



Challenging Anti-Black Racism in Organizations

with

Mahlon Evans-Sinclair, Anima Leadership

Mahlon is an educator and facilitator with ten years of teaching, training and leadership experience within education. He has a deep understanding of how people learn and has designed and facilitated training for various stakeholders and organizations. Mahlon supports individuals and teams to develop competence and resilience when working in unfamiliar and sometimes challenging contexts. He has developed curricula for Teacher Training and Teacher Development courses, both in the UK and international contexts, incorporating concepts of equity and inclusion to the content knowledge and subsequent tools of application. Mahlon is concerned with empowering marginalized people to recognize and develop their own personal power as a means to thrive in their personal and social lives. Mahlon is working on a podcast entitled Educating While Black which looks at the experience of vulnerability and resilience of black leaders in schools.



Parker Johnson, Anti-racist Educator and Consultant

Parker Johnson is a settler of African descent and an independent consultant and active community member who has been working in the field of harassment and discrimination prevention, workplace equity and inclusion, conflict resolution, intergroup relations, and organizational change for over 15 years in Canada. He worked for the City of Vancouver for 10 years in the Equal Employment Opportunity Office. Prior to moving to Canada in 2002, he worked extensively in the US higher education administration, policy and research focusing on justice, diversity, equity and inclusion. Parker earned his MEd in administration, planning and social policy at Harvard University. Originally, from Boston (Wampanoag lands), Parker moved to Vancouver from Los Angeles, unceded territories of the s̓k̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish), sel̓il̓w̓it̓ulh (Tsleil-Waututh), and x̓w̓m̓əθk̓w̓əy̓əm (Musqueam) nations, in 2002.





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- Annahid : My name is Annahid and I'm one of the co founders of Anima Leadership. We're an organization that's led by two Brown immigrant folks here in Toronto, based in Toronto, Canada. And our passion is creating organizations and environments where everybody feels like they matter and belong.
- Annahid : So in Toronto, Canada where we are based, let me just move this over here, recognizing the traditional territory of the Anishnabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and the Huron Wendet First Nations people. And specifically we recognize the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations and acknowledged the people, the ancestors, and the spirits of First Nations people across our country as the original and the current stewards of this land we are so blessed to be living and working on. It's really powerful as well during this time of pandemic to acknowledge First Nations people in the country that I live in. The first nations people were the original survivors of mass pandemic that eradicated much of the culture and many, many lives as Europeans came and settled in North America, many, many, many First Nations people got sick. And I want to acknowledge and honor that history.
- Annahid : History is part of the conversation that we're talking about today because history, and especially when we're looking at the history of Black people around the globe, isn't something in the past, something that we buried, as we can see quite clearly in this moment, but something that's alive in our structures and our institutions and in many, many of our workplaces. And so the focus of today's call, there's so much that has happened over the last couple of weeks in terms of the surfacing of police bias and brutality, the disproportionate number of deaths of Black and other folks of color in our countries and communities.
- Annahid : And for today's call, we really want to zoom in to looking at what does anti-Black racism look like in our workplaces? How do we become conscious of what it sounds like, feels like, looks like so that we can all step in within our own scope of influence and interrupt the patterns of racial patterns so that it doesn't consistently fall on the shoulders of Black and other racialized people to do that work.
- Annahid : Okay. All right. So I'm going to start with thank you, Parker and Mahlon for doing this. I mean, I know both of you and I'm excited to have this conversation. And I also recognize that in your identities as black men who have worked within organizations and now consult and help organizations in the area of diversity inclusion, that this is not a neutral conversation for you. And so I just want to start with a huge and massive thank you for you folks stepping into this. So I'm going to just do a brief intro. Parker, you are now working as an independent consultant in Vancouver, Canada, the West Coast. You've been working in this area of anti-racism and equity and I think in different capacities, your entire adult life. Before you working independently, you were with the City of Vancouver in the Equal Employment Opportunity Office. And then in the US and you grew up, I think, in Boston. And then you were in LA before you came to Vancouver. Working in higher education administration, policy and research, focusing on these issues that we're talking about today. And that your educational background is you have an MA from Harvard in admin, social planning, higher ed. And just as a personal level, you're one of the most knowledgeable people I know in my world around anti-Black



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racism and the histories and the struggle and what this means. And I'm just so grateful to you for being here. Thank you.

Annahid : Mahlon, you've been with our organization Anima Leadership for about, I think a year now, as one of our diversity specialists and consultants. You come to us from the UK. And folks, this is really interesting because we're having a... Do you see we're having a cross-geographical conversation on anti-Black racism where Parker and Mahlon live in Canada, but also come from these other nations with similar, but also different histories. So that might be part of our conversation.

Annahid : And Mahlon you come from the education system. You have worked with individuals and teams both within the educational system as a teacher, as a consultant. And you've also worked outside of the system to develop and offer curriculum to people from different organizations, again, around issues of equity, justice, anti-racism, all that stuff.

Annahid : And I just want to mention your podcast Educating While Black is in development. And you're also going to be doing a series on challenging anti-Black racism in organizations through Anima is October. So folks, if you're looking for more learning, that's a great opportunity to plug in. All right, I'm going to start then with just asking the two of you, let's just start with a general response to what your thoughts are, what your take is to what's been going on over the last week since the unfortunate and horrific death of George Floyd. What's the impact? How are you doing?

Parker: Okay. Yeah, I guess the way that I'm feeling, I've gone through a lot of emotions and right now I'm feeling very hopeful, I guess. Having lived in LA during the aftermath of the decision to acquit the LAPD for it's beating of Rodney King, and now seeing what is not so much a US issue but a global move, a global response to ongoing systematic institutional oppression, particularly of Black folks. But also I think it's connecting with a lot of the challenges and struggles that people have globally across a variety of issues and in ways in which they intersect.

Parker: And I do want to also bring in a couple of other names, Tony McDade and Brianna Taylor. I think that as we talk about these issues and the horrific lynching of George Floyd, it's important for us to say her name as well. And trans and folk and women and others who continue to be harmed and killed in this context.

Parker: The reason why I'm hopeful just really quickly also, just to give you a quick sense of that is seeing all the movement that I see in social media across the globe, from New Zealand to England, to South Africa, and it's quite amazing what's happening in Asia. And this is while people are having their own local struggles as well, along with the pandemic.

Annahid : Thank you. Mahlon.

Mahlon: ***Where am I with it? Everywhere and nowhere all at the same time.*** What do I want to say? I think if I look at it on a macro level, I'm probably more hopeful. And I'll be real specific as well as to why I'm more hopeful. And this is partly because of the wealth of history that there is even on this call. There are people who have lived through George Floyd's, way before George Floyd's. I've lived through one in my own family in the UK as well. And there's ways in which all



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of these seem to just be isolated incidents of conversations that would happen and then close down and happen and then closed down. And I think it doesn't take away how difficult it still is to enter into these conversations. Because at the same time of having these conversations, I'm mostly just trying to exist. So there's also that element of it too.

Mahlon: But I do think where I suppose I'm hopeful is that actually the ways... Much like we've COVID, much like with the pandemic, things that we trusted in, things that we believed in, things that we just assumed to be the States as core ways of which it just has to be that way because it's always been that way. And there's no one to challenge it. I feel like I want to call this a bit of an ecosystem where we've got an ecosystem of change at the minute where you have got everybody doing everything from every different angle where you have got those of us who are willing to have conversations and educates and teach. You have got those of us who are also tapping out this time and saying, "I'm no longer involved in our conversation." You have got those of us who are having different ways in which building the bridge is important and taking place. And I just feel like the ecosystem of it also being regional and national and very specific.

Mahlon: The UK flavor of anti-Black racism is very different than America one. Being in Canada for about two and a half years, very different situation where... And at the same time, I get privileges for being a particular type of Black, which is not from Canada. But in also, I have to recognize that I'm at the same time potentially taking up space from other Black folk who are here before me, who also need veteran voices to be champion in the conversation.

Mahlon: And then also the facts about what it means to be black in an Australian context is something that is always an afterthought for both the US, both the UK at the same time. And that there's being space for that conversation to take place as well. There's a way in which we as Black people are seeing each other globally and the conversations that we're having across each other are far more bilateral. And there's a way in which we're talking directly to each other without a translator that can, as said, make it more of an isolated situation or an isolated conversation to say that. But at least in Canada, we're not, or at least in the UK, we're not. It's the case of everywhere we are. The flavor of it is just these things in different places.

Mahlon: So I'm hopeful because it's pivotal at the moment. I was listening to your person that I follow and I listen to. Her name is Amanda Seals. And she was kind of speaking about this moment being like a Jenga block. And we're at the place where the in the game of Jenga, we've removed the brick that is holding everything up so stably, and this is the moment where it's teetering. Like your move. Like we've removed the last brick, over to you. Let's see how we're going to maintain the structure as it currently is doing the same things that we've been doing before. And so I'm hopeful of the situation that we haven't done before.

Annahid: That's great. I had this image of an ice cream shop where there's all these flavors of anti-black racism, depending on what country and what culture you're coming from.

Speaker 3: Can you say a little bit about the Canadian flavor? Because I think the majority of people are joining in from Canada. How would you describe the Canadian flavor of anti-black racism?

Parker: I want to leave that to Mahlon to open up on that.



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- Mahlon: I mean, I'm going to caveat the fact that I've been here recently and so I don't... My lived experience of it drives more than my academic understanding of it. I want to be really clear on that because there are writers of this work. I remember one of the first, when I arrived, I arrived in January 2018 and I went to the Point of Reference Library. It just so happened that there was a talk happening and it was Robin Maynard's. She was speaking around police and black lives. I just happened to stumble on this talk, I didn't plan it, I just happened to be there. It kind of dawned on me that less than a month I've been in Canada and there is a talk happening on exactly the same situation.
- Mahlon: About three years before, I was at another talk by a UK writer, Reni Eddo-Lodge, on 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race' and it's just, the ink on my immigration paper hadn't even dried and we're having this conversation already. And so I think with me specifically with my understanding of it is kind of what I said before the dual understanding of one place I am exalted, I speak differently. And so all the connotations or whatever the British accent comes with, I'm afforded. I'm afforded when I speak, I'm afforded benefit of the doubt and that's of intelligence, that's of trustworthiness, that's of a lot of things.
- Mahlon: And at the same time, I still remember, that I have got Canadian friends that I made before I moved to Canada both brown and black, and the things that they would speak to me about in their work spaces, in their everyday lives. And if things that are extremely similar to what I have experienced in the UK there's ways, in which for example, prime example, I live downtown Toronto. That's a benefit of being an immigrant to Toronto from the UK. There are no other black people that I typically see on my day to day journey. And this is me coming from London where every two seconds we are 40% downtown London itself, zonal. We're everywhere, you can't move for seeing a time in the UK is beam, but you can't really move from seeing us.
- Mahlon: I live just next to Bloor street. And so kind of seeing who exists at the time when I'm going to work and coming from work, there is nobody that looks like me pretty much existing on the streets. And I know that there are black people in Canada. Jamaicans in terms of, as us as exports, Canada, and Toronto specifically, and London are the two places where we've gone the most in numbers. ***So where are we? Where are they? I don't see them. And so my experiences of being black downtown leads me to believe that there is something going on as to why black folk the don't exist downtown.*** And then thinking about what space I take up in being the sole black or the only black or that person who people would typically be in conversation for downtown. Does... I feel like I'm very cautious of the role that I take.
- Parker: Yeah, wow, thank you. I think for me, I've been here since 2002 and I came... Coming from the States, had the sort of arrogant assumption that Canada was like the U.S., just North and Canada quickly informed me that my arrogance and my assumptions were quite wrong. And there is the nature of also Canadian exceptionalism that I think informs the ways in which it uses the U.S., particularly having 10 times the population. And I moved from a state that had the population of the country of Canada.
- Parker: So moving from California to here, people asked me what was it like? But the sort of exceptionalism that shows up using the U.S. as a way of saying Canada is racist and white, is



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one of the ongoing challenges that I know Canadians grapple with particularly Canadians of color, indigenous folk, and also coming from the States, the conversation there's principally framed around a black/white conversation. And then here, particularly on the west coast, it's very much an indigenous conversation around race sovereignty, genocide, and reclaiming the land. And black people oftentimes refer to themselves, particularly those who are descendants of slaves, as mooted people on looted land.

Parker: And this has become very much a connected conversation as we talk about these things. And it shows up in a... The way in which racism shows up here is, and I don't know a lot about England, but the British flavor of this place, seeing the Queen on the money, being the strong connection to the Anglocentric notion of how Canada finds itself, even as it's contested between two colonial powers of brands in England, I find still quite something. And the imagery when I went into, for example, city hall, when I was working there and, the images of principally, just white people, people who've been the mayor, look at the parliament, you look at who's in charge, you look at who's in charge of the police. You get a sense, a very clear sense of the colonial white supremacist nature of Canada. Yet Canada would not see itself as such, but would see the U.S. in that way.

Parker: So U.S. police brutality is a particular thing, but Canada is much nicer. Yet and still, we know that police brutality here occurs. And oftentimes, and so the other ways in which racism shows up, often times it goes unnoticed and it gets sort of normalized, if you will. And in the backdrop of the ways in which we see ourselves and don't see ourselves. ***So, I'm both hyper-visible as a large black CIS hetero man, 200 plus pounds, and yet I'm invisible at the same time. So, and that's the constant struggle.*** And so when I, you see and hear, particularly black Canadians, talking about their experiences, I'd really like to spend some time listening to that. And whether we're talking about Africa, Africville, or Hogan's Alley, people such as L. Jones who are speaking out, Sandy Hudson, who was one of the organizers at BLM Toronto, and then our own local folks with Hogan's Ally, people who've been organizing here, BLM Vancouver. It's an interesting combination of the diaspora. So black folks who've been here multiple generations to black folks who recently arrived, but we're always seen as people who are not of this place. And that is the constant struggle with the, one of the clear thing between the U S and Canada is there's no sense of enslavement here, which was part of Canadian history. And there's no sense of brutality against black people. And particularly in the larger ways in which systemic racism shows up, in housing and employment and education, and all of the ways in which opportunities are denied and the D's of denial, distraction and defensiveness as it comes up with white fragility are constantly being void by the notion of exceptionalism.

Annahid: Yeah. Yeah, I think there's a... You're both naming this image we have in Canada of being more progressive and polite can get in the way of us really looking at the pervasive racism and particularly anti-black racism in our inner institutions. I'm going to shift us into the workplace for a few minutes. You know, it's always surprising to me that when we talk about racism, when we get to this point in the learning process, when we're doing training in organizations and we talk about systemic oppression, systemic racism, and then there's the stats. And I always make sure that I make the point that the stats and the evidence around racism, anti-black racism could fill the entire building.



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- Annahid: And then people still resist the idea that we all carry and perpetuate anti-black racism despite, sometimes because of, our best of intentions and how studies, and I'm going to quote a recent catalyst study from 2019. And for folks on the cafe today, we're going to post this up on our site, it's a great resource that said that of the workplaces they surveyed, up to 50% of black and other racialized employees report being highly on guard in the workplace.
- Annahid: Of that 50%, 50 to 70% express feeling a regular desire to quit. And I think about, carrying that feeling of I'm walking into my place of work, whether I'm a teacher, whether I'm working for a consulting company, whether I work for, for government and I walk into my place of work and from the moment I get in, I'm thinking about how I can get out. And I wonder if you two can just really speak, frankly cause I don't think it's any coincidence. You're black, but you're also black men, and I think there's a particular impact that black men carry in the workplace and I wonder if you could, if you'd be comfortable sharing with us a little bit of, what does it feel like? What does it sound like? What's the impact for you?
- Mahlon: I mean, if he saw me on camera, just then as you said that I had to click my neck because the tension of being brought back to places where that was very apparent. Mmm... yeah, it's there, and you do carry it, you carry it in every situation. There was a... There's a slide that, or an image that I wanted to share and it just kind of speaks to just a visual that's being created with regards to, and I think actually it might be useful for both Parker and I to explain what's they were intending to do so this one, this has been quite recently shed by the Slow Factory Foundation and all credits are there. And yeah, it really kind of spoke to me about the ways in which these four things are always at play, up to and including all four, but definitely two or more of these things are at play. Anytime that I've gone into a workplace, I think, and I can think about the last three places that I was.
- Mahlon: So I said I was an educator, I was a teacher in the UK. And so what I think about what that means, we talk about making the situation better for those who come after us. And then at the same time, there was a dual consciousness that I've always had to occupy in being a black teacher and a black male teacher in a school based setting. Where, when I think about the school to prison pipeline, it's the same in all three countries. So Canada, the UK, the U.S., Australia too. There is, literally, from the moment that you enter into the education system, you are being set up for a life on the margins. And if you're squeezed out, then you didn't make it.
- Mahlon: And being a black male teacher, who's in charge of academics, I wasn't in charge of pastoral. I made a conscious decision throughout the whole of my career in education as a teacher that I did not want to go into anything past or early based because that is a skillset that I have inherently.
- Annahid: Can you explain that? That's not a commonly used Canadian term.
- Mahlon: Okay, so pastoral is the things to do with behavior. Pastoral has things to do with discipline. Pastoral has to do with parents or engagement. Pastoral has to do all the things that aren't to do with the learning of the subjects. So the black history teacher, you don't really find too many of me in the system, as it is. And so there is a way to look at the academic side of things as being the way to prevent things becoming pastoral. So if I do my job as a good teacher in



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the classroom, and I ensure that the classroom setting that I have is encompassing of everybody in my classroom. I reduce the need for there to be possible pastorally-minded interactions with those students. And that is something that is not in my job description. It's not... There's no extra pay for doing these things.

Mahlon: It's not even recognized as being something that is, it's a skill set. That is great, that I haven't. So if I can speak to Jamal and Darnell and TyShan and all of these other kids that we don't want to speak to, or we decide that we don't know how to speak to, can you speak to them? There is a way in which that becomes an extra layer of the job that I have, but I don't get any recognition because it's not seen as a competency. It's not seen as a skill. It's not seen as something that is when we talk about diversity, there is a way that that is something that I'm bringing extra and above to being able to do the job that everyone else can do, but there is no extra recognition for that. And I say that because then when I went in to teacher training, I remember some of the instances that I had there where, I mean, I left the school that I was in, not because I had any intentions to quit.

Mahlon: It just became very stressful in that circumstance. But teachers' training was very interesting because this was a place where, now I'm affecting both teachers who are going to go into the classroom and teach hundreds and thousands of kids more than I ever would have had a chance to teach in that academic year. And just some of the memories that I have kind of bring to light some of the ways in which you're always on edge. I remember we introduced this scheme, why we had a career changes. So there were older teachers going... Older people going into teaching after they've done other things in that career. I remember being at the end of a line and it was an open evening event. And I had already explained to them that I would be your history teacher. I would be training you and how to teach history.

Mahlon: I saw that there was some eyebrows raised. It was what it was. I don't frighten easily so that's... It's either me or you're not on the course, it's very simple. So those are your two options. But I remember at the end of it, this particular individual went to shake their hands. I was the fourth person in the line. Shook the hand of the first person, shook the hand of the second person, shook the hand of the third person and approached me with a clenched fist, as though I was to bump fists with this person. And already kind of shows me that there is a way in which there's a level of respect that I'm giving these three, and as I approach you, there's already a way in which I'm going to just subtly, cause in Britain, we don't necessarily do overt, we do subtle.

Mahlon: I'm just going to start to show you that I have a different respect level for you than I have for the rest. And I remember taking this person's clenched fist and I shook it because at the end of the day, I'm not going to end up feeling stupid in this situation because what the reaction that you want, I don't really know what reaction that you wanted, but I'm going to take your whole construct, and I'm just going to shake that. And I just remember thinking that that happened in front of three of my colleagues, but I was the one that had to manage that in the space to, one, maintain the name and reputation of the organization, to not have a potential person who would join the organization feel slighted and then bad mouth the organization, because I couldn't handle my reaction or the ways in which that was coming back to me.



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- Mahlon: And I loop all of that back to say, so when I was there for teaching those black kids in school, the other lesson that I was teaching them, which was not history, was how to start learning from early to play this game of you come to me and we'll find ways that we can address the system. So I don't even want you to challenge things in the classroom. You hold it, you bring it to me. We will speak to your parents together. And we're going to get your parents to come into the school and do the thing that if you try to advocate for yourself as a 14 year old, a 12 year old and an 11 year old, punitive judgment and punishment is going to come your way, but if I can use who I am in the space that I'm in to build up, what could be a bit more of an armor.
- Mahlon: And also I'm now able to triangulate data. There's a pattern, whether the pattern is of this particular teacher or this particular situation, there's things that I'm in a position to do, but I'm not asking you to up... Push the boulder up Hill on your own. And those are the kinds of things that I have to be aware of 24/7. So there's no wonder that some spaces are more hostile from the moment that you arrive and I'm already looking to leave than others, as an example.
- Annahid: And Mahlon, if I can just, and then Parker, I want you to speak to this too, but how did people respond when you raised, when you made visible, what was invisible? Like when you raised the impact of doing the additional labor to support the racialized students, especially black students, when you raised the impact of these micro inequities, like the fist bump or... You not the way... How was that received by, I imagine, mostly white non-black leadership.
- Mahlon: If I can jump in real quick on this one, ***I feel this is where being a black male is very different to being a black female. Black women, from the get go are told that they're loud, that they're abrasive. If they so much as blink, it's an affront to someone in the room*** and specifically in education, it's a very white female dominated sphere. And so me being an also another intersection that I have, is that I'm a black, gay man, there is... There have definitely been spaces that I've walked into, where there has been a level of, and I can't really find another way to place this, so I'm just going to have to just give it to you as it is, where some of the interactions that I've had with my female colleagues has been on the side of flirtation.
- Mahlon: And what has happened is that I'm a naturally open person. I'm fine, I'm flirty whatever, not flirty, but I'm open or whatever else. And there's just this way in which the moment now that I have to bring to your attention that you did something that offended me, I don't get what black women get, which is you're aggressive and you're argumentative. What I get is now you're a threat. And so there's a way in which one, how dare you challenge me? Is Amy crew for rollover, right? I've asked you to adhere to the policies that you as an organization have said that I have to adhere to for coming in here.
- Mahlon: And the moment that I tell you that you've transgressed such a line, the blow back that I get is to suggest that, how dare I not know that you were joking? It was jovial. An example was a colleague of mine said to me that I... She read me as being sa... No feisty, no sassy, sassy, was her word. She said, I find you to be quite sassy. And I said to her, that's a bit of an intersection of one, homophobic and two, very racialized slur that you're giving me though. Because men don't typically, they're not called sassy unless they're effeminate and sassy is typically a very loaded black racialized word to be used. And I remember I had to the way in which I had to deal with it because HR was ineffective, the HR within the team was ineffective.



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- Annahid: So, honestly to that, Mahlon, and I know you're describing your experience in the UK prior to coming here. And I, as we all know, and certainly my experience of doing this work for many, many years in many, many institutions. And, usually it's people, racialized people, black leaders and colleagues and employees coming at breaks and at lunch and sharing some variation of what you're so vulnerably sharing with us on this call. And you know, when people talk about trauma, like the definition of trauma is to be in a situation over an extended period of time that you feel unable to change, that you feel you are somehow stuck in it and you can't change, and I feel like that is so much the experience of what you're describing. I don't know if you would use the word trauma, but I think there's some level of trauma for a lot of racialized folks, certainly black people in most institutions. And again, this comes back to, despite many of these organizations having very great equity policies on paper, many of these leaders releasing statements into the media in this time period, but not understanding that the culture and the invisible... the moments that you're describing, the words and the body language and the way some people's experience gets supported and we act on behalf to support some people and then other people who speak out even a teeny little bit, get further marginalized and the impact of that. I just want to thank you for speaking to that.
- Parker: No problem, yeah.
- Annahid: Parker, I want to give you some time to talk, and if you want to reference the model you brought at some point, then we can bring that up and that'll go into-
- Parker: Yeah, and I think Mahlon was capturing some of what happens on an ongoing basis around surveillance, containment, and control. I oftentimes, not only work professionally in terms of working an organization, but I also do a lot of informal coaching, working with colleagues who are working in organizations and part of the reason why I left working within organizations and as an inside person also, is that I felt the need to work less because it required a lot of energy to have to deal with the ongoing assault and indignity and needing to manage that all the time.
- Annahid: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Parker: And also, certainly I don't want to besmirch work as an opportunity, because it also is a great opportunity and the importance for organizations to look at how to leverage these things in terms of organizational change. But what happens generally speaking in my experience, particularly looking at this chart is that... And this is something that's talked about by Ibrim Kendi in his book on how to be anti-racist, is one of the things that occurs is, we oftentimes have to decide between assimilation and desegregation. Those are the two key ways in which racism shows up.
- Parker: So, what Mahlon was talking about and what I also do deal with is, how do we manage other people's experience of us? On some level we're always internalizing and regulating the ways in which we need to not be our full, authentic selves, because there's danger in that. And so the need, the policing behavior that shows up with someone like Amy Cooper and seeing a black man as a threat or in the lynching case of George Floyd, were very similar in some ways. And so we're... internalized, we're expected not be as Mahlon was alluding to, uppity or



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confrontational or people who challenge. And so there's a certain amount of the internalized aspect that we do in terms of the dance for survival.

Parker: Then there's also the interpersonal. And I do want to go to the pyramid very quickly. I had an opportunity, when I worked at a camp when I was in my early 20s, to lead an international exchange group and I was invited because it was a boys camp and sort of old boy network, you don't apply for a job, but you're invited to take it on, and so, I got invited over to the executive director's house and I didn't know why, and I'd be going to camp for all these years. And he said, "So do you want to lead one of these trips?" And I was like, international camper trip. I was like, "Oh, sure." He's like, "Well, which one do you want to lead?" And I was like, "Wow." So there wasn't, this was the application process, if you will. And I told him what I wanted to do and he said, "Yeah, that would be a great one for you." And so I did this and I went back and I shared this with one of my white colleagues who was also a counselor. And he said, "Oh, you got that because you're black."

Parker: And, it was a microaggression, all of the things we talk about, but it was an interesting point because up until that point, he and I were just both counselors at the camp doing our thing. And then when I am the recipient of the logistics typically assigned to him, then all of the sudden, not only am I a competitor, but I'm less than, and he has to be clear that he knows that I know that I'm less than. And so it was an interesting moment of him revealing who he was and for me to just sort of stand there. And similar things happen all the time for folks. So, that was an interpersonal interaction. And part of the truth was I was the first black person to lead one of those trips in the history of the camp.

Parker: So anyway, exceptionally qualified I might add. That said, all the ways in which these things happen were at play, the old boys network in particular. So, I just wanted to acknowledge that from him. So looking at the overt white supremacy and the structure here, what we oftentimes end up having conversations about is the stuff that's above the line. When people say, "Oh, these people are white supremacists." But as we know, and Mahlon and I have been talking about, white supremacy is ever present. The colorblindness framework that operates with neoliberalism and simulation that has people saying, "I don't see you as X," is always at play.

Parker: And the denial, the privilege, always at play, the fear of people of color, always at play. And so even when Black Lives Matter was a prominent and... The televised and video murders of black people were populating social media. And I was going to work oftentimes dressed in all black, in a black suit and tie... Because it felt like a constant state of mourning. One of my colleagues at the time was sort of feeling sorry for me. And I was just like, oh, okay. But then later on, this sort of sympathy moment became a surveillance moment when I'm doing work for Hogan's Alley. And again, this is structural... to-

Annahid: Can you explain Hogan's Alley for the record?

Parker: So Hogan Alley, it's an organization now, Hogan's Alley Society, but it was a part of Vancouver inhabited significantly by black people and the city of Vancouver made a racist decision to put viaduct directly through the community, dislodging people, pushing them out of the area. A lot of people had jobs and there was a community and so on that was there. And there are some efforts still with working with the city around recognition and restitution. But a few years ago



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when I was working for the city in gathering information, going to meetings, doing things "after work", I had a colleague asked me, "Well, what are you doing?" When I was printing things off related to the work that I was doing with Hogan's Alley, I was looking at what Toronto had been doing.

Parker: And I said, "Well, I'm going to this meeting." And I knew that when I printed stuff off, I realized that one of my colleagues was there at the printer and so, this was going to be seen as work that wasn't relevant or authorized by the city, but the city was committed to doing the work. And I was doing this after hours because it's part of my commitment. And it was at that point, that was one of many microaggressions and people refer to it as micromanaging. I refer to it as, as an aggression but that was at the point where I was like, "Okay, I really do need to go." And there were a series of behaviors like that of surveillance and punishment that happened from a colleague who was ostensibly, "Oh, I'm so sorry that what's happening to black people," yet still would dehumanize me. So all of this stuff that's at play here in terms of denial of privilege, things such as assuming good intentions is enough. All of these things are at play at all times. Anyway, I'm taking up quite a bit of time here and realizing we're at 1:00pm..

Mahlon: Can I just say, don't apologize.

For me, don't apologize. You're good. Even I'm learning stuff from what you're saying, there's things that I learned from speaking, but I feel like that's something to again, jump into and say that one of the things about, in this moment, the beauty about there is in Parker and I is also a bit of the tragedy that there is in Parker and I speaking about this, which is, and we spoke about this yesterday and to bring it to light here, there is also a way where both that pyramid and the layering that's in the other slide... I look at Parker as someone who is precious to me as a black man, because there's something in the absence of black men ahead of me... Who are still whole. Whatever whole looks like, and present and attentive and just there, that is missing. The smattering of black men that... And this is the point, I'm going to be really blunt here.

Mahlon: ***There is a literal killing of black men. And then there is a metaphorical killing of black men, which means that men of Parker's age and knowledge base, they never make it. And then when they do make it, there is a way in which white supremacy turns around and says, "Oh, well done, I didn't expect to see you here. I didn't expect to see you at the finish line. We set up all the traps in the world to ensnare you here to snuff you out that way to really just make this whole journey for you, the most difficult that it can be, and that you still made it to the end. Can you now tell me how you did that?" And so the whole journey of the whole thing is extraction. I don't get to have a Parker as a older figure to me that I can be selfish with because everyone after Parker's time to ask how did you as a black man, black man, how did you as a black man, black man in this society because this society was not intended for you to do so.***

Mahlon: And so there's a way in which I do get irritated when Parker does speak in the way that he has to speak on behalf of all these things all the time, because this constant dredging, constant dredging. I remember when I was a teacher again, and we invited Holocaust survivors in to speak to the students. And I remember the organization said that we do not run more than one Holocaust survivors scenario a week, because for those who survived the Holocaust to



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come in and speak about the Holocaust, it takes a lot out of them. And we give them a week before we put them in another school to speak to students about this stuff.

Mahlon: There is no rest that's given to us to speak to this stuff. There is no acknowledgement that every time I have to go back a decade, two decades, three decades, the first time that I knew I was black was when someone, there is none of that, that's afforded to us and it's just this constant. Can I mind you for more information? Can I mind you for more information? And even when you get to the end, it's like, so tell me how you made it because you weren't supposed to be here. I say all of that's the same, I'm trying to take up all of my 50% of space because I have to, and so, I never want you to apologize for, if it runs over, it runs over.

Annahid: I want to, just for a moment, just say and reflect back that what just happened, was so powerful and I'm just noticing it, like the micro is always revealing of the macro and Parker just watching you apologize. I had the same instinct, and Mahlon, I'm watching you honor and speaking to, and I want it just as an invitation to all of us on the call. This is what interrupting anti-black racism looks like, it's constantly catching the ways in which racialized people monitor and shrink themselves and Mahlon, what you just did.

Annahid: How do we all notice and pay attention and interact in our own scopes of influence? So, can you say more? Hey, I notice the black folks around this table, haven't had a chance to speak yet. Can we take an extra 10 minutes and actually hear from those voices? Or can we actually, can we invite the black person in the room? As a facilitator, it's 90% of the time, it's white people that in every room I walk into that will speak and continue to speak, unless someone, usually myself invites, and even then so, and I know that you were being mindful of time, but I just, that was just a powerful kind of like let's notice these moments and not have it be the other black panelists, I would have said something to, but this is how it plays out-

Parker: I just wanted to say, I really appreciate what Mahlon had to say and I think about Robert Hales, who was a mentor to me, black man, who I met quite a number of years ago, doing this work and continues to be someone who I hold in high esteem because, and I'm going to be fairly transparent here. Part of the reason why I left the city of Vancouver was because being there was killing me. And I mean that metaphorically and literally in terms of my heart and my health and going off on stress leave. And so, there are prices that are paid and their exit interviews that are not done and that are done, that people don't feel safe to share in. And so I say this not to be smart to the city of Vancouver because it's an employer, like all employers are employers. But oftentimes what people now are doing is saying, you weren't the right person versus we weren't doing what we needed to do as an organization.

Parker: And until organizations come to realize and work hard at doing things beyond the performative to actually transform their organizations, to be places that nurture value and uplift the people who were there, then these sort of policing behaviors, these diminishing behaviors, the number of black people who have come in and out of that organization, and many other organizations, **when you want to look at what anti-black racism looks like on a structural level, look at the systemic ways in which people go in and out. And for those who are retained, what the price is in order for that to happen.**



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- Parker: So Amy Klobuchar, who had an opportunity to bring the person who actually killed George Floyd to some reckoning for his behavior, that didn't happen. Did the police union do anything? No everybody supported his continued violence and terrorism of people. As a consequence, there we are. He's got his knee on a man's neck, like he's bagging big game and he's a Hunter. So, when people say that was a lynching, that's not a metaphorical observation. That's an actual observation. That's what happened. **And when Amy Cooper threatens a black man with the police, I wrote Emmett Till in there because that's what she was doing.**
- Parker: That's what she was doing. She said, I can kill you right now. I can control you to my satisfaction, you are an unruly Negro.
- Parker: **So, these are the things that people are dealing with. The over-policing, the containment, the control, the dehumanization.** We see it when people die, when they are executed. And don't ever show those things on... But the way in which the black bodies and particularly black female and black trans bodies, black homeless bodies, black children, are policed. It's not just by the police, it's by the every day human. Us. And when my patriarchal assumptions, I needed to check my policing, and my daughter, how she dresses.
- Mahlon: Right.
- Parker: I needed to contain that behavior and say, this is... I'm caught as a male to look at, oh okay, I need to make sure she doesn't dress a particular way. Why? Because men are out there who might harm her.
- Annahid: Mm-hmm (affirmative)
- Parker: But am I focusing on what I need to do to stop these men from harming her?
- Mahlon: Right.
- Annahid: So much of what happens, the harm that gets perpetuated is unconscious, right? It's people that think that they're doing their job and being progressive and not catching the ways in which, actually I treat people who kind of look like me a hell of a lot different than those people over there that are different somehow.
- Parker: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Annahid: I want to ask you, what do you do with the anger? What do you do with your anger and the grief? And you don't have to answer to that because that's a personal question, but I'm listening to you and I'm feeling my own emotions coming. How do you work with that? What keeps you going?
- Mahlon: I think I'll go back to the ecosystem situation. How does anyone deal with their anger, right? There are... And this conversation, I'm going to split it. There are ways that I'm talking directly to black and non-black POC specifically at this moment. **Deal with your anger how you need to deal with your anger, right? Because there is no appropriate, acceptable way to deal with it that is going to please everybody.** As said, I started off, and tried to educate, it's still not pleasing some. You go off, it's not pleasing some. You try to internalize, it's not pleasing some. There's just no way that your anger is going to be palatable to outside, so it has to be something that you choose to work on for yourself, by yourself, with disregard for however



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other people are going to advise... Specifically non POC and non-black people. If you're black, specifically, how they're going to advise you to deal with it.

Mahlon: And I say that because I've employed multiple different things, multiple. ***I've got a WhatsApp group where it's a closed group and it's called all black everything. And we just talk everything black, from the microaggressions to the things that make us laugh to the things that are from our heritage too and it's because if I were white, those things would be called Netflix.*** Those things would be called Yoga, as it's now been appropriated. Those things would be called, all of the things that I just have access to... My existing, but that I have to curate and create a space for myself, that I have... create this thing. I'm going to be very boundaried about who is let in and who is not let in because this has to be my sanctuary of space. And there was also something about dealing with the anger by walking away, not everyone buys your time to deal with it. And there are some bridges that I have... I myself have I've put a bomb on the bridge because I do not want you coming back over here after we've had this conversation, to regurgitate the

conversation again, because it's so traumatic to keep doing this. That boundary has to be that there is zero way for you to crossover again. There are others where I do have the conversation with people. And I feel like ultimately what I'm trying to get at is we need to get it out as black people. And I think if you're not black, what you can be doing is there is a wealth of information at this point, like Netflix. Okay, put it this way, our CBCs and our ABCs and our BBCs have had the monopoly on whose voices get spoken about and whose voices get to hold courts. And there is a democratization of things.

Mahlon: I mean, don't get me wrong. Instagram is still shadow banning people. Facebook is still doing the same or whatever else. But the ways in which that there was a spread of black voice that is out there right now, speaking about things, there is access to, we are showing you behind the curtain on so many different levels that you often haven't had the privilege to see this. And it's still not a privilege to be involved in it, but it's more a case of a privilege to just see it. And so there are ways that I think for my white colleagues, my white friends, the people that are on here. It is for you to kind of see, "Okay, well, where is this something that I am responsible for? What am I responsible for? And what is the thing that I'm starting to see as a pattern of things that I can start to change?"

Mahlon: ***Because there is a way in which, as Parker just said, I've left jobs too where the choice is do I go up in this organization, which I already do not check for? I don't want to be forever policing black kids in a black school as a black teacher and so the choice is I have to leave.*** There is a way in which I went against the CEO and another organization, because I was asked to be a black person in body because they were called out for not having any black panelists on stage. And I was asked to be a person who would note this, and mentioned this, and do all these other things that exonerate the organization at the expense of me. And so again, I had to leave there. So there's ways in which there are patterns at play here. If you are non-black and this includes POC, and non-black POC or BAME, check the pattern and check how we are dealing with our anger. Because we are doing everything to try and still exist in this ecosystem as black people and alongside others in this.



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- Parker: Right. Right. And it's always, and that's brilliantly said Mahlon, and it's always, at least for me, important to put my feet on the ground, physically on the earth each day, bare feet. I don't do it every day, but it really helps for me physically to actually be in the space. And as mama was saying, music, being around folks. Being in space where one can just be and celebrate, enjoy. And because for me being black has never been a problem. I remember a colleague of mine said, "Park, you ever wish that you were white." As if the problem, again, the assimilation framework with racism was my blackness. I'm like, "No, I wish that there was no white supremacy and the racism, but I'm good with the black thing. I'm okay. I know nothing needs to be fine tuned or what have you. This is something that bring me joy."
- Parker: And so I think it's always important that oftentimes people, when they say, "Oh, so and so's experiencing this because they're black." I'm like, "They aren't experiencing that because they're black. They're experiencing that because of racism, white supremacy." Or because sexism, racism, and all of the intersectional things that come at them. And if those things had gone away, they still be black. They just be black without being traumatized.
- Mahlon: Right.
- Parker: So I just, I think it's important for us to, at least for me, always remember that. And we live in a beautiful part of the world. And I'm always overjoyed about being able to go to the woods and go to the ocean. That for me is grounding peaceful.
- And so that's helpful along with just, and I know for a lot, some people particularly don't have to go to work now because of quote unquote COVID. That they're forced to work from home remotely. There are folk who are like, "I'm a lot less stressed. Because when I'm on a call and people are saying some nonsense, I can just click the mute button." Or I can go off screen and say, "Excuse me, I got to go away from this." And so for some folks, it's a great time for being able to stand back. **And as Mahlon was saying, being able to look at our patterns is so important. And for people not to be afraid to make mistakes. Just don't keep making those same damn mistakes on someone else's back all the time.** Because they will get pissed off and they will get tired and you'll also get tired.
- Parker: **And we also need to spend less time trying to manage our image and more time trying to manage the problem. The people that bring the problem are not the problem.** Focus on the problem. Because far too often people punish people for bringing forward a concern. Someone says "I'm doing something inappropriate." Like I just need to step into it and just breathe, as you were talking about, Annahid.
- Parker: Ground myself, difficult to hear, as my parents said, if you have a problem, you want acknowledge it, take responsibility for it, clean it up, and do what you need to do to make sure that shit doesn't happen again. And when we can do that, when we can be accountable, then we're on the way to being better humans. To doing less harm. To connecting with people in ways that worked for them because it's not about always the way that works for me. And as Mahlon was saying before, when his friend said, "Oh, I think you see the world the same way I do." Well that's nonsense. None of us see the world exactly the same as the other. So we need



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to look at these opportunities of difference as bridges for understanding, as opposed to problems to be solved.

Parker: Listening is one of the greatest tools we have. We listen with our ears but we also need to listen with our hearts.

Annahid: You that's spoken so powerfully and is, am I up?

Parker: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Annahid: So I want to close with saying thank you to everybody that's joined the session today. I wish we had time to actually have a bit more of a conversation, but as I say, we'll organize a part two.

I'm aware that there may have been moments in this call that that may not have been easy to hear. And that's part of this terrain. Change is never comfortable. So notice the moments that are uncomfortable for you and then target why that might be, whether it's something to work through more for yourself, whether it's something to learn more about, whether it's something to have a conversation with some someone around. But discomfort is a part of creating inclusive environments. And as we look at ourselves and think about how do I open the door for those that are are struggling to feel as comfortable in the organization that perhaps, in some ways, I take for granted.

Annahid: Mahlon, Parker. I know that you've spoken from your expertise, from your years in institutions and the Academy, but I also know you've spoken personally from your identities as black men and beyond that as well. And I don't take that for granted. And I just really want to say, thank you. And I want to give the last word over to each of you in closing for today.

Mahlon: So I'm going to leave with this and... I'm legitimately yeah, go back to the hopeful piece that I spoke about at the beginning. There is hope that in this conversation, the way in which it was set up, the actual, maybe there's beauty in the design that it didn't happen that we go to a breakout room just yet, but there's ways to like marinate on this conversation and think about you've had an hour and a half of three of us just speaking, candidly. Which, where does that happen often?

Mahlon: I going to say cheekily, but it's wasn't cheek, it was very direct. I put a challenge up on my Instagram page, which is basically, I guess, Black Out Tuesday one month on. And it's a countdown. And the countdown is basically wanting to know, after a month of being in on basically books, podcasts, videos, everything that you could ever want to know of how to do something, I'd love to know, in a month's time. What is that something that we've been able to do that has been able to bridge what we've been talking about today, specifically? The way in which systemic and institutional impacts of this thing, bridges with the interpersonal and the sort of the lower level things underneath the pyramid as Parker was sharing.

Mahlon: And so I suppose, if our reconvening coincides with that time, I just want to know that we have done something rather than just shared on, like a chain WhatsApp message to someone else, the books. And actually, what is the thing that has stuck with you? What is the one thing? Because this is, again, ecosystem, we need the sharks in it, as much as we need the plankton in it, everything, everyone needs to be doing something. So you don't have to over commit, but



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you just have to commit to something. So I would love to know in a month's time that we are doing something. That would be mine.

Annahid: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Thank you.

Parker: Sorry. I forgot. My technological ineptitude kicked in. I have three things I want to leave folks with. Well actually, just two major points. One is four parts.

Parker: **Listen. Amplify. Act. And collaborate.** Listen to the voices of the marginalized. Particularly black folks, indigenous folks, women, trans folk, men, male identified folks.

Parker: And pay attention, amplify those voices. Don't always interpret and then transmit, amplify the voices as they are.

Parker: Act. So take some action, figure out what you can do organizationally, interpersonally. When you hear that stuff that shouldn't be said, figure out a way to intervene. When someone says you said some stuff, figure out a way to be courageous and stand in that discomfort. Because unsettling as folks in [inaudible 01:30:35] has many, many meanings and we will be unsettled.

Parker: And then collaborate. So work in a collaborative way with folks. And again, that really means being fully present to folks, and listening, and embracing what the possibilities are. Because we can not go backwards because backwards, what was got us to where we are. We need to imagine and live into something different.

Parker: The thing that I would like to share with you is, because I love poetry, and there's a great poet right now that I've really been intrigued by, Jericho Brown. And then also, there's anyway, there's a variety of folks. But I want to share with folks a poem from Langston Hughes called I Too.

Parker: And it's - I too sing America. I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes, but I laugh and eat well and grow strong. Tomorrow I'll be at the table when company comes, nobody will dare say to me, "Eat in the kitchen. then. Besides they'll see how beautiful I am and be ashamed. I too am America."

Annahid: Wow.

Parker: Thank you.