

STUDY ON WHITE PEOPLE

The Reminiscences of

Joshua Rogers

INCITE

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Rebecca Keel conducted by Whitney Dow on December 17, 2017. This interview is part of the Study on White People.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Joshua Rogers

Location: Richmond, VA

Interviewer: Whitney Dow

Date: December 17, 2017

Q: Can you tell me your name, your age, where you're from and a little about yourself?

Rogers: [17:37:47] So, my name is Joshua Rogers. I am forty-three years old. I would say I'm originally, essentially from Virginia. I was born in South Dakota and moved to Virginia just before I was two, lived in Charlottesville [Virginia] for a couple of years. And then I think we all moved to Richmond [Virginia] when I was just around four. I lived in Richmond through high school, went to UVA [University of Virginia] in Charlottesville for college and stayed there for a couple of years after. And then to Burlington, Vermont for medical school and then back down the East Coast to Baltimore [Maryland] for residency and then back to Richmond in 2005, and have been here essentially since then, minus one year in California.

Q: So I'm assuming you're a doctor then?

Rogers: Yes. Yes, sorry. I talked about it with Sam [phonetic].

Q: No, that's fine. I'm hoping that you didn't go to med school and residency. And now—

Rogers: And now I'm an accountant.

Q: —and now you're a vegan baker.

Rogers: I've thought about it.

Q: You're like, that whole medical school, then eight years of school and I'm here. Can you tell me a little about growing up—what your family was like, the neighborhood you lived in, the community you lived in? Was it diverse? Was it mixed? Just a little about your childhood?

Rogers: [17:39:08] Yes, so I would say the community and neighborhood was pretty homogenously white. I think we had a couple of neighbors who were kind of East Indian descent. But most of our neighbors were white. And family, basically everyone I know, all of the family that I know of is white. I don't think we have really any other kind of races in the family, at least in my immediate family that I know of. I mean, my grandmother was, like, half-Colombian. But that's about it. And yes, I would say, so I grew up in a neighborhood just south of the river here, a neighborhood called Westover Hills [in Richmond, Virginia], which is actually where I live now. And I would say, you know, I guess what one might assume is kind of a traditional family. I had a brother, have a brother, who's a little bit older than I am.

[Interruption]

Q: Yes, go on. You have a brother?

Rogers: [17:40:27] Yes, so I'd say a pretty relatively traditional upbringing. My dad was a doctor also. My mom stayed at home with us until we were in high school. And then she went back to school. Yes, I mean, it was not a very exciting—nothing really stands out. I mean, it was perfectly fine. It was great, but nothing really earth-shattering. We didn't move ever. We've been in—my mom still lives in the same house I grew up in. My brother now lives a few blocks from me. So we all kind of ended back up kind of where we started.

Q: And when did you first become aware of your race?

Rogers: [17:41:27] I'm not really sure, honestly. I certainly remember, like, in a school I went to in Charlottesville, so it was preschool, kind of a Montessori [education] school. I remember there being kids of other races—Asian, black. So, I guess in that sense I was aware that there were different races. But I don't feel like I ever had some epiphany where I was like, oh, I'm white. We never really talked about race in our family. I mean, I guess a lot of times there was not really much occasion to. And I think part of that is because we never really were affected by much of anything regarding race, certainly not directly affected by anything because we were white, essentially, I think. We never had any kind of problems due to our race. So I guess I never really felt like I had a revelation that I'm white. I remember, like I said, being aware of other people, you know, of different races. But I guess I never really paid too much attention to my race as far as—just because, I think, largely because I never had any issues related to race, personally.

Q: And did that continue throughout your life?

Rogers: [17:43:08] I mean, I guess no. In a sense, I guess, maybe I guess I could say I had more of a revelation about race when I kind of was confronted maybe with racism. Obviously, when you're two and three, I mean, kids of that age don't really pay much attention to anything as to, I don't think, race or sex or really anything. I think they're just kind of, you know, kids. And I'm trying to think the first time I remember. And I'm not sure if I'll be able to remember. But I'm sure I was relatively young, and hearing, you know, either someone say a racial slur or something, and kind of then being aware like, oh, wow, that's kind of surprising. I remember being taken aback when I heard something like that. But I can't recall how old I would have been. I suspect pretty young, probably kindergarten or first grade.

You know, I went to private schools. And the schools that I went to were largely white. I think in my elementary school we had two kids that were black. And they came in around fourth grade, I think. But before that I think it was almost completely white. And then high school was a little more diverse but not much. It was a private school, and it was just pretty homogenous as well. But I certainly remember at that point knowing about at least racism and certainly racial identities and kind of having a sense of my race, I guess, at that point.

Q: And when you think about, like, you know, the hierarchy of your identity, your, you know, white, male, doctor, father, southerner, vegan, how do you sort of think of yourself when you think of the things that are important that make you, you?

Rogers: [17:45:31] When I think about it, I guess I think more about me as a person as opposed to, like, my race or my education. It makes me uncomfortable when people call me doctor outside of the hospital. I don't really even like it inside the hospital because I feel like that's—I mean, it's obviously what I do. But it's not like who I am, you know? So, I know, like, some friends of mine, if their kids call me Mr. Rogers, oh no, it's doctor, and it's like no, just it's fine. I don't want to be like—that's not who I am. That's just what I do. So, I feel like as far as my identity, I feel more of like husband, father, and brother and son would come before doctor or white or certainly southerner.

That really doesn't hold because both of my parents were from New England. So they didn't really have any sort of—you know, they weren't southern. So we didn't really have any of that kind of identity like some people who have lived here maybe for a few generations may have. So, I never really grew up with that feeling like, oh, I'm a southerner, until I went to Vermont and everyone's like, oh my God, you're from the Deep South. And I was like, well, no, I'm not. Alabama is Deep South. I'm like mid-Atlantic if anything. So yes, I mean, I guess my identity, I feel more of me as just, like, my person as opposed to necessarily my sex or race or certainly profession or where I'm from.

Q: So you really feel like an individual?

Rogers: [17:47:29] Yes. I mean, obviously I know people. And I feel like I guess people I know well have seen me in the same light. But when people find out what I do, I feel like they make certain assumptions. And I don't know. When we go on vacation I never tell anyone what I do

because I just don't want to answer questions. And part of that's just me as an introvert. But I usually just make up something and hope people don't ask again. So, that's very low on my list of how I identify myself.

Q: Interesting. How often do you think about your race? And can you put my question into your answer?

Rogers: [17:48:18] Yes. How often do I think about my race? I would say more recently a lot more. I would say up until the past few years, not much at all. And I included this, I think, in my statement or whatever. But part of it is just being involved with, or being friends with some people who are active on Facebook with kind of issues related to race who are very vocal and post a lot. So it's really kind of gotten me thinking a lot more about it. And I think part of the reason why I rarely thought about my race is because, again, just like growing up, it rarely had any negative effect on me, you know? I've, if anything, only benefited from being white my entire life. And so I've never had any negative experiences, at least that I can really think of, because of my race.

I mean, the only thing I can think of where I—and it wasn't even a negative experience. It was just when I moved to I lived in a largely black neighborhood. And so, I was certainly like—it was unusual for me to be where I was because I was really kind of in a downtown neighborhood that was, again, majority black and mainly kind of working class because I could afford a house there. And that was really the only place I could afford a house. But it was unusual for a white person, let alone a white doctor, to be living in this area. And no one ever was mean about it. Or

I never felt threatened or anything. It was just like, people were kind of like what are you doing here? Why are you living here? But it was fine. Again, it wasn't any negative. But it was kind of the only time where I felt like, you know, I'm in the minority, which was unusual.

Q: And now you say you've thought about it a lot more in the last few years, last couple of years. Can you describe a situation, whether it's reading Facebook or whether it's a situation where you're in out in the day, where you became acutely aware of your race?

Rogers: [17:50:44] I mean, again, probably most of it is kind of through, like, this Facebook kind of thing and kind of reading posts both by my friend and people that she, I guess, cross-posts or whatever. And usually they're black or black women, black men. And at first, reading these things, I was kind of shocked reading some of them and defensive feeling, almost, with some of the things that were being posted. And a lot of times I don't comment. Or if I do I'll privately comment to my friend as opposed—because I don't like getting in Facebook arguments with people, especially people I don't know, and especially about something sensitive where someone feels very strongly. I want to respect their opinion. But if I have questions, I don't want to kind of publicly put it out there for everyone to pile on. I'd rather have a little private one-on-one kind of conversation.

But part of what she was talking about is white supremacy and white fragility and all this stuff. And I was like, you know, these are really strong words. And I think you're going to maybe turn some people off that you're trying to kind of get to see the point. And she was like, that's kind of exactly my point, is like, you know, the fact that you're offended by this is kind of a sign of like

you're used to being in charge, used to calling the shots. And you're telling me how I should feel when this is how my life is affected by it, not yours. Your life isn't affected by, you know, racism, really. You're not being discriminated against. But when people say that they're hurt by X, Y, or Z, whether it's someone appropriating their culture, you don't need to be the one. You don't need to question that. You just need to kind of accept it and internalize it and kind of understand where they're coming from as opposed to interrogating and saying, why do you feel this way? Well, I don't think you should feel this way.

And it was hard to kind of, I think, get over that initially, kind of feeling like, wow, you know, because you're thinking, like, gosh, I do that. That's exactly what I feel. When someone tells me what you did offended me, whether it has to do with race or not, I kind of get on the defensive. And I think that's kind of a natural thing to do. And I think it's generally a good lesson to learn, is that if someone's coming out and telling you you've offended me or this action or these words offend me, it's not to get defensive but to try to say, okay, and try to step back and understand why that's offensive or why they're offended or why that's hurtful and, you know, take them at their word, which can be difficult, I think, for people.

So, anyway, long story, I guess, most of my conversations, most of my, I'd say, realizations on kind of my race and my attitudes toward race have really kind of come more to the forefront in the past couple of years. And things like the Black Lives Matter movement and more recently the NFL [National Football League] protestors, I feel I'm more acutely aware of those issues and more critical of people that I know and their responses to these kind of more recent developments, you know, with the NFL and the Black Lives Matter.

Q: What compelled you to get involved with this project, to fill out the survey, agree to come in for an interview?

Rogers: [17:54:52] I mean, I think, again, for me it's relatively new just kind of thinking about this. So I just thought it just seemed very kind of fortuitous that I ran into this person while spectating at a marathon, like, to ask me about this, because I was like, wow, I've been thinking about this recently. And this is really interesting that someone's doing a study. And I didn't really know exactly what the study involved or what was going to be asked or anything about it. But I thought this will be interesting just to kind of, again, broaden my perspective on something that I've been thinking a lot about recently.

Q: And how did you find the experience of taking the survey and talking to Sam the second time? We'll find out later how you feel about this. But the first part, was that interesting? Did it lead you down any paths? Was it helpful?

Rogers: [17:55:49] I mean, it was. The initial survey, yes. I mean, again, I feel like since I'd been thinking about it a lot I didn't have to spend a ton of time thinking about the questions because I feel like I've really—I mean, I certainly haven't explored every aspect of my race and racism and everything that's involved with it. But I feel like I spend enough time kind of contemplating, just to myself, kind of all these different issues that I felt relatively comfortable answering the questionnaire and felt pretty good about the answers that I was able to put down.

Q: Why do you think that this issue is important to you, important enough to fill out the survey, to think a lot about it, to come down and talk to us on a Sunday night?

Rogers: [17:56:45] I guess I feel like we're kind of at almost a watershed moment in the country, both with regards to race and sex and everything. I feel like it's just kind of like this perfect storm of everything. And I guess if nothing else just to help further the conversation that hopefully more people are having. I think there's—and I include myself in this category—but a lot of people, like me, who just never really gave it a second thought. I mean, they're living their lives. They're not affected by race. They're, you know, just kind of going about their daily business and really have no idea what it's like to be someone in a marginalized group, whether it's a woman, whether it's a minority, gay, transgender, whatever. And I think the more that people are able to kind of not just understand but empathize with someone with a different either view of the world or different background or different life experience, I think it just improves kind of everyone's lives.

And I think it's something that I feel is especially important now given our current political climate. There's just, I think, a lot of angst on both sides. And I think that the higher level of understanding you have, I mean, both for people who someone may consider a bigot, there's a reason that they're like the way they are. And it's because maybe they just feel like they haven't been heard. And that's their form of expression. That's their outlet. And whether just as someone in a minority who feels like they've never been heard and they're angry, you know, there's a lot of anger and anxiety, I think, on both sides. And there's a lot to be learned from interacting with people who are not like you.

Q: We talked about you being white. What is it that makes you white?

Rogers: [17:59:22] What makes me white? I mean, obviously my skin color. I don't know really how else to define it. I was reading something about this just the other day, about cultural appropriation. They're talking about white culture. And someone asked, like, what is white culture? And I was like, I don't know how I'd define white culture. And someone said country music. And I'm like, yes, I guess. There's not much in America that's original to America. We, I feel like, appropriated cultures from a lot of different places. But I don't know what someone would consider white culture other than, again, country music or Taylor Swift, just more of like the pop culture kind of things as opposed to—I feel like we don't have—I mean, other than things like Thanksgiving, that's maybe more of an American tradition as opposed to a “white” tradition. Obviously, it was dreamt up, I guess, by white people.

But I feel like we don't have the same sort of cultures that even, say, white people in Europe might have because they've lived in these cities for 600 years. And they have all these traditions that have been passed down. I guess I just don't feel there's that same kind of culture maybe in America. I mean, I feel like everything's so much newer. And it's such an amalgamation of cultures from all over. But I don't really know what white culture is.

Q: But isn't there an American culture? I mean, tell us about Americans.

Rogers: [18:01:16] Yes. No, I think there's definitely an American culture. But I don't know if I would just say that's a white culture. I think largely you could say it is, I mean, just because at this time most of Americans are white. But I guess maybe I'd feel it's more American culture. I don't know. I don't have a great answer.

Q: Well, what do you think some of maybe, like, the hallmarks of your family culture are?

Rogers: [18:02:00] Hallmarks of my family culture? I mean, we're a relatively close family. But we don't really have a tremendous number of traditions other than kind of the standard ones that I feel like everyone has, like the holidays. I was raised religious. I'm not religious at all now. So I don't really share that with my family, which is fine. It's just, like, again, not something that I feel like is certainly not part of me. But I don't feel like we really had any traditions that had been passed down from, like, my grandparents to me, necessarily, anything that was really, I would feel, any different than anyone else's grandparents might do.

Q: So, do you feel any connected to any sort of culture yourself, whether it's the medical culture or the community of Richmond? Because I kind of think that, you know, what is it that perhaps you and I share that allows us to feel some sort of a kinship that would be different if I were a black American sitting here talking to you? Do you feel that you would be talking to me differently or feel differently about the conversation?

Rogers: [18:03:36] I don't know if I would feel a lot different if you were black. And I'm not saying that just to try to make myself feel better. I just don't know you, obviously. And so I don't

know if we share anything in common other than the color of skin, which is fine. But it's not something I necessarily would bond with someone over. And I don't feel like I have any—so, I feel part of community, like, say, more so in my neighborhood and with my friends than I do so, say, with the medical community. I mean, I work with these people. But I don't socialize with them really after work much, if at all. I have kind of a separate friend and family group that I tend to spend time with when I do have free time.

Q: And how diverse is that friend and family group?

Rogers: [18:04:34] It's pretty homogenously white, yes.

Q: So, that group then must have some commonalities, right, that you share, whether it's like family, your neighborhood. I'm not trying to put words into your mouth. I'm just trying to—the whole basis of this project is sort of trying to understand how white identity is created. And it's hard to see it because so much of the time it's not in opposition to anything else, where if you're a black American, many times your culture is in opposition to something else. So, it becomes visible to you. But I would argue that if there's one thing there's another.

And I would also argue that many times we feel that we feel like we're having racial experiences when we're with people of other races. But when you're alone in your friend group that's all white, that's a racialized experience as well. But what is that experience? Because we never name it. We never grasp it. And yet, we are the dominant race. We're economically dominant.

We're politically dominant. We're socially dominant. And yet we don't name it. And you saying I don't think there's any white culture—

Rogers: [18:06:04] So, but I think part of that is because, like, essentially I would say white culture is American culture, essentially. Like you said, there's not a reason to define it because it's everywhere. Like you said, you talked about a group of my white friends and I together is a racial experience. But we don't talk about it because, again, we're not affected by it. We're not sitting at a restaurant and getting ignored by a waiter. Or we're not sitting being stared at by other people. We're allowed to be without any kind of, I don't want to say consequence. But going out, we don't have to think about, like, whether it's because we're men or white, we don't have to think about where we're parking. I don't have to worry about walking to my car on Broad Street [Richmond, Virginia] after this interview, whereas if I were a woman I'd be like, do I have my keys in my hand? Do I get ready to defend myself?

And that's part of, I think, you know, we don't have to think about it because it doesn't really affect us a lot. And so, yes, I mean, I guess there's got to be some sort of white culture. But, like you said, it's not in opposition to anything. So you're never really thinking about it actively. It's just kind of there, I would say, because we're not necessarily up against anything for doing what we're doing. And I don't know if that really answers the question or not. But I don't know how to describe white identity, necessarily, other than a lack of oppression, you know, of any sort, really, at least in this country.

Q: I don't know if I asked you this already because you're my eighth interview. So I'm repeating some questions. But are you happy you're white?

Rogers: [18:08:57] Yes. I mean, I think I'd be lying if I said I wasn't. And I can't remember who said this, I don't know if it was Chris Rock or somebody. But he was doing some standup thing. And he was like, you know—what did he say? Something about how he knows racism exists because he's like, here I am, super-rich, super-famous. And I can guarantee you not one person, not one white person in this audience would trade places with me. And I was like, God, that's shocking. And then I was like, you know, but it may be true. That very well may be true. So I feel like, yes, I'm really lucky in that sense. I got kind of, other than the hair, genetic lottery, I think, because being white and male in this country, at this time—shoot, forever, essentially—it has been to one's advantage. And so, I guess I do feel lucky because I haven't had to endure really much of anything other than, I think, you know, the benefits of that.

Q: Would you voluntarily give up your whiteness?

Rogers: [18:10:32] I guess it depends on what you mean by—when you say give up my whiteness—

Q: Let's say you're leaving here, and you could pick two doors. One you'd walk out and be the white man you are. One you walk out, there's a fifty-fifty chance that you would walk out as a black American. Would you choose one door over the other? Would you say it doesn't matter to me, I'll take my chances, it doesn't matter?

Rogers: [18:10:55] I don't think so. I don't think I would. No, I don't think I would. Yes, I don't think I would. I think, yes, I can't say that I would. I would choose to stay who I am. But you could also ask me would I change into another white person. I'd say no. I like who I am, because after I saw that Chris Rock thing I was like, yes, but would I want to be, like, Ben Affleck or Matt Damon? And it's like, yes, certain aspects of that would be really cool. But then I was like, I really like who I am. And I like my life. And I like my friends. And I love my wife. And I wouldn't have any of those things. Or I'd have friends. But it'd be different. And I'm kind of, I guess, a creature of habit. And I really don't think I'd want that and not be me. So, I wouldn't want to be anyone else. But, I mean, certainly if someone said you're either going to be white you or black you, I would choose white me just because it's easier.

Q: I know it's sort of like a corny question. But I ask it because people a lot of times say, I don't see color. And yes, it wouldn't matter to me. And then you say, well, would you give up all the privileges of whiteness? And that's a tough thing. You can talk about wanting things to be equal and not seeing color. But it's recognizing. I think people recognize that you would have to give up something significant to do that. What type of a doctor are you?

Rogers: [18:12:51] Emergency medicine.

Q: And can you tell me a little about the patients that you see in the hospital? I don't know if you're in a local hospital in Richmond or you're outside of Richmond. What's the makeup of

your patients? And does race fit in at all in your medical practice? How does it play out in your medical practice?

Rogers: [18:13:18] So, as far as medical practice, yes, I'm in the city, not downtown but in kind of one of the larger community hospitals. It's still in the city. And it's the busiest ER [emergency room] in the city and the second-busiest in the state. So it's a busy place. So our patient population is really pretty diverse. It's like the big heart hospital, so you get everybody. But since it is the heart hospital you'll get the high-powered executive who's having a heart attack or has heart problems will come to Chippenham [Hospital, Richmond, Virginia] just as the person down the street living in subsidized housing is going to come to Chippenham for the heart problem. So, we see a pretty diverse patient population. I would say the majority of our patients are probably in the lower socioeconomic class. I'd say kind of like working poor to middle-class. And that's largely A, where we're located, and B, the fact that people who have higher-paying jobs or corporate jobs tend to have better insurance and have access to primary care physicians. So they don't frequent the ERs quite as often.

As far as does race play a role, I wouldn't say it plays a huge role. Certainly, there's plenty of evidence in the literature, medical literature, about race and kind of how people are cared for. And there's very clearly disparities between white and black care. And that's not just based on where they're being treated. It's in the same hospital, same problems, getting different treatments. So, for me personally, I really try to be cognizant of that because I know I have subconscious biases. They exist. And I have to recognize that. And so I really make a concerted effort to try to address that in my head before making any kind of final decisions, like, just

thinking if this person weren't black or this person weren't Hispanic or whatever, would I be making the same decision? Or if this person had a primary care doctor or didn't have a primary care doctor, what would I be doing differently? And so, I really make a conscious effort to try to incorporate that. So I try to at least address the fact that I'm sure I do have some subconscious biases and to try to make sure that I'm not kind of making that problem worse.

Q: Can you give me an example or tell me a story about any time that you sort of applied that and it changed the trajectory of how you were caring for someone?

Rogers: [18:16:38] Yes. I mean, I think, so we see a fairly large Hispanic population. And we get a fair amount of young Hispanic women. We get a lot of young women in general who are complaining of abdominal pain and can be kind of off-the-walls. And it's like you're just trying to figure out what's going on. And it's difficult because it's hard to sometimes get people just to calm down and be able to talk to you. And I feel like I think at this point I'd seen, I think, probably three or four other young Hispanic females who came in really uncomfortable-appearing, kind of almost climbing the walls. And you get them settled down and can't find anything wrong. And they feel better after really not much of anything is done. And you're like, what's going on?

And so, by the time it was towards the end of my shift, it was just like another one came in. I'm like, what is going on? I'm sure there's nothing wrong with this girl. And it was one of those times where I was tired. It was the end of my shift. And I was like I just want to get out of here and be done. And I want to go in and just discharge her. But she was still complaining of pain,

which was not kind of how the day had gone. Everyone else had gotten better. And I was like, all right, I've got to stop and regroup and just kind of start over. And I speak some Spanish, but I hadn't used the language line with her. So I went and got the language line and just kind of sat down and just said we're starting over, and kind of got the whole story again. It turns out she had appendicitis and did fine. But it was kind of one of those things where I was like, I was ready just to send her home.

And it was kind of one of those things where I was like this is the fourth or fifth young Hispanic woman that's come in screaming her head off. And the last four have had zilch wrong. And this is just another case of that. And so, yes, I mean, I would say that's one that I distinctly remember. And so, I try to keep that in the back of my head, like you've got to stop and regroup, and what if this was your sister? What would you do then, or your mother or your father or your brother? And try to start over.

Q: Do we as white Americans living in 2017, because of the history—you talk about you're not being connected to any of that. Do we owe black people something? And can you put my question in?

Rogers: [18:19:44] Yes, I will. So, do we owe black people something because of our history? My gut says yes. I don't know how that's achieved or how you go about trying to—you're essentially trying to right a completely horrific and unforgivable wrong, you know? And I don't know how one goes about doing that, or how a society goes about doing that, let alone an

individual, other than trying to be an advocate for, say, people of color. What else? I don't know how.

Even just logistically, if someone says, okay, we're doing—let's say Congress passes a bill for reparations, not that that would ever happen. But say it does happen. Just logistically, how do you figure that out? Like, who gets what? Like, how much does a person who's an eighth black get who maybe passes for white? Do they get money or whatever? Do they get special whatever? Or what if someone moved here after slavery? Do they still get special treatment? I don't know. So, again, my gut says yes. I just don't know what that would look like. Yea, I don't know how else. I think there are ways as far as things like, you know, say, affirmative action. I think that's a step. And then, I'm trying to think. The question again, though, was do we owe?

Q: Yes. Do we owe black people something?

Rogers: [18:22:01] Yes. I mean, I think the answer is yes. I think the hard part is determining how that debt is paid. And I don't think there's a good way. And maybe someone who's black might argue that position. But I just don't know how you would go about addressing that in any sort of legislative or financial or whatever way other than saying we need to—because of school segregation, because of the fact that every relative of mine in the past, I can almost guarantee, owned a home, was always able to vote, all these things, whereas, you know, black people my age, their parents very likely didn't own a home. And the parents before them almost certainly didn't and couldn't vote.

And so, all of that has been kind of baked into the culture. And they're automatically almost starting off behind me just because of what my family brings to the table for me that their family wasn't able to bring because of institutions and laws in society that was kind of against, actively working against them and their prosperity. So, from education on I think you have this inequality that is very difficult to overcome and to kind of equalize, at least quickly.

Q: Is this conversation valuable, worth having? Is something like this worth doing? I talk to people and they're like, the more you talk about racism, the more you perpetuate it. Is this something that—and I'm not trying to ask you to—I'm not trying to, because we're doing this, to say it. Just sometimes I wonder the efficacy of what we're up to. And I'm wondering what, if any, value it really has.

Rogers: [18:24:38] I mean, I think by talking about it, I think it depends on your audience, honestly. I think if you have people who are—well, I guess I would say the conversation needs to be tailored to the audience. There was some story that was on CNN [Cable News Network] today. And it was something I read while it wasn't terribly busy at work. And it was this guy who's called the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] Whisperer. It was this black guy who's basically spent the last twenty years going around to these rallies and kind of engaging these Klansmen and befriending them. And this article was about, he met this guy in Charlottesville more recently. This was after the whole rally and that woman was killed. And this guy was back because he was at the case of, I guess, one of the guys who shot a gun or whatever.

And so, he was there talking with this Grand Wizard. And there are still people there protesting the fact that these people are even back in town because of this court case. And so he's saying, you know, these people are yelling at me, too, saying how can you as a black man even dare have a conversation with this guy? And his point was, unless you engage someone in a conversation you're not going to change their minds. Or you're not going to make them change as a person. And I think, clearly he's had some success, no doubt. But I think it goes to show that you really need to tailor that conversation to your audience.

If you have a bunch of KKK members and the Black Lives Matter people, you know, one giving a lecture to the other, I don't think you're going to get a lot of minds changed or even dialogue that's beneficial to anyone. But I think if it's done on a more personal level, like this guy does, I think you can affect change. But that's obviously, like, thirty people over his lifetime, which is not nothing. That's an impressive achievement. He's clearly made an impact on at least those people. And maybe they've gone on and shared those new beliefs with maybe their family. Who knows? But I think if you don't talk about it, it doesn't get better. And it's not going to get better. And I think there was kind of this hope that after [Barack] Obama was elected, like, oh, we're this post-racial society and blah-blah-blah.

And it's like, that's complete nonsense. And I think that gave a lot of people kind of this, like, oh, I feel so good about our country. We don't see color. We're past the race thing because we elected a black president. It's like, no, that's not really how it works. There's a lot more to racism than just having a black president and ending racism, or addressing racism, even. So, I think you have to talk about it. And it can be uncomfortable. And initially for me it was really

uncomfortable because I was like—again, I was kind of defensive, like I’m not racist. What are you talking about? And then, kind of the more I thought about it, I’m like, well, I probably am to some degree, whether conscious or not. And that was hard to accept. But if you don’t think about it or talk about it, it’s not going to change.

Q: Is there anything we didn’t talk about that you think is important to say in the context of a conversation like this?

Rogers: [18:28:46] No, I feel like I’ve tried to say as much, because I’ve been thinking about it a lot today. And I can’t think of much else that I’ve had on my mind that I haven’t talked about.

Q: Naomi [phonetic] keeps flashing me and wants to ask about if you’ve experienced people rejecting black organs as organ donors in the hospital. I know that’s sort of a thing that happens periodically. Is that something that you’ve seen in your hospital?

Rogers: [18:29:22] I’ve never seen that. Honestly, I didn’t even know that they disclosed the race of the person donating. Maybe that is a thing. I don’t know. I’m sure if they do, then yes, I’m sure it’s happened. I’ve never heard of it happening. Certainly, we don’t do a lot of transplants. But I’ve never heard of it happening. Some of my coworkers who are black have been told they want a white doctor. I know people have asked about blood products. And that’s totally, like, we have no idea. It’s like, who knows? It’s not recorded. And we get people with swastika tattoos and Confederate flags. And I’m sure it’s pretty uncomfortable for the black doctors who are there, having to take care of people like that.

Q: And what about the idea that blacks don't get care if they are organ donors so that—

Rogers: [18:30:44] Oh, so they can donate?

Q: Yes.

Rogers: [18:30:46] Oh, no. I mean, I can't imagine that happening, at least not in today's day. I can certainly understand the premise, given the history of medical tests and experiments done on black people in the past. There's every reason for that assumption to be out there. But I never once have thought they're letting this person die, or they're letting this person go, so they can harvest organs because he or she is black. I've never heard of that actually happening. And I would certainly hope to think that that is not something that occurs.

And I think, I mean, in today's at least medical community, it's pretty diverse, ranging from the doctors to the nurses to the techs. And most people have a very good idea as to what's going on. Even if you're a tech, you've got medical knowledge. And if something doesn't seem right, you know if something doesn't seem right. And so, I think if there was anything like that going on, it would be pretty obvious to a number of people who would probably, I would imagine, say something. But yes, I've never heard of anything like that actually happening.

Q: You've never killed a black person so that you could get their organs, is what you're saying.

Rogers: [18:32:30] Right. That's a rare conversation for me anyway, fortunately. But no, I've never heard of anything like that.

[END OF INTERVIEW]