



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NATIONAL AGENDA 2021
REFLECTING AMERICA

“Divisive Issues Through Civil Dialogue”

with Berny Jacques and Geston Pierre

HOSTED BY University of Delaware –
Center for Political Communication

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Lindsay Hoffman Director of National Agenda and Associate Director
of the Center for Political Communication,
University of Delaware

Berny Jacques A former Florida assistant state attorney, Republican
and a conservative activist, Berny Jacques was named
among “30 under 30 rising stars in Florida politics.”
An active community leader he serves as director of
development for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay.
He also is a 2022 Republican candidate for Florida's
House of Representatives, representing House District
66.

Geston Pierre An emerging American leader, Geston Pierre shares his
message as both a pastor and musician. After his
a capella group, Committed, won season 2 of
NBC's The Sing-Off in 2010, he toured the world and
was a multi-award nominated vocalist and recording
artist. He is a podcast start-up consultant and co-host of
several podcasts.

Friends since middle school, both are children of Haitian
political refugees who fled political instability settling in
Florida. Despite their friendship they have reached very
different conclusions about politics and social issues in
the United States. They ask, “Can we imagine a future
where we disagree deeply, but still like each other?”

Transcript of Event

Date: September 22, 2021

Place: Mitchell Hall and Webinar
Newark, DE

[Musical interlude to 0:00:36.2]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Please welcome your host for this evening, Dr. Lindsay Hoffman.

DR. HOFFMAN: Good evening, everyone. It's great to welcome you all in person and virtually to the, the eleventh annual National Agenda Speaker Series. Thank you to the University of Delaware's Center for Political Communication, the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Division for Student Life for helping support this program. This year's theme is reflecting America. How is this historic era of political divides, social movements, economic upheavals fueled by the pandemic and politics redefining America. Have we ever faced anything like this before in this country? We're going to explore these questions. We explored them last week or two weeks ago with our first speakers author David Joy and NPR White House correspondent Asma Khalid in our inaugural program. You can view that at CPC.udel.edu. We have a hybrid program this year. Half of our talks will be in person and live streamed while the other half, tonight included, are entirely virtual. But we will be inviting audience participation. So to submit a question, type your question into the Q and A box at the bottom of your Zoom window and it may be selected during our Q and A at the end of this talk. Tonight, we're featuring two speakers from an organization called Respect and Rebellion. It features pairs of speakers with divergent views on a variety of topics. And I'm pleased to work with Respect and Rebellion in the Village Square, "a nery bunch of liberals and conservatives who believe that disagreements make for good conversation, good country and good times, to bring these two bright bold speakers to you tonight. It's a different

model, one that invites difference rather than avoiding it. One that demonstrates that people with different political and ideological views can engage in civil dialogue and even learn something from one another. That's the essence of National Agenda; modeling and encouraging civil dialogue. So, I hope you will come away from tonight with some ideas for how to bridge relationships with people in your life who may have divergent viewpoints. Berny Jacques is a Republican and conservative activist recently named among "30 Under 30 Rising Stars" in Florida politics. He's also running for state representative in his home state of Florida. Just a note, by the way, tonight's event is not a campaign event or an endorsement. We've featured running politicians in our programs in the past on both sides of the aisle. Jacques also serves as the director of development for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay. Geston Pierre is both a pastor and a musician. His a capella group, "Committed," won the season 2 title of on NBC's "The Sing Off" in 2010. After he toured the world he became a multi-award nominated vocalist and recording artist. Here's the thing, they've been friends since middle school. They're both children of Haitian political refugees who fled the country's political instability that put their families at risk. They settled in Florida and despite their friendship and shared family immigration story they have reached very different conclusions about political and social issues in the United States, a country they both dearly love. Instead of allowing their differences to tear apart their relationship they ask, "can we imagine a future where we disagree deeply but still like each other?" Please welcome to the virtual National Agenda stage, Berny Jacques and Geston Pierre. Hello, and welcome.

MR. JACQUES: Good evening.

MR. PIERRE: Oh --

DR. HOFFMAN: It's nice --

MR. PIERRE: -- hello.

DR. HOFFMAN: It's so nice to see you. We've had a great conversation with our students earlier today. I know that the two of you have a bit of a roadshow prepared that you share with audiences around the country as part of your Respect and Rebellion program. So, I, you're going to address divides facing the nation, you're going to address cancel culture, and even delve into some more controversial topics like critical race theory which we talked about with our students earlier today. So, I'm going to hand it over to the both of you and I'll jump in as I always do with questions because I'm a very inquisitive professor, and we'll have a conversation and then at 8:30 we'll take questions from the audience. So, again, make sure you use that Q and A to ask your question. But with that I'm going to hand the reigns over to you guys. You have sort of a lightning round, if I understand, that you want to engage with so go for it.

MR. PIERRE: Yes, indeed. thank you, Dr. Hoffman, and we're grateful for the opportunity to be here at the prestigious University of Delaware and Bernie and I are just going to go back and forth today sharing our stories, sharing about the divided states of America and also talking about why we believe that cancel culture should be cancelled. And so, we're going to start off by just sharing our story. And I'll let my brother and political frenemy go first.

MR. JACQUES: Absolutely. And thank you Geston and I'd like to echo our thanks to the University of Delaware and thank you Dr. Hoffman for making this all possible and happen, and, and able to make it happen here this evening. So, as Dr. Hoffman mentioned, I'm a, you know, child of Haitian refugee's political

asylum seekers and in fact I was born in Haiti, so I actually moved here with my parents at the age of seven. We moved here to the state of Florida initially settling and moving in with my uncle in a small town called Immokalee, Florida. And if anybody is familiar with Immokalee, Florida, it's a very, I mean, tough area mostly immigrants, there's some, a lot of crime in, in, in certain pockets. Very much different from where, you know, a lot of people that I ended up going to school or college or, or law school experienced. So from there we lived with my uncle initially and then we eventually moved out had our own place in a, in a mobile home park in a, in a mobile home. And then; but I remember that being a sense of accomplishment because I saw the progression, [indiscernible] out we had our own place. And then from the mobile home we went to an apartment complex, and we had an apartment and I saw that as a great win as well --

MR. PIERRE: Uh-huh.

MR. JACQUES: -- you know, because, you know, the, the AC seemed to work a little, a little better. It was still kind of a, a rough area but, you know, I could see the progression. And I remember when my dad got his first car. And mind you, these are, both of my parents worked very hard when we moved here. they both took on two jobs, sometimes three jobs each. Always teaching my brothers and I that in this country if you work hard and play by the rules all things are possible. I basically had a front row seat, you know, to the American dream. And so, from that a, apartment we eventually moved into East Naples which is a much better community but still a working-class community and we had duplex. And I remember again, you know, feeling the joy of the progression. It wasn't quite a full house, it was half a house but, you know, it, it seems like we were moving on up. And then eventually my parents were able to buy their own home

where they still reside today. And that was all less than 10 years. That was less than a decade. All of that happened within, from, from when they came to this country with very little. And so, to me that showed me as a young person having that kind of front row seat the promise and the, the actuality of what America has to offer for anybody who's willing to work hard and, and do the right things. My dad eventually got his college degree, his bachelor's degree; went to school at night and, and both of these folks, my, my mom and dad got to see their son – imagine, they're from political refugees in that sense to seeing their son not only serve as an assistant state attorney, become an attorney, serve as an assistant state attorney for the great state of Florida and then get appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis last year to be on the judicial nominating commission where I'm helping on of the most popular governors select judges and appoint judges here in the state of Florida. Only in America. Only in Florida. And so, this is my story. It helped informed my political world view. My view of it is that, you know, we made no excuses. We didn't accept anything for free or expect anything for free. We put in the work, and we saw what it got us. And so that brought me towards my political conservatism because I do believe when given the tools and the opportunities in communities people can make the best of themselves. And this is still the best place where you can be the best of yourself and you don't need big overarching government controlling the everyday lives of citizens and enabling them to stay in the same station where, where they are. Policies are to be there for people to thrive. My family has taken advantage of that and have seen the benefits of that, and, and it needs to be preserved in I only think the conservative ways. Conservative policies can really foster that type of growth and not inhibit it like our friends on the left.

MR. PIERRE: Well, thank you for sharing your story, Berny. I'm going to share a little bit of my experience. So, I was actually born and raised in the crazy state of Florida. My parents are from Haiti. They migrated to America in the early 80's and I was born in the late 80's in Florida. So, I just want to see what state everyone else is from. If you could drop it in the chat. But I guarantee, regardless of what state you're from, there is no state crazier than Florida. America's class clown. Florida, the largest swing state and home to Florida Man, Florida Man, Florida Man. But, shout out to Florida where I met Berny. We grew up together. So, I grew up in a middleclass neighborhood. My parents worked very hard. I lived pretty much from the time I was four years old we moved into our house and my parents still who live in that house to this day. And I, I attended, you know, good schools. I went to a boarding academy in high school. Went to a HBCU in Huntsville, Alabama, Oakwood University; studied theology. From there I was able to experience the entertainment industry. I moved to Los Angeles, and I was able to win the Sing Off on NBC. I went back to graduate school in Michigan, cold Michigan – if anybody, if anybody's from Michigan I don't know how you guys do it, but I survived three years of those brutal winters. I got my Master's of Divinity and returned home to Florida to work as a professional pastor. And, my first assignment I was assigned to a, a conservative Caucasian congregation in Central Florida, an area called Avon Park, Florida, and Highlands County. It was a rough time because there were people in the congregation who weren't ready to receive a pastor who was black. And, you know, I did my best to serve and love them. And to make a long story short, like, I made it a point to be vocal about race relations and the issues going on in our country at that time. And, in 2016 after the death of Philando Castile I

was talking about race relations in a sermon, making the point that we all are of the human race and that race is a manmade construct. And I was talking about the sons of Noah in the Bible, how they were from different regions in the world, but they were blood brothers. And so, I talked about Philando Castile and, and race relations at the time, and the next week I received a notice that I was to pack up my office and cease serving that church because they had completely different viewpoint and they had, they were offended that I brought up Philando Castile and I talked about race relations. And they were, quite frankly, fed up with me and my attempts to have those critical crucial conversations. And so, from that point I moved to the bay area, and I was serving there. And I currently pastor in New Jersey but from my experiences growing up I'm grateful for my family who instilled the values of hard work and, and the importance of being a good citizen. And I love America. But I have always had an uncomfortability with America's refusal to acknowledge its root issues. And so, growing up in Florida I remember, you know, simple things like getting pulled over while black – DWB – and getting harassed and questioned by the officer and the last thing the officer would say is something like, well you stay out of trouble, boy. And this is, you know, as an adult in my late 20's. And so, these small interactions sometime serve as reminders that although we've come a long way as a country we have a mighty long ways to go. So, I love America, but I believe that America can do better, and I think the fact that America refuses to have these crucial conversations and is trying to institute what we call bills to limit the truth I find a problem with that because if you don't confront something then you can't change something. And so, I believe that with dealing with the truth and talking about the roots of our history and the realities that we often try to shy away from, we can

actually find reconciliation and repent of our sins as a nation and strive to dismantle those systems that keep certain people in the place that they are. And so, that's kind of my story, a snapshot of my story and, I, I love America. I'm a proud Democrat and I, you know, I, I cherish my friendship with Berny despite our differences but as mentioned before, our friendship started as children, as young boys. And so, I'm a proud Floridian. proud American but I believe America can do better. So, Bernie, I want to talk to you about CRT, that hot, hot, hot word – critical race theory. Everyone's talking about it. We're talking about it in academia. We're talking about it in the legislative halls. What is your take on critical race theory and why do you think it's such a big topic right now? Is it new? Is it old? What do you think?

MR. JACQUES: Well, I think its becoming more new and the mainstream. Prior to, you know, the last couple of years critical race theory was confined in the faculty halls of places like the University of Delaware and, and the Academy, and colleges and universities. And now we're seeing that seep into our K through 12 education which I think it has no place and, quite frankly critical race theory really divides. And I've heard it said best, and, and summarized this way, it, it's a curriculum that teaches people to hate each other, teaches students to hate each other and to hate their country, quite frankly. It creates animosity. It creates resentment. So you, you; imagine if you're a young, you know, white student, you're sitting there in class and you're basically being taught that you're somehow part of an oppressor class. And if you're a young black student you're somehow supposed to be a victim just by the nature of the way you look. And I think we need to pump the brakes on this because I think it has a severe impact on true education, real education instead of indoctrination and in this case liberal

indoctrination. I'm all for teaching the history. There's a difference between teaching historical facts and events and there's a difference between injecting ideology and a viewpoint that, that is attached to these historical events. And so, I always make the case that look, in Florida, in our textbooks and, and in our curriculum it is required to teach things like slavery, the Jim Crow era, segregation, the Holocaust. But what critical theory, race theory does, it takes it a step further as ideology and somehow tries to create some kind of discord or some kind of, of, of notion that this is some kind of a country where minorities cannot succeed and somehow if you are part of the majority race you need to apologize for something. I think that's destructive. We don't need people hating their country, hating each other in our schools.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, this is where we disagree because I believe that critical race theory is a tool for understanding. So, it's literally a framework that allows you to see the reality of America and the many layers that comprise of America. And so, I don't believe that CRT is attacking a certain group or attacking Caucasians or attacking certain people. It's literally bringing to light the systems that make up the framework of our country. And so, I know that whenever CRT is brought up it sparks emotion but when you recognize the reality and the roots of our nation you have to recognize it in order to advance and to move beyond where you are to where you need to be. And so, by refusing to confront something you cannot change something. So, you know, the thing that makes it so controversial is because many folks feel attacked; they feel like you're calling me a bad person. But the reality is you are bringing to light a system, not an individual. So, the criminal justice system, the education system, the labor market, the housing market, the healthcare system. These are all

systems with layers of injustice embedded in them. And, the fact that our country refuses to acknowledge how, how baked-in the injustice and racism is in our country is sad. And I believe that until we are at a place where we are, a, a, ready to, to talk about it openly and to have that dialogue and to confess of our sins, if I might say, as a country we won't be able to really be unified as a people. Because the reality is if we keep acting like nothing's, nothing's wrong and we're living in a post-racial America, we're deceived. It's, it's an illusion of inclusion. We are living in the yet to be United States of America. And so, we're not attacking people. We're calling out social institutions. And I know people often identify themselves, and they can see themselves in a (sic) institution. But we're not attacking the person; we're attacking the product of these systems. Of racism. And so, we talked about it in the class earlier with Dr. Hoffman that about 22 states have already issued bills, and some of them, some other states are having conversations about whether they should implement some of these hinderances or not. But I want to take a quick poll fir everyone with us this afternoon, this evening in the Zoom chat. Do you think CRT is essential in our curriculums? I'm sorry, the chat is turned off for the audience, so you can't respond now. But I want you to reflect. Do you think the CRT is essential or do you think it is over the top or unnecessary? That's a question that will be rhetorical since the chat is closed. But Berny, in the state of –

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and we can –

MR. PIERRE: -- Florida –

DR. HOFFMAN: -- we can –

MR. PIERRE: Go ahead, go ahead, Dr. Hoffman.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- open it up to – yeah, we can open that up in the Q and A

at 8:30 for sure. But I think this is so fascinating to, to see two friends who fundamentally disagree on this issue. So, how do you guys engage in dialogue around this issue? Do you decide not to talk about it? Do you talk about it with certain rules in mind? How do you make sure it, it remains civil?

MR. PIERRE: Oh, I believe that its important to listen not to respond but to try to understand the person who is speaking. So, I know that no matter how many times I talk to Berny about certain issues I will not change his mind. I will never convince Berny that CRT is essential and should be mandatory. But what I can do is listen to Berny and what Berny can do is listen to me. And throughout our conversation we can actually see and connect the dots that lead to our positions. And so, by hearing Berny's position I can now have a better understanding of, okay, this is probably why he feels that way. But if I'm unwilling to listen to him then there can be no constructive discussion. There can be no [chuckle] productive dialogue if you're unwilling to sit and listen even when it's uncomfortable, even when you don't like what you hear. You need to learn how to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. I'll let Berny chime in.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah. And before I answer that's the sort of question, Dr. Hoffman, I do have a quick rebuttal for my good friend Geston here. He mentioned you the sins of the nation and that's my issue of critical race theory. It dwells, it's a, it's a theory that seems to want to dwell and, and finds comfort and, and, and harping on the sins, the historical sins of the nation as opposed to looking forward and to talk about how far we've come and so forth. And so, it creates this dynamic between students that somehow we're living in a Jim Crow era. Which we're not. I mean, there's never been more opportunities for black people in this country. And I will proudly submit in, in world history than right

here, right now in the United States of America. And so, what I don't want our students – and we're talking about K through 12 – these are children – to leave away with, especially students who look like me I would hate for them to leave a class after being indoctrinated with the CRT thinking somehow the chips are stacked against them and that they cannot be their best in the USA. And part of my success was that I had this very limitless idea that all things are possible in the United States, in the United States. I actually believed that. And I pursued it. I didn't go around thinking there was somebody in the corner at every turn trying to stop my success. I, I, I don't think that's the case in 2021. And I want our young people, our young people of color to be optimistic about where they are and not to go around feeling as victims and it's not fair for a white student who may even have a, a struggling life. You know? And, and, and to, or somehow they think there's some kind of an oppressor when they've done nothing wrong. But, to answer your question, Dr. Hoffman, [chuckle] I think, you know, I hope that Geston and I are friends. I think build genuine friendships first because when you build genuine friendships you don't question the motives of your friends. And you, you know they're coming to their perspectives in an honesty fashion. And so even though you may not agree you know they're an honest actor and you can level with a person like that. And, and, and I say it all the time; don't get into these conversations expecting to change the other persons mind, you know. I, I, I never do that with Geston. I know [chuckle] he's very principled. He's entrenched in what he believes. And so am I. But, I can at least take away how he got to his views. I can understand better how people like Geston think and I can appreciate it better as opposed to just writing it off even though I may not agree with it, it gives me a better understanding of how people

on the left get to the conclusions.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, it's a fascinating conversation. It does look like we do have a poll that is going out to the community. But I, I would like to switch gears a little bit and talk to you both about your experiences and, and really try to get at some concrete ways that people who disagree with each other can find commonalities. But I think first I really want to talk about Haiti. The country's been in the news a lot the past couple of days because of the mass migration of ten to fifteen thousand Haitians coming from South and Central America sleeping under a border bridge in south Texas as they tried to make a home in the United States. If the crisis snagged the country's attention this week as photos and video of Border Patrol agents on horses chasing Haitian migrants with in one case appeared to be a whip got national attention. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorka said he was horrified by the images. At the same time the United States is preparing to nearly double deportations of Haitians at the border – potentially 1,000 per day reports *The Washington Post*. So, help us understand, just because I'm hoping you have some personal insight here, how did we get here? How did these Haitian migrants end up in Central and South America in the first place, and how does the recent assassination of the president and the devastating earthquake in Haiti play a role in what's happening right now?

MR. PIERRE: Berny?

MR. JACQUES: Yeah. So, I mean, what we're seeing right now is a very, very sad and terrible situation. A humanitarian crisis of great proportion. I think what you're seeing in Haiti has been kind of the story of Haiti for, for many, many decades. The instability, the, the poverty, the lack of rule of law they had makes

many people want to flee and get out and seek a better life. All that being said, you know, there is a proper way to do this and I, it still remains unclear how Haitians ended up being transported from Haiti, and island nation, through Central America all the way up to the Texas border. But what it shows is there's definitely desperation that would make somebody want to do this. That's not to excuse entering the country illegally. I'm very much firm on, on legal immigration as opposed to illegal crossings and I think if we don't have a border as a nation we really don't have a, a nation. People need to be vetted as to who comes in and who doesn't come in and, and we need to know who all is coming in. And, and I will submit that this is kind of a crisis. You know, I, I talk to people who are very close to the situation and people within my own family that squarely put the blame at the feet of this current administration, that's when they campaign it was a clear reversal of the zero tolerance policy that we saw under the Trump administration, it was almost an invitation for migrants to come. So, we've been seeing migrant crises along the border ever since this administration has come into office and, and certainly this is adding to that. And so, some of the images do appear disturbing but what, what I will say is, you know, to kind of analyze the facts as opposed to snapshots and draw conclusions. You know, there's this whole thing being made about the, the, the Border Patrol on horses holding a whip. I don't see that as the case. These look like reins for the horses. And never once has anyone shown me a video of a migrant being whipped. You know, the take a snapshot of, of, of a Border Patrol agent on horseback holding the reins to his horse. And so, we can all let media narratives fit a certain political ideology to make it seem as if Americans are somehow cruel. Americans have an obligation to secure its borders and I think –

MR. PIERRE: [Indiscernible.]

MR. JACQUES: -- this is what's happening where our brave men and women at the border, but it doesn't help when you have an administration that's sending mixed signals and saying come on in, you know the water's great.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, I'll, I'll chime in. I, I'll admit that, that imaging, that image was just devastating, and I think people are disappointed, they're angry because that visual represents the reality of America over the past years. The visual, I'm speaking of, whether it was a whip or a rein, it doesn't matter but the visual is disturbing. But the reality is that America has not done right by Haiti for decades. You can go back to President Jimmy Carter; you can talk about Reagan; you can talk about George W., George Bush; you can talk about Clinton; you can talk about Bush again; you can talk about Obama; you can talk about Trump. You know, it seems to me that America has different policies for Haitians. Different policies for brown immigrants. And so, I, I'm just frustrated with the hypocrisy that I see. I know that, you know, everyone knows that they're in a crisis right now and I want to highlight the fact that, that Haiti is beautiful nation with resilient people. And before Haiti became the way it was, it was the jewel of the Antilles, the Island of Hispaniola was a very, very rich, rich country. And I want you to know that in 1804, if you don't know about this, the revolution that the Haitians were able to accomplish, they were able to free themselves and be the first black independent nation. And as a result of their independence many other countries – America, France – continually have made them pay, made them pay for their freedom. In other words, they didn't their freedom to inspire others in America, of in, in other countries. It was a real revolution. You can read about it. In 1804, Toussaint Louverture. But, the reality is, France you

know, made Haiti pay billions of dollars and, so it's a combination of exterior exploitation and internal corruption. These are the things that led Haiti from being one of the most richest prosperous nations to being the poorest nation in the western hemisphere. And so, I don't want you to think that this situation in Haiti is because Haiti is cursed, or because they, they, they worship voodoo or whatever people are saying. Haiti has been destroyed and it's been by systemic designs. So, I'm not pointing fingers at one person, or one country, or one nation but even America has a part, has played a part in the state that Haiti is today. And so, the, the reality is it's a humanitarian crisis, as my brother Berny said. There's been an earthquake, the president's dead, gangs are running rampant. Things are terrible and people are seeking a better life. So I know President Biden has been, you know, using Title 42, Title 42 which was brought on by the, the previous president, President Donald Trump, which means if there's a pandemic then you can just send them away in order to keep your country safe. But, I'm just wondering, like, why can't we test them? Why can't we treat them if they have COVID? Why are we so quick to send them away instead of giving them due process so that they can at least have a chance to survive? Because these people have been traveling for a while, a while.

DR. HOFFMAN: Right. Many of them left in 2010, right?

MR. JACQUES: Yes. Yes. And so, they've been in, some of them were in Mexico for a few years. Some of them have been in other areas and now we have seen them make their way to our borders. And its sad to me, I want to say this, you know? I know I'm speaking at the University of Delaware; I know that you have the Joseph R. Biden School of Public Policy. I'm a Democrat. But I am disappointed in our current president because he broke his promise. He

made promises at the beginning of his campaign. He made promises at the beginning of his presidency. And so, I pray that America will hold President Biden accountable.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Well, it's a fascinating conversation and I'm sure if the president were here he'd love to enjoy having the, the conversation with you both. He loves the idea of, of civil dialogue and speaking across differences. So, let me shift to that topic before we go to the Q and A. I had this under my list of things, is a civil dialogue how to. So, before we can even think about speaking across differences we must approach conversations with empathy and what students in my class are learning about a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset. So, a question for you, Geston, from Nick. You posted on your Instagram that talked about growth mindsets, so help us, help us understand what a growth mindset is versus a fixed mindset and any tips you might have for engaging in conversation with people who are sort of set in a fixed mindset and how you can help, also helps to develop your own growth mindset. So, it's not just about your interlocutor but it's about yourself as well.

MR. PIERRE: Indeed. I, I believe that the moment that you believe that you have arrived, a, the moment that you stop growing you start dying. And so, I believe that it is important for us to continue to evolve as people, as students, as people living in this country. And so, a growth mindset is a mindset that is embracing of discomfort; embracing of challenges because every opposition is an opportunity to be better, to rise to the occasion. And so, you know, if you are, you know, like me and you are Democrat and you refuse to have a conversation with a Republican because they're wrong and you're right that's a fixed mindset. But if you have a growth mindset you'll say You know, I'm confident in what I

believe, I'm not going to change my mind, but I believe that I should at least hear what my friend has to say. That's a growth mindset. Because I believe that I can still learn from somebody else. I can always hear Berny talk and take the meat and spit out the bones. Right? You don't have to, you know, agree with somebody to be agreeable. You know? So, it's important for you to be able to be comfortable with being uncomfortable; to be willing to stretch yourself; to, to reach out to people that you technically want to avoid, people that you might be tempted to cancel. Those are the people that you need to lean into and reach out and find a commonality and build a bridge. I mentioned it in the class earlier, I want to mention it to all our people here today that we all have a sweet spot, right? As a human being; republican, independent. I don't care what you are, Democrat. You have a sweet spot. You have a strength. You have a weakness. You have education. You have experience. And you have a talent. And so regardless of your tax bracket, your socioeconomic status; I don't care who you are, where you've been, what you've done you have a sweet spot. And so, you should lean into your strengths, lean into your weaknesses, lean into your education, lean into your experience, lean into your talent and leverage it to grow and be better than you were yesterday. So, that's a growth mindset.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you so much. Berny, do you want to add onto that?

MR. JACQUES: No, not a whole lot. I mean, I, I, I think it's, it's healthy, you know, to discuss with others who, who think differently than you. I, I'm a big believer in this idea of the marketplace of ideas, the public square where all can come and discuss their views without intimidation or without cancellation. And that, you know, we can have competing ideas and that's what's healthy in a, a republic like ours and, and people can take it or leave it, but I think all sorts of

viewpoints should be heard and, and people can assess them accordingly and, and genuinely see where people are coming from. Again, you know, Geston and I we've been going at it for years [chuckle.] I don't –

MR. PIERRE: [Indiscernible.]

MR. JACQUES: -- we've ever changed each other's minds. But, but definitely have some takeaways from all of our different conversations.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, what happens –

UNIDENTIFIED: [Cross talk interference.]

DR. HOFFMAN: -- Ben is wondering, one of my students is wondering, what's your advice on how to engage in a civil dialogue or conversation with someone who you already know from the get-go has the polar opposite or non-negotiable views on a certain controversial topic like gun control, abortion, immigration? How do you talk to people to understand them because I think what, what both of you are saying is that it's beneficial to understand the other point of view not just to be an openminded individual but, as we talked earlier today, to be a little understanding the other side, other point of view to be persuasive? You're trying to convince someone of something. So, if you come across someone who has got the polar opposite of, of what your, what your position is what's the best way to approach that conversation?

MR. PIERRE: I would do some research and before you try to approach them with how you disagree with them or what you don't have in common, try to find the commonality. What are you both for? You, you both might be against something. But what are you both for and let that be the bridge, the transitional point from where you can begin a dialogue and a discussion in a, in a, in a productive way because I think a lot of times we always enter, we typically enter

conversations with our own predisposed ideas and we know we're not going to change our mind but we think that we're going to change someone else's mind. I don't know why we think that. You know?

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

MR. PIERRE: Silly, silly us. Silly us. But, you know, it takes emotional humility to have the conversation. Everyone talks about IQ. Yeah, yeah, yeah, IQ. What about your emotional intelligence? What about your emotional humility? Are you willing to just sit in the awkward place and listen? Are you willing to reach out to someone else that may have said something that offended you because you wanted them to know how it made you feel, and you want to hear their perspective so you can better understand why they feel what they feel? Why they believe what they believe. And so, it's that emotional humility that is key. You can know all the information in the world, but if you lack those emotional skills, that emotional strength and humility you won't be able to have a productive dialogue because nobody likes arrogant people. You need –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

MR. PIERRE: -- to be humble. You need to be likeable. So don't be a jerk. Be, be nice.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] That's good advice. Berny?

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, absolutely. I think, you know, know what your objective is going into that conversation. If its just to be adversarial and, and, and to duck on them –

MR. PIERRE: [Chuckle.]

MR. JACQUES: -- you know, that. I mean, reevaluate that. I mean, if you want to have a, a real good productive conversation, again, don't go in expecting

that you're going to change the other person's mind. Go in, you know, as a good faith actor to hear where they're coming from. Don't have an adversarial tone. And, and hopefully, you know, they can give you the same courtesy to see where you are coming from. And so, that's the kind of things I like to, to take away from the conversations with people I disagree with. And it's not to say everybody is the same because there are some people you may change their mind if somebody is not -- in this type of situation somebody was firmly rooted it's very rare that they shift. But there's people I casually have conversations with who, who later on, years later said, hey, remember when we had that conversation? I kind of see what you're talking about. But it was conversations where it was pleasant. It wasn't a shouting match. And it was conversations where you ask that additional question. They make a statement, a statement of belief that may seem radical or, or just beyond the pale, simply take a step back, take a deep breath and ask them why? Why do you believe that? How, how did you come to that conclusion? And that will really open your eyes that people aren't as looney as you may think and, and there's a lot of rationality behind people's political perspectives on how, how they got there. Whether it be their experience or how, or how they reason. So, I, I think, you know, again, disagreeing without being disagreeable. I'm an attorney by trade, my training and, you know, one of the things we learn in trial advocacy when you question your, the opposing witness -- called cross-examination -- we had a great professor who said, cross without being cross, you know? And so, kind of going with that mindset to have as pleasant a conversation as possible and I think you'll get through more than you think, and you'll learn something as well.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's great advice. So, we've been a little bit serious about

this topic of civil dialogue but I'm curious, do you ever find that engaging with diverse viewpoints can be fun? Like a fun endeavor? Can it be exciting and enjoyable to, to kind of practice these skills of speaking across difference?

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, I find some of Berny's views quite comical.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: Sometimes –

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: -- all I can do is just laugh. SMH – shake my head and –

MR. JACQUES: [Chuckle.]

MR. PIERRE: -- just like, how am I friends with this guy?

MR. JACQUES: [Chuckle.]

MR. PIERRE: But you know what? You know, I listen to him, and I hear his perspectives and I'm not changed by his perspectives but he's my friend and that's okay. And I, I believe that democracy is a contact sport. You've got to get personal. You've got to get close even to the people that you are tempted and itching to cancel. Don't do it. Get close to them. It's a contact sport.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, I find some enjoyment in it obviously former lawyer practice in the courtroom as a prosecutor I, you know, I was trained to be in the adversarial system and, and to debate a mock trial and all that good stuff. And so, I love a good exchange of ideas and, and, and that's a lot of fun for me. And obviously running for office it's, you know, you're advancing your ideals and your views and, and juxtaposing it with your political opponents for the consumption of, of the voting public as to where they want to go. And so, I, I think it's really essential – yeah, it's our form of government to have all of the different ideas

and, and not to, to snuff out the one's you disagree with because it does the voters in this, in this instance a disservice on, on how they will choose their leaders who will legislate on their behalf. They, they need to hear all the perspectives and, and I think its very essential to, to a republic as ours.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, okay, so let's get into some actual tips. One of the things I tell my students is one of the best things to do if you are engaged in a conflict is to lower the stakes of the argument. So, if you're discussing immigration reform, for example, it's unlikely that either you or your interlocutor will be able to establish or revise immigration policy, right? What are some of your tips for civil discourse across differences, like actual tools that people can bring into conversations when they're starting to feel that it's getting a little bit tenuous?

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, learn the art of the pivot. You've got to learn how to pivot sometimes. Sometimes when you, you're reading the situation, you see where the conversation is going and things are getting heated and tense sometimes you've got to find that little humor, that, that little space to just pivot from to kind of ease the tension because the reality is, you know, conversations can, can get intense and, you know, tempers flare, emotions rise in the moment but I think at the end of the day don't forget to breathe. You know, take, take a moment to just, you know, soak in where you are and what you are doing. And so, just be aware. I think, being able to read cues is great. Like, there's a book called *I Can Read You Like a Book*. It's, it's a book about body language. So, like, you can read their body language to see if they seem comfortable or open. Like, people, you know, don't just communicate with their mouths. Like our whole body communicates a message even before you open your mouth. And

so just being aware of those physical cues and, you know, speak in a still small voice. You don't have to yell all the time. Like, you don't –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: -- have to be like. You know, you can just have a civil conversation. Those are just some practical tips that I could think of. Berny?

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, I like all of those. And again, just, just, you know, turn down the temperature. Have a, a good decent conversation. Focus on the commonalities. Give deference where it's needed. Give affirmation where it's needed and then, and hopefully it's afforded to you as well. And then if it's getting to a point where just, you know, a shouting match and, you know, then it no longer becomes productive, and you've got to pivot and get out of the conversation. Either talk about something else or say, all right, I, I know I see where you're coming from, I hear you, it was good chatting with you. And just kind of, you know, end it [chuckle] before it gets, you know, non-productive or, or, or pivot to the next topic where, where all minds can, can agree on. So, so yeah, just kind of bring down the temperature.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, I'm raising my hand like I'm in class but --

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

MR. PIERRE: -- one word of advice. Don't attack the person, deal with the issue, right? So, stay on task. Even if you disagree with them, never attack them, just deal with the issue at hand and keep it moving.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yep, yeah. No name calling. That's my number one rule.

MR. PIERRE: Pleases no. Please.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] No name calling even of, of people who aren't in the room. Like, it doesn't doo any good. So, I, I love that the theme that's

coming up this year so far in terms of thinking about civil dialogue and civil discourse is active listening. And both of you have mentioned that listening is really important. And I love Berny saying, just saying I hear you is a way to demonstrate to the other person, yeah, I'm listening to what you're saying. I might not agree with it, and we might pivot – I think pivoting is a, a great technique for saying look, okay let's move on. But to say I hear you is, is an acknowledgement of that person's humanity and says I respect you. I respect who you are and your ideas. I don't necessarily agree with you, but I hear you. So, I'm going to, we're going to open this up to Q and A, so I just was to alert folks in the audience to continue to ask your questions in the Q and A. We will have that poll ready about critical race theory very, very soon. I have a couple of questions before we jump to the audience. One of my students, Kaitlyn (sp?), asks if you've ever avoided a conversation with each other on a topic where you knew you would disagree?

MR. PIERRE: I don't think I've ever avoided a conversation but if I don't want to talk about it I won't bring it up. But if it comes up I'll talk about it. That's, that's kind of how I operate. So –

DR. HOFFMAN: Do you ever – well I guess you pivot if you were to like, okay.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, if I don't want to –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: -- really engage in, on that topic and I'm, let's say I'm offended or, you know, I'm, I'm done with the conversation then I'll pivot and I'll, you know, say a complement here or there and, and honor, honor him as a person and say hey, I heard you say this; I disagree agree but I'm no longer in a place to have this conversation and pivot to somewhere else. Or, you know, if, if,

if he won't back down, if I'm in person and talking and carrying on and I want to stop talking and he doesn't want to stop talking, you have the right to walk away. Like, you don't have to entertain every conversation. So, just use your wisdom and, and, and just, you know, do whatever you deem is best respectfully.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I want Berny to respond to that too, but I think I want to add to that question. Like, how do you nurture the friendship if you have these kind of fundamental differences? So, Berny, I'll pass the question to you which is have you avoided a conversation with Geston to, because you knew you would disagree? And then how do you kind of nurture that friendship?

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, look, there's certain things, you know, again, that you know, he's not going to budge on and I'm not going to budge on. Like during this last election, I mean, there were quite a bit of articles or memes that I was tempted to forward to my good friend Geston and after much reflection I am like there's no point and, and I'm not going to rile up the guy. [Chuckle.] You know, it's not going to change anything. So, use your judgment, right? And every now and then I would send something, but I mean it, it's not, you know, you don't always have to bombard somebody with information that fits your viewpoint especially when, you know, I mean, it's not going to, it's not going to accomplish anything. Lower the stakes, you know? You're not going to save the republic by sending that meme. And so, so, you know, think about it, you know, [chuckle] before, before you do certain things just to kind of nurture and just not, not get into a whole tussle. But, you know, every now and then we'll, we'll, we'll get into it. But, yeah, that's how I assess that every now and then. I'm like, ah, is it necessary? I'll send it to someone else. [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: Yeah. I'll, I try to also. I think one of the things that, that I, I think about for our friendship is that, you know, the greater good. Like, what is the good that can come out of me maintaining this friendship, me maintaining this relationship? And, every time I think about that question I think Florida, right? So, I have a love and a care for Florida, and he does too. I want to see Florida do well. I want to see Florida be the best state in America. He does too. We just have different viewpoints on how, on what it'll take to get there. But, we have the same passion for our people, for our home state. We, we're passionate about the Haitian people. We're proud Haitians. So, we have a lot in common that we could lean into. And, there's more in common that we have than there is more that we have [chuckle] in opposition.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think that's important to understand that. I think sometimes, particularly students who are watching cable news or, you know, listening to these political debates they think, oh my God, people hate each other on each side. And its often times there are lots of folks like the two of you who are able to say you know, we disagree but we're still friends. So, I'm going to again ask for some questions to come in the Q and A. I'm going to wrap up my last question with our speakers. I also want to let you know that the Q and A is a little different because we're online. Some folks on our end have been reading through all of your questions that you've been submitting and please, again, there's still time to submit your question. For each question chosen one of my students – I'm so proud of my National Agenda students – they're going to read the question for you. I'm calling them audience surrogates, whether that's the right term or not. But, so, but before we get to that, I'm going to start with a question from one of my students for each of you which I think is a good segue

into the Q and A. This is from Nuroli (sp?), and he asks, if you could give one piece of advice to college students about how to communicate with those who think differently from you what would you say?

MR. JACQUES: Just don't shy away from it. Don't shy away from it and invite the dialogue and, and really, you know, go into it not necessarily thinking you are going to convince the other person but, you know, gather how they came to their conclusion and, and hopefully, again, you know, the same will be afforded to you. But, but don't, don't hide away from people who think differently from you. I think if, if, if anywhere that should be cherished and promoted it should be on a college campus where, where ideas are freely exchanged. And so, take advantage of that for sure.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah. And my advice is to be comfortable with who you are. You know, own what you believe. Own it confidently. It's okay. And it's not a sign of weakness to listen to other people's viewpoints even if it's different and you don't agree with it. It's not a sign of weakness to listen to others. And so, every time you have an opportunity to listen to others and hear their differences and whatever it is, lean into it. Don't, don't, don't shy away from the opportunity because you're missing on a growth hack. And the growth hack is being a listener that is active and being able to just hear their heart, hear their mind and just connect the dots so that instead of being drawn further apart you can at least draw closer to them as a fellow human because that is what you have, what you have in common with them. They're a human being just like you. They deserve dignity, dignity, respect and the opportunity to build relationships. And so, don't miss out on the opportunity to, to lean in and listen and don't think that listening to others or other viewpoints is a sign of weakness. You can still be who you are

and listen to others without losing who you are.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's a fantastic point. I love that. That, that, that its, it's actually a sign of strength to say like I have my own opinion, but I would love to hear what you have to think about this particular issue. And, again, I, I think Berny said this as well, but, again, lowering the stakes and be like it's not, neither you or I, nor I, are going to solve this problem. We can talk about it. You don't have to be belligerent and take a stand. Like, let's just have a conversation about it. And I, I feel like as a professor of communication it's unfortunate that I feel like a lot of our media outlets are demonstrating the wrong model for how to communicate about politics and I think we need to see more conversations – I'm sorry, I'm looking at the chat. Are you having problems with my sound or is it okay?

MR. JACQUES: I hear you fine but I'm not sure.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay [chuckle.]

MR. PIERRE: I can hear you.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. I'm just checking the, the chat here. So, again, please enter your questions to the Q and A. We should also have the critical race theory poll ready to go. And, we should have the first question from the audience coming up. Here's the poll coming out. Do you feel critical race theory is necessary? I'll assume that this means in courses and education. I think that the question differs depending on whether you're talking about young people versus college students. I mean, this is, critical race theory has been taught in college courses for a very long time just as has critical feminist theory and other types of theories. I don't think there have always been a lot of conversations

about critical race theory in the K through 12 sphere, but I do think that with the introduction of the 1619 Project a couple of years ago with curricular resources for elementary and high school students it alerted people to something they might have been concerned about. And, but, but I do think that there aren't really like any – as far as I am aware of like any massive efforts to implement critical race theory on elementary and high school students it's still a concern that its worth talking about. So, it does look like we have a majority of saying yeah, critical race theory is necessary; it is important. If we'd asked this among a different audience as both Geston and Berny have acknowledged, if you were at Brigham Young University versus another, you know, you've been in many different environments where as Geston said, you're the home team versus the away team. This differs depending on where you are. And in Delaware we tend to have a somewhat more liberal student body. But, if I can just say here, I think Ryan is our next audience surrogate who is one of my students and he's going to be asking a question from one of our audience members. So, Ryan, if you're ready, let's ask the question.

RYAN: Well, thank you, Dr. Hoffman. And also thank you both so much for coming here today. I'd like to thank you on behalf of the UD student body for having this dialogue with us. The conversation you both had on critical race theory prompted many questions from the audience. Lisa Alexander (sp?) asks, without it aren't we erasing a large part of our history? And Sonya Sherman (sp?) asked, do you believe we can teach it in schools once it's been evaluated and critiqued?

MR. JACQUES: I'll, I'll jump in on this. No, I don't think it erases history. Again, there's a big difference between teaching the hard fact history and critical

race theory which actually attaches ideology to the history. So, you can teach slavery, segregation and Jim Crow without saying oh, because of that there are systemic hurdles and somehow, you know, you are the conclusion is you are somehow a victim. And basically, create an environment where it foments disdain almost for your own country and for your fellow countrymen, in this case your classmates who may look different than you. I think it's very dangerous to be teaching that type of thing in a K through 12 context it's totally different from the history. I want the historical facts to be taught. I don't want to shy away from that. I was a history major. I love history. But it's different to put on an ideological cap and then make conclusions and then try to present it as if it is fact when, when it is not. And so, that is the danger I think with teaching critical race theory. It leaves students leaving the classroom with a different kind of mindset and a worldview that I do not think is productive as, as citizens and as young people. I do not want, again, students who look like me thinking that; they're somehow victims and somehow the country has the chips stacked against them. And it's not fair for that white student through no fault of their own, had no kind of, of, of participation in the wrongs of the past to somehow feel guilty about what was done. I mean, this is wrong. It creates discord, and it does not, and it diminishes progress.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, so, I disagree of course because I believe that critical race theory has become the new boogey man for the people who want to erase the truth of this nation's history. So, the reality is it literally highlights the systems that have led us to where we have been and where we are now, right? So, it's acknowledging the systemic injustices that lead to where we are now as a nation. So, I don't believe that it is attacking specific people, although people may play a

part in maintaining those systems and not speaking out against them. But the reality is just like a cake, just like sugar is baked in a cake, these layers of systemic injustices are baked in the fabric of America. And for us to, to, to be unwilling to examine the ingredients, I think it's crazy because the reality is this is who we are as a nation. This is what we have done to get to where we are. And we need to be okay with acknowledging and letting people know how things are and then perhaps from there we can talk about the way things should be. And I don't believe that it makes those who are affected by those systems and constructs. It just gives you an awareness of where you are, and it's a reminder that we have work to do as a nation. That's how I feel about CRT.

MR. JACQUES: And let me do a quick rebuttal. And, and that's the thing. The, the, the system and constructs I think, and a lot of my fellow Americans agree with me that a lot of these systems and constructs are imaginary in present day. You know, we can look at historical clear systems that were meant to divide and to oppress or, or, or just that were wrong that we can all agree with. But to say right now in 2021 that there's somehow the systems and constructs that are so overwhelming that should be ingrained in the minds of, of K through 12 students I, I, I think is erroneous. Mind you, we live in a country; there are people alive today who had to go to different school because of the color of their skin, who had to drink from a different water fountain because of the color of their skin and had to sit on the back of a bus because of how they look. And yet, these same people in the same lifetime got to see somebody by the name of, a black person by the name Barack Hussein Obama, a no means, a traditional American name get elected not once but twice. I would submit to you after the second time, you know, a lot of us knew he wasn't that good of a president but

yet he still got elected. So, to me how does that, how was that a systemically racist country or a country that is so oppressive that the same people who lived through actual oppression got to see somebody by the name of Barack Hussein Obama, a man of color, get elected twice in a country that is supposedly racist. If this is a racist country, wow, we're doing a bad job at it.

MR. PIERRE: And, and we saw what Barack Obama endured as president of America, what he was called, how people talked about him. So, we are not living in a post-racial country. We have work to do as a nation and until we deal with our realities, deal with our history and to deal with how we have rebranded those same histories into this present day we can't move forward and improve and change what we will not confront. So, that's how I feel about it. We may disagree but I heard you, Berny. I heard --

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: -- what you said.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.] Much appreciated.

DR. HOFFMAN: And civil about this. We had the same conversation in class today and it's like, I hear you, we might disagree, let's move on. And I think that's the pivot. Okay, so we do have another question from the audience. I think Margo is next to ask a question on behalf of one of our audience members.

MARGO: Thank you, Dr. Hoffman. And thank you, Like Ryan said, thank you both for being here. The next question actually comes from a UD professor, Jenny Lambe, and she asks, are these kinds of difficult conversations possible when one person believes things that are [indiscernible] false, sorry.
[Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: So, it's demonstrably false. Like you can say that information is not correct. How do you engage in that conversation? Thank you Margo.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, that, that's a, that's a tough question because everybody believes that their opinion is fact anyways. And so, I mean, unless someone is walking around with a literal universal fact checker like how do we know what truth is. We have strong convictions. We are saturated with media that feeds us all different information depending on who you subscribe to. We have social media that allows you to be an expert. If you Google something you are now an expert and you can share your opinion and, and, and so I don't know. It's just a tough situation but I do believe that having that emotional, emotional humility and being willing to listen to others is the key. Viewing the next person as a human being and having compassion and a genuine love for them will go a very long way with even someone you disagree with. And so, that's my take for now. I'll let Berny take a stab at it.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, I think just taking a step back and realizing a lot of what people – I feel like we're seeing this more and more – a lot of people feel that their opinions are automatic facts. You know, when you're discussing issues, especially a public policy they're just your perspectives on how to get to a certain outcome. And so, they're your viewpoints, they're your beliefs and so I think people will need to take a step back and, and, and I think it would minimize them being offended and just kind of dismissing the people they're discussing with if they realize a lot of things they hold near and dear are actually there, they're own beliefs. They're not as verifiable as they may think. You know, an

example I would use is, you know, you can, you know, there's certain things, dates, you know, science, math, math, you know, and you can definitely point to and say No, that is wrong. You know, the date in which this thing occurred was, was ,was that and you're, you're wrong. So, you can, you can have a good conversation or stand on solid ground by saying hey the civil war ended in 1865 but it's another thing to say well everybody who seceded from the Union, you know, did it for this reason. This, this was the reason. When there could be other factors. And it could be a conversation, you know, that, that someone can have and say, well no, this certain person from that state they cited this was their reason why they want to secede from the Union. And, and this person, yeah, they, you know, this was their view. And you can have the discussion. So, but you can have an overarching opinion and say, no the secession movement was about this particular issue but it's still your, it's, it's an opinion that there is room to discuss as opposed to a hard and fast date [chuckle] where you can verify and say no. This is when it occurred. So, I, I, I would really caution people to really just take a step back. Not all of their opinions are facts.

MR. PIERRE: Yeah, and the, the reality is we're living in a time where identity politics is prevalent. So, you know, my political beliefs are a part of who I am so if you disagree with my political stance you are attacking me, and I feel like my life is threatened and I'm going to fight back right now because I'm standing up for my life. So, like, this level of polarization is toxic and if it does not, if it does not get under control it's going to get really ugly in America, you know? So, I would love to see more people embrace the concept of just seeing the other person as not the enemy but as a human being and being willing to listen and learn and be respectful in the process.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and that's what we do here at National Agenda. It's the whole purpose of this for the last 11 years we've been doing this is to demonstrate civil dialogue and to demonstrate that it's possible to have conversations across differences without being disagreeable, I think was the term that you guys used, and, you know, I'm excited to be a part of, of this initiative on University of Delaware's campus. I think we're doing really great work here at UD and I know my students are, are impacted by this kind of conversation. So, let's move on to the next question. I think my student Trey (sp?) is going to ask the next audience question.

TREY: Yes, thank you, Dr. Hoffman and thank you to our two guest speakers. This question is from UD student Ann Hicks (sp?). She says, you say we never attack the person, attack the issue. Which did you do when the issue has to do with your personal identity? For example, transgender rights or racial oppression.

DR. HOFFMAN: Great question. Thank you, Trey.

MR. PIERRE: Very inciteful question. I think, when the issue hits close to home it's really hard to not allow your emotions to provoke you to a response that might not be productive. So, I think the most important thing to do is to focus on the issue and you can use your experience and your closeness to that issue and leverage it to share your viewpoint. So, I believe that your experience is your expertise. I think that your experience is something that you can tap into to leverage as your sweet spot, as a part of your sweet spot. And so, leaning into your reality and how it makes you feel, express that. Share it. And so, if, if you disagree with what is said and it hurts you, you know, you can tell them how it made you feel and tell them why. You don't just have to respond out of

vindictiveness because you've been hurt. But just communicate how you feel, why you feel that way and what they can do next time to make you feel a different way next time they want to express themselves.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, and if you're having that conversation and you're, you're having a conversation with somebody where you're making a very strong point that you're so passionate about and you can see that that particular issue affects them personally, you know, add that disclaimer. Add the caveat. And say look, this is not a personal attack on you, but I want you to know why I, I feel this way. It's not to say I, I'm attacking you but, but here's my view on it. Kind of set the parameters. You know, throw a preamble in there and just say, and just kind of set the tone. In, in order to do that, not necessarily, especially if the person is receptive to not shy away from the issues but if it's a situation where it's, it's, it's to the degree that it's so hurtful that you cannot have it and it won't be productive, you know, then I mean you, you – like Geston said earlier, you, you have a right to not be part of certain conversations. That's different than you saying that person does not have a right to say these things at all. There's a difference. You know, you don't have to participate in it, but that person has every right to espouse their viewpoints on a certain issue I, I thinking, in, in our society. And it's one of the things that makes us stand out as a society in the world. This is not; this is a thing we take for granted quite a bit. So the silencing and cancelling of others is, is, is, I believe is what despot societies do. And we shouldn't have that here., And so, a lot of things will make you feel uncomfortable but democracy and, and living in a republic is uncomfortable because it invites all to participate. And, and, and so, there's a distinction there between you personally engaging and you silencing somebody because they may have a view that may

be very personal to you.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I think this is a great opportunity to plug [chuckle] one of our upcoming events and then we'll go back to the Q and A. October 18th through 24th is Free, Free Speech Week and we're going to be hosting several speakers virtually about various issues around free speech and the First Amendment. And I'm very excited about that. So, please be looking forward to that. Check out cpc.udel.edu for more information around that. We have another question that my student Kayley (sp?) is going to ask from our audience.

KAYLEY: Thank you, Dr. Hoffman and thank you guys again for being here. This question is more directed towards Berny, and it is from Mary Maureen Stone (sp?) of Wilmington. And she asks, how do you think your story would have changed if you were a child of a single parent who works hard but only has one income?

MR. JACQUES: I don't think it would have changed much. I think, you know, things may have taken longer for, for us to achieve what we achieved but if it's the same mother I, I have I know we would have punched through, nevertheless. I mean, she's the hardest working person I know. And so, a lot of my viewpoints, you know, derive not only from my father but from my mom who immediately just dove into work, dove into work and, and, and really made no excuses. And, and, and I, and I really took away from that that if you contribute, you get what you put in in America. That's the beauty of the capitalist system that if you can contribute you can add value. It doesn't matter what you look like, your services will be needed and will be utilized because it's a, it's a system that uses talents and, and contributions to monetize. And so, it's actually one of the best guards against systemic racism because you can see somebody that can add value to your

firms, your company, and if they're talented they can do the work, they're going to get the opportunity. And, and, and I learned that at a, at a (sic) early age and I've seen it. And so, I don't think it would have changed much. I think it, it would have changed if we, if I had different parents or different dispositions, of, of different outlooks on these things. And I remember just growing up being puzzled and imagine we're first-generation Americans, and, and we saw the country for what it was having just left Haiti. We saw the limitless opportunities and I would see some of my fellow Americans who are still, you know, struggling and look, I'm not, you know, casting blame or any kind of judgment but, but sometimes you, you, it made you wonder as a kid without fully forming my viewpoints,; how are we able to make it and we just came here, we barely know the language. Clearly there is something missing because it can be done. We did it with very little with black skin and barely knowing the language initially. And so, if this is not a testament that all things are possible in America and that there are no [indiscernible] systems holding you back. It's, it's, it's good to study the barriers but don't delude yourself to thinking that the same systems of the Jim Crow era are still around. I don't think it's productive. And, and I think it, it really is a mindset thing that really helps somebody's trajectory.

DR. HOFFMAN: Geston, do you want to add to that?

MR. PIERRE: I, I would just say that Jim Crow is gone, yes. But the new Jim Crow is here, and it has simply been rebranded. So, I disagree with Berny, but I heard what you said, Berny. I heard you, Bro.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] Awesome. Okay, I think we have time for one more question. And my student Ryan is going to ask this for our audience.

RYAN: Thank you, Dr. Hoffman. This, this question comes from UD

student Nicole Travis (sp?) representing my home state of New Jersey. She asks, do you think your approach would work for differences between a parent and a child? How would you approach a conversation with a parent who has a fixed mindset?

DR. HOFFMAN: That's an incredibly great question particularly as students, I, I always tell them as they go off for Thanksgiving break and the holidays, like, okay what happens when you have to interact with Uncle So and So, or, you know, a mom or dad who disagrees with you. So, Geston and Berny, what are your suggestions for how to deal with that with like family relationships?

MR. PIERRE: I'm still going to lean into my previous answer of its important to have emotional intelligence and emotional humility. So, you already love your family. You love them with all your heart. Nothing can change that. And so, just let them know [chuckle] how much you love them. Be honest even if you disagree with them. Don't be afraid to let them know how you disagree and why you disagree with them. Just be honest and open and I believe that they will respect that. They should respect how you feel and regardless how angry you may get or how annoyed you may be or how embarrassed you may be about their viewpoints they're still your family. And so, never forget that. I think at the end of the day, you know, family is an institution that is God-given. It's a blessing to have family and so, cherish it. And appreciate them and love on them even through your disagreements. It can get messy. That's what, that's what love is. Love is messy –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: -- but love is a, is a force that can change the word. And so, there's no better place to practice these concepts than in your own family. That's

a great place to start.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's a great point. Berny, do you have anything to add?

MR. JACQUES: Sure, and I think just, just go in not trying to be the one to convince mom, dad or uncle, Uncle Billy. You know? You've got to go in and say, and, and, and almost want to hear from them – Dad, why, why do you believe that? You know? And, and just kind of hear from his perspective and mom's perspective or whoever and then, again, I think when you start that way those type of things, and I know every family dynamic is different of course but normally, you know, then you can kind of explain it. And say, all right, well here is how I got to this conclusion and, and here's why I believe this. And so, when you hear somebody's – typically speaking – conclusions and we just state, you know, our, our, our position and that alone can be a repellent. And so, I challenge everybody to ask the next question why. So, as soon as you're shellshocked by what you heard that may seem just beyond the pale, gather yourself and just say, okay, why, now why do you believe that, and you'd be shocked about what you hear. I'll share one, one, one story that actually kind of punches on the opinion versus fact thing as well. And, and it's, you never know what you, what tidbits you can pick up and different perspectives you can garner by just speaking to someone. There was an, a judge here in our circuit – it was during when a lot of the cancel culture on, on confederate monuments were starting and people were just tearing down confederate monuments; they were being vandalized. And the prevailing thought in mainstream culture and the media, academia was that these were symbols of oppression and that is clearly signs of racism that any black person should be triggered by and that these things were erected as a sign of white supremacy. And they, they talk about the

years of when a lot of these things were erected in the early 20th century, and they said it's not coincidental why would these things be erected during those times. So, I spoke to this judge, and he told me – he's, he's, he's older – and he said he would vacation in South Carolina and his grandparents were of the age, they were old enough, they knew confederate veterans. And so, he was like, yes, [indiscernible] I only actually knew people who knew people who fought in the civil war, and he said what was happening in a lot of these towns is that in the early 20th century is that a lot of these veterans were starting to die, and they were getting up age. And this, despite whether you agree with their cause or not these were their fathers, their grandfathers, and it was as a sendoff. And these Daughters of the Confederate States and things like that did these things to just honor them on their way out as these folks were dying. So, so it was a perspective I'd never even heard of before, ever part of the conversation. And he was actually there. He's like look, I talk to grandma and grandpa and they, they, they told me, you know, what it was. And so, a lot of these things are not always ideological bound and so if somebody for whatever reason is peacefully protesting against the vandalization or the takedown of a confederate monument it's not fair to just label these people outright as racists. There are a lot of ways people can get to a certain conclusion that you may vehemently disagree with, and I'm not asking you to change your position, but understand and ask that why and you might get a perspective that you never knew before, and I think it will be enriching for all. And hopefully that's afforded to you as well.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think that's great to think about these issues that we feel like are so embedded in our national dialogue as being here's the one side, here's the other side that there's often a lot of grey area in the middle. So, I do

want to thank you both so much. This has been an enlightening conversation. I hope to bring you back to the University of Delaware campus soon.

MR. PIERRE: In person. In person, please.

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Absolutely, in person. It's been a delightful conversation. I want to thank everyone for being here tonight and for this series. It continues. Please tune in to our future events. Our next event is – look at my notes here – is October 6th. Oh, someone is saying that Geston has to bring Committed with him if you come back next –

MR. PIERRE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: -- [laughter]. Your a capella group.

MR. PIERRE: I'll see what I can do.

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: But it's been a privilege to be here at the University of Delaware and Berny and I are just grateful for the opportunity to have shared and to demonstrate our, our bromance despite our political frenemy-ship. So, thank –

MR. JACQUES: [Laughter.]

MR. PIERRE: -- you all for having us and we hope to see you again soon.

DR. HOFFMAN: Berny, final thoughts before I wrap things up?

MR. JACQUES: No, thank you. This was a delight. It was an honor to be with you all. Keep doing this. Keep fostering these discussions and I think



we'll be better for it as a country.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Thank you both.

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