

Interview Transcript: Michael Klindt and Irene Rasheed

This oral history interview expresses the personal views, memories, and opinions of the interviewee. The content of this interview is personal, experiential, and interpretive because, by its nature, oral history relies on the memories, perceptions and opinions of individuals. This interview should not be understood as statements of fact or opinion endorsed by Springfield History Museum and City of Springfield. Permission to publish, quote, or reproduce this interview or its transcript must be obtained from Springfield History Museum. No use (beyond limited quotation) should be made of the transcripts of these interviews without authorization. Copyright 2023 by Springfield History Museum, all rights reserved.

Michael [00:00:00]

My name is Michael Klindt and it's spelled K L I N D T. And when I was growing up, teachers would always be like Klindent... Klindent... Klindindent... So I started going by K just like, Michael K. and two because there was so many Michael's and in my school, you need to know which one. So between my last name being weird and having so many, Michael's people know me as Michael K.

Irene Rasheed [00:00:34]

Can you tell me your part in this project and also what you do for a living?

Michael [00:00:40]

Yeah, so I accepted the, the opportunity to be the host on this particular project, Springfield History Museum Illumination Project, and I took that on for a few reasons. Number one being is that we're trying to capture the story of the African-American history or roots in Springfield. I... When I was in eighth grade, this was in like 1993, I did a project called African-American History Project and myself and four other middle school students with the mentorship of Bob Bolden, Misa Kawai-Jo, Cal Coleman, Mr. White. We did what's called the African-American History Project, and we interviewed the four eldest living matriarchs, African-American matriarchs of Eugene. So Ms. Washington, Ms. Reynolds Ms. Mims. Ms. Johnson. And so when the opera... Like when this project came to my attention and they invited me to a meeting, I thought, man, I helped capture the legacy of those women who are no longer here. That was what, almost 30 years ago, and I just thought as a part of my own legacy, like I should probably be a part of helping capture this moment in time just to bring that full circle. And I'm also a teacher here at Springfield High School. This is my 16th year, so I also have roots in Springfield. And I thought being is that I teach digital arts, like I teach students how to use the camera and everything to help pass on, you know, continue the legacy of the work that I did, like grabbing a camera almost 30 years ago, like helped... Like give purpose and meaning and direction to my life. And so it's only natural that I that I pass that on. And a lot of students here that are struggling and maybe they're not into sports and into they... You know, don't feel connected with some of their teachers, especially people that being the only Black teacher in the building, other students who, who may look like me or have some cultural continuities identifications with me... Showing them the camera, giving them the camera or giving them a way to tell their story

and to understand the significance of their voice, whether it be in front of the camera or behind the camera is hugely important.

Irene Rasheed [00:03:40]

Can you tell me a little bit about your family and sort of your origin story here in Springfield?

Michael [00:03:47]

Yeah. So I actually was born in Germany and I was adopted in Germany. That's an interesting story in itself 'cause I'm biracial and my biological mother is white and my biological mother's husband is also white. So that kind of tells you the story of what happened and they were going to work things out. But as a part of working things out, like they weren't going keep me right? So, I got adopted. And when I was around two years old, I moved to Tacoma, Washington, where I was raised until my adoptive mom passed away. I was about 12 years old, and that's when I had to move to Eugene to stay with my adopted dad. And just from... I didn't grow up with him. They got divorced when I was pretty young and didn't really know him. And I was really impacted by having to leave all my friends from the neighborhood that I grew up with my whole life. And then moving to Eugene, where like I went to Cal Young Middle School. At the time, there were two other Black students there and coming from Tacoma, this is the early nineties. So it was like I had like the overall... Pinstripe overall jean shorts - with the one strapped down, and the Raider Starter jacket, and Nike Cortez(sp), and like I was rocking like what we rocked. And I got made fun of for it. And I was so confused like I got called the N word for the first time and it wasn't even by like people hostile. It was like one of the only people that was friendly toward me. Asked me if he could call me to N-word with the R at the end. So I was just so confused by the move and the trauma of my mom passing away and all that... That I ended up running away from home when I was 15. And I've been I've been out on my own ever since. And like I was the kid I was known to like... I lived in the back of a car for a long time. I bought it for like 200 bucks from the junkyard. I was 15, I didn't even have a license, but I pull up to the party... Party, whatever... Fall asleep in the back, go sneak into the YMCA shower, and then go to South Eugene High School. Like I was that kid, you know? But that the thing that kept me grounded was the creativity was the music was being able to perform, was recording, and stuff like that. Otherwise, a lot of people that I was surrounded with ended up going to prison or just making certain life, you know, thing... Decisions that to this day it's been harder for those people to find success. And somehow I was able to stay grounded enough, even though I was in one of the worst situations out of everybody I knew because like I said, I was homeless, and I had a lot of trauma, and mental stuff that I was dealing with, but somehow I was able to transmute that into to being here.

Irene Rasheed [00:07:10]

Yes. I was going to ask, how did you come from there to being the only Black teacher at Springfield High School?

Michael [00:07:18]

Right. So my, my Springfield origin story, I first encountered Springfield, and I think I think it was around 1993. I don't think it was my third concert, but it's the third concert I remember. My

first concert I ever did was in 92. It was at the Sheldon Community Center. The second one I did was at the Lane County Fair. The third one that I remember was in Springfield is it was... It was at this little club called Voltage, and it was like a club that they... All ages where they would have hip hop performances. And it was like right over off of Mohawk. I think where WinCo and all that area is. There was like a little spot that I went and I rapped at, and that was the first time I'd been to Springfield. Fast forward to something like 2005, 2006. You know, when they say, someday a computer is going to take to take our jobs. I was a radio board operator, so I put in all of the commercials at this jazz radio... Smooth jazz radio station, put all the songs in on CD, and then the commercials were run off 8-tracks and laser discs, and then they brought in the computer that was automated, and so they didn't need board opps anymore. So I moved. I was in Portland. I moved from Portland to Springfield because the person who I called my mother, 'cause she took me in for a while when I was a teenager. Now I was married with two small children, and we all moved in with her in a two-bedroom trailer park in 53rd and Main. And it was the four of us sleeping on the floor. We didn't even have a bed. And that was that was when I first became a Springfield resident and ended up moving back to Eugene and over about the course of two years, built a house. Like didn't just buy a house, built a house, which I liked to brag about that just because, you know... When you talk about perseverance and resilience and whatnot, going from literally nothing, no bed, sleeping on the floor in a trailer park to like building a home with a studio and stuff like that... I like to, I like to talk to my students about that story because to show them was possible. Like you can go from living in the back of a car, and being a high school dropout, and doing well for yourself, and then having everything taken away, and then build it back again. Like I like to... I like to tell students that story is as a model for, for what's possible. Especially since a lot of them are going through those same struggles, too. And so, I was doing well for myself and I ended up getting on the radio. I was a DJ on one of 104.7 K Duck. I did Friday Night Hype, Saturday Night Hot Mix, Sunday Slow Jams. I actually started Friday Night Hype and Freestyle Fridays where I was freestyling on the air every Friday night on the radio. Which is crazy because everybody told me I was like, I'm going to get my music played on K Duck. And everybody's like, "They don't play local music on K Duck. They don't play local music K Duck!" So I got up there and I was doing an interview because I was a producer for this big dance company and they were doing a big show and they were like, "Come to the interview!" So I went up there. He was like, "You do music", yep, "You got a CD?" Boom! Back pocket, Listen to it, "This is pretty good." Played a song that night on the radio. This is after years of people telling me, "No. They don't play local music."

Irene Rasheed [00:11:05]

Now, you know, if you say that you freestyle in the presence of other Black people that is going to need to be proven! So I insist, on a freestyle.

Michael [00:11:14]

A Freestyle?

Irene Rasheed [00:11:15]

Oh, for real.

Michael [00:11:16]

Right now.

Irene Rasheed [00:11:17]

You said you do it...

Michael [00:11:18]

Right now with no need to play...

Irene Rasheed [00:11:19]

You said you're about that life.

Michael [00:11:20]

With no need to pipe down like actually freestyle, no pencil to write down any words that I said, like off the top of the head. You want me to twist my words right now? Like I'm twistin' dread? You want me to bring the gifts like I'm Santa with a sled? You want to ask if I can go back to the past like Bill and Ted? Hop in Phone booth made me go back to the past, maybe to the future. How long will it last? I don't know. I feel like I'm maybe on the spot, but they say I'm like a sauna feeling kind of hot. But of course, I got the camera in my face and plus I got the stamina so I could leave no trace of where I've been or where I'm going to. There was no knowin', but when it come to the microphone, I'm so flowin'. I'm flowin' sort of like a river. I'm in Oregon where it's hecka pretty. Everybody was talking about that. But I'm doing a thing about the Springfield City. And when it comes down to the nitty gritty, there's no need to pity... Man that's all. That's all... So I did that. (laughing and hooting in the background)

Irene Rasheed [00:12:12]

Challenge accepted.

Michael [00:12:13]

Every Friday night

Speaker 3 [00:12:15]

It's your turn. (laughing)

Michael [00:12:16]

On K Duck. And, and I did it so consistently that they gave... They put me on. They said, we want you to be one of our, one of our people on air. So, fast forward... Springfield High School got a 21st century grant, and they wanted to fund an after-school program to teach students about writing songs and recording and making beats. So, because I was known on the radio, when they was looking for somebody, they were like, I wonder if he'll do it. And I had actually just resigned the radio like months before that, and started going to the U of O and I was just going to do school. And but then when they reached out, I was like, you know what? Getting paid to teach kids how to make beats? Yeah, I'll do that. I'll do it. So that was 16 years ago, I think. And that first year with the grant money, I got to buy all this equipment and stuff and I had a small

group of students that would come every day after school, and Jasmin Brown was one of those students my first year here at the after-school program. She used to come in after school and, and write songs and record. After a couple of years of doing that and then learn of my story about being a homeless teen, and being a dropout, and whatever, whatever... And seeing that kids who didn't really like coming to school would still come after school to hang out with me, and that would help get them to go to class because they couldn't come hang out with me if they were skipping all the time. So they were like, "Will you come do that during the day?" So I became a transition specialist working with freshmen that were at risk of maybe dropping out and just like going to kid's house, knocking on the door, like, come on, let's go to school. I can't wake up, I don't got alarm clock. Oh, we'll buy you an alarm clock. Like we just tried to make it happen. And after a couple of years of doing that, they said, we want you in the classroom. So Springfield School District actually paid for me to go to grad school to get my teaching license and my master's degree to the Pathways program.

Irene Rasheed [00:14:44]

Nice. What are some of the memories of being here on Springfield that really stick out to you?

Michael [00:14:57]

From what I can remember from that first show that stuck out because that's one of my loves is performing. Other memories that stand out in Springfield. I mean, a lot of that is, is here... Is here at school, you know. Like seeing somebody who doesn't know anything about music or whatever. And then like - discovering something, or writing a whole verse and then recording it - and hearing it back and then the look on their face. Like they can't believe that that's them, that they're that they're listening back to. Because they never thought they could do that. I, I remember we... One of the English teachers here at Springfield said, hey, we're doing a poetry unit, but I want to see if maybe you can help them turn their poetry into songs. And so we not only did that, but we entered them into, it was this speech and hearing contest where it was like, make a rap music video. So we took their poems, we turn them into songs, and then we some recorded music videos and we submitted them and we won like... I think first, second and third place at this contest, right? First place, the kids got iPads and stuff. And like at the Wildish Theater I got to host, be the host for this little event talent contest. And actually my sons, when they were little, like - my youngest son is now 18. But when he was like, must have been four, like he got out there and he was breakdancing and doing the robot and doing all of that, you know. So a lot of my fondest, most fondest memories in Springfield are around the arts. And specifically with young people encountering the arts and witnessing like the transformative power of the arts.

Irene Rasheed [00:16:56]

Can I ask you, in the 16 years that you've been here at Springfield High, how many Black teachers have you seen come and go?

Michael[00:17:10]

In the 16 years that I've been here, I don't know of any other Black classroom teachers. To my memory, the 16 years I've been here, there have only been four Black employees at a time. So

when I was a transition specialist, there were no other... There were no Black teachers. And it was myself and Jean Chism. We were both transition specialists. So the two Black staff that worked here were assigned to the at risk kids. The third person who worked here, Darryl, was a hall monitor. So making sure nobody's fighting and doing whatever in the hall. And the fourth one was Harry, the janitor. And the running joke was the superintendent of the school district at the time would always call me Jean and call him Michael. So there there were only four Black people working here, and our names were interchangeable at the time. And yeah, since then, you know, when Chism left and they, they got a new transitional specialist. Dezerick(sp) was a Black staff person, and they were a transition specialist as well. So yeah, So it seems like when they move... Some Black people move out, new Black people move in. Kind of in the same positions, hall monitor stuff, like transition specialist stuff, working with at risk kids stuff, but not in the classroom.

Irene Rasheed [00:19:02]

What do you think, if any, your impact being here makes for not just the Black students but the student body in general? Considering they're not encountering Black teachers in the classroom.

Michael [00:19:18]

I'd like to think that it has a, a huge impact. One of the things that I think makes it have such a huge impact is that I show up as myself. I don't like try to put on like a, this is the way teachers act. So I'm going to act like a teacher, right? Now, what I'm not saying is because I know some people are going to hear that and think, that means you're, you're not professional. You're not... No, that's not what I'm saying. That just means that if I'm going to... My sense of humor, some of my slang, some of my mannerisms are going to be culturally evident that they're different than any other person in the school. And yet I try to make sure to display and model that like I'm not just good with technology, right? It's not just that I know how to work a camera is or music or programs, but like you want to talk history right? And social studies in psychology. Like we're going to have some conversations and you're going to see a Black man in the front of the class that is well educated and knowledgeable on, on all fronts. You know, I graduated I was a high school dropout. I graduated from the U of O top 10% of my class, like, you're going to be able to see that, you know, a Black man in the classroom is, you know, is capable of all the things that maybe some of their families would have them to believe is it's not... Is not capable of. So not only does that model for two other Black students like, oh no, we, we got this. Come on, step up let's, like don't dont hide. Like come on step... Be your full self and everybody else just gets to witness that too and you know take inspiration. I want, I want everybody, regardless of race, to be like, I had this one teacher when I was in high school that inspired me to - fill in the blank.

Irene Rasheed [00:21:30]

Can I ask, what are the two biggest opportunities you have found being in Springfield and the two biggest challenges that you have found being in Springfield?

Michael [00:21:47]

I'll start with the challenges, and man... Sometimes like talking... That's been one thing that's been difficult with this whole project, is that we're doing the Illumination Project and we're highlighting all these wonderful African-American folks with different perspectives and different experiences. But our commonality is that we're of, of African descent and racism and race comes up strong in every conversation. And you almost think like, here we go again, another Black person talking about being Black and racism and stuff like that. And so it almost feels like cliché in a way. And yet, as much as I don't want to talk about it, there are just some things that I continue to be baffled by. I mean, to this day, like I've had multiple staff say the N-word in front of me. I had, luckily this person retired, but when Chism was here. So like I said, there was only a few of us Black staff here. And it was after our staff meeting and we were in the hall talking and this teacher walked right through us and then got about 20 feet away, turn around and go, you two at the same place at the same time. You must be plotting to overthrow the school. And then chuckled and kept walking. And I'm just, you know, I was like, do you know him? Like, do you have like an inside? And no... Like, we were trying to process what had just happened. And just things like being in the locker bay, doing locker check and like somebody is like, hey, how's BSU going? And it's like, that's... That's a fair question. I'm the BSU advisor, but like, do you really not know how to talk to me about anything else except, but Black related stuff, you know, like you're constantly just reminded that you're the other, even if it's not hostile or if it's not hate based or what it is just a constant reminder. Like, I'll forget that I'm the other. Sometimes I'm just doing my thing and it's like I don't get to forget for too long as somebody in some way being negative or not is going to remind me. And I think that that's one of the biggest challenges. I think, though, the opportunity is just how much autonomy that I feel like I have. Like I feel like there are no major obstacles. And when I want to get something done, when I want to achieve something, when I want to have something, I don't really notice many people or anybody really saying no or saying, You can't do that. And I feel like even the school, like they let me pretty much do my thing and they let me be the expert in my domain and do my thing. And so even with the students, it's like, man, you got access to all this equipment, you got access to all this technology, you got access to all this information. Like and I have a decent number of students who already have built a future off of it, built a career off of it. But I just feel like it's the tip of the iceberg. Like I feel like a significant amount of students who are willing to, to focus and take the opportunity for what it is can build a thriving future off of what's being offered here.

Irene Rasheed [00:25:23]

So you've kind of touched on this a little bit, but do you think being Black has in any way kind of shaped the way you navigate through living here in Springfield? And I also want to preface that response with having you consider, do you think the mixed race experience has presented you with different challenges or advantages as you navigate around Springfield?

Michael [00:26:00]

So I've definitely worked in Springfield more than I've lived in Springfield. I've only lived in Springfield for a few years and that was before I was a teacher. And I found when I lived in Springfield I was pretty much just it was like at the house or at Safeway, like I was not out and about engaging at Springfield at all. Which I also think is informative too, because I just didn't

feel like there were really opportunities for me to go engage with... Or if there was a community here, I wasn't aware of. It was just, I felt kind of like isolated out doing my thing. As a teacher, as someone who works in Springfield. It definitely impacts my experience and... You know, they talk about retaining Black teachers and how difficult that is. And I know I know why that is. I have to convince myself to go back the next year every, every year. And that's partly because being a teacher is difficult. Right. And but I just I do feel like being a Black teacher has its own set of challenges that do make it hard to stay. I do... I do like the fact that Springfield High School in particular has a bit more diversity than there is in the area, maybe not with the teaching staff, but with the student population. And so I think that, that helps. But in general, yeah, it's a bit like I said I would sometimes when I'm doing my thing, I forget that I'm that I'm Black and somebody is going to remind me. So yeah, I think that, that, that shapes your experience. Now as far as being as far as being mixed, I think that's that's a little bit more complex and nuanced. It's one of those things where you always, you feel like you're you're in the middle or like I never feel like white folks are like, oh well you're only part Black, so we're just going to treat you part Black. Like, no, no, no (laughs). You know, white folks don't tend to treat you as part Black out here. You know, Black folk, Black folks, depending on, depending on who it is and what the situation it is or whatever, might remind you that, you know, that you're mixed, too. So you're like, okay, cool. Like in the middle of everybody... You know, trying to get in where I fit in and, you know? It's, it's... That's that's its own, its own set of psychological labyrinth to work through.

Irene Rasheed [00:29:24]

So when it comes to the Black community here in Springfield, we talked about you couldn't find the spaces. What would you like to see change or develop in Springfield when it comes to the Black community itself?

Michael [00:29:46]

Yeah. I mean, I haven't really in Springfield, I haven't really noticed too many opportunities to build and have community. Even the Illumination Project. A lot of people had said when they were in the room that they hadn't been in a room with that many Black people in Springfield before. And it seems like there were a lot of people that that were thankful that that space was being created to be able to to do this. So that does show me that there is a desire for that.

Irene Rasheed [00:30:29]

How many Black people were in the room? People said they hadn't been around that many Black people in spaces in Springfield, but about how many people were in that room?

Michael [00:30:39]

I'd say the meeting with the biggest attendance probably had, I don't know, 12 to 15 Black folks.

Irene Rasheed [00:30:49]

So it was a big deal for them to be around 12 to 15, 12 to 14 other Black people.

Michael [00:30:56]

Yes, absolutely. Which is a common theme, because when we'll have a BSU meeting and you have 10 to 12 students in the room, they've never been in the room with that many Black people either. And a lot of them, when I ask, what brings you to BSU? Like, What do you want to accomplish? What do you want to see happen? A lot of them are just like, I just like being in the room, just being able to see other people that look like me and we can vent a little bit and we can just let our guard down and just be ourselves. And it seemed like that's kind of like what the adults are too. Like, Wow, I'm in a room where people want to hear our stories and let us have kind of a voice in what we think should happen here and there, and we get to just fully be ourselves. It's, it's kind of crazy that that that's the situation that, that it's so, so new and so - I guess what I'd like to see is that not being such a rarity, and I'm super thankful for the Springfield History Museum for providing that space and providing that opportunity. But I also feel like we should be creating those opportunities within our community as well. Like we shouldn't be waiting for other folks to create those opportunity to come together and build. And, you know, one of the meetings that we had was at Bryan's Studio, right? OG Studios, and I didn't even know that studio was there. And I think a lot of other people didn't as well. And it just really got me thinking like, man, I'm not aware of who the Black business owners are in Springfield. And I feel like I want to know... And that's just something that needs to happen so that we're not in the situation where we can (sic) be supporting each other's businesses and be welcomed to come build and each other's spaces. And, you know, like I would love to have more people in the community come and talk to my students and even be on this project, come in and tell their story on camera. And there's a lot of building that I think needs to happen and that we can't always wait for somebody else to create those opportunities. We need to be more active in creating those opportunities.

Irene Rasheed [00:33:38]

So speaking of the Illumination Project. How has it been for you as an interviewer now, the interviewee, hearing all of these stories of people who are from Springfield, from the community. What the impact has that had (on you)?

Michael [00:33:57]

The impact that it's had on me is so there are several things that stand out. Number one, I'm a bit surprised by how difficult it was to find people to interview, and particularly when we were trying to find an elderly Black woman with roots in Springfield. We almost ended up just interviewing some Black elderly women from Eugene. But the fact that it was so hard to find somebody I feel like was illuminating in itself. And it really told me, you cannot have somebody from Eugene tell the story as if Eugene and Springfield were the same thing. Because if they were the same thing, it would be just as easy to find one in Springfield as Eugene. So you can't really make that substitution. And it made it so that when we were able to talk to Lois Reynolds, I was I was really grateful because it's like, yeah, like the perception is true. There weren't really many of us out here. And those who were out here, you had to be strong, like you had to sounds like have a little bit of thick skin in order to just sustain and not, you know... The people who I interviewed were very gracious. Right? They were saying, there wasn't that much. And, you know, it was overall, it was very pleasant. And yes, people were welcoming, but then they

kind of would tell like a little story, like, yeah, and there were a couple of situations that where they so happened to... And then explain something that most people wouldn't be able to tolerate or, you know, wouldn't would run for the hills just in one of those encounters. And they had many of these encounters. So it really it really showed me why.... It's... There are as many people out here. And just common themes like encounters with law enforcement is a pretty common theme. And I know that that's a difficult one for people to talk about, and to think about, and to wrestle with. But when you have all of these people with the same sort of stories, that it's not like they're all in a room together, like they don't know each other is talking about it. I'm hearing all of these different stories. And then, you know, it makes you think like, there's there must be something... There must be something to that. And one of the common themes from the elders to the young people, or like may have just be be you like, speak up. Like, don't let people do that to you. Like, speak up. And ultimately, at the end of the day, it's really all about unity. It's about building community work for us and unifying and resolving our, our differences. And it's about the, the, the greater unity between... Between everybody and I find that I find that inspirational.

Irene Rasheed [00:37:29]

Alright, my last question when it comes to the students, you're a teacher and you've encountered generations of Black children and children in the community, the wider community here, but specifically at the Black children. If there would be one thing that you could change about Springfield that you think would make their lives better, make their experience better, what would that be?

Michael [00:38:04]

There just has to be one?

Irene Rasheed [00:38:07]

You could, if you could think of more than one, but...

Michael [00:38:12]

The first one is there needs to be more Black teachers. That just need to be. And that's hard to say if it's more so the school or the educational system, or that Black... More Black people aren't interested in teaching or they just don't encounter the opportunity or a little bit of all of that. And so in all of those different domains, somehow we need to, you know, get more. I know a lot of the students that I work with and encounter aren't interested in teaching (laughs). They look at what we're doing, and are like "man I don't how you do it! That's not..." So that's something that I think needs to be resolved, but that's a bigger issue. I think, I think one of the biggest things for, for Black students and really this is this is for, for all students, I guess in a way, too... But it's a lot of students when I ask, like, what is it? What is it you want to do? Like, what's the vision you have yourself? What's the future that you see for yourself? And even junior? Senior, they're not sure. They don't really, they don't really have a vision for themselves. They haven't identified their passion. Or a lot of times if you ask what are your strengths and weaknesses like... They don't always know how to articulate their strengths. So I, I think that in particular, for Black folks, we can we can, we can focus there. There needs to be a lot more

work and time for them to just develop their, their vision. To develop their values and who they want to be. Self-knowledge. Otherwise, they're not going to see the purpose for math or for writing or for learning the periodic table, because they don't see themselves in it. That's the same thing that happened with me. I didn't learn algebra because I knew I didn't need it. It didn't have nothin' to do with me until I went to college to study recording technology. And they said in order to understand acoustics and how to measure the frequencies that are bouncing off the wall that you need to treat so that you can get a good mix. You calculate that using what? Algebra. Having known that, I would have changed my focus. So, I would like to see more of that sort of work with our Black students, which is like, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, creating a vision for themselves and really understanding having self-knowledge. So that all of the other subjects can actually resonate and connect, connect with them. Because what ends up happening otherwise, is they have a hard time finding their place and finding their way here, and feeling connected, connected here, and that's when all of the stories that you hear, like not getting along with teachers or teachers targeting them. And, you know, all those sort of things. And I'm not saying that that would solve issue even of, even a lot of our students feeling targeted by teachers. Like when they speak up in class or if they're a little bit loud, they get sent out the room, but maybe somebody else... They get noticed more. Right? And I don't even think it has to be intentional. Like I said, I get noticed more for being a Black teacher, whether good or it's just you notice more. And so I think that they'll be impacted by that more. But when you are all in on, you have a vision and you have something that's driving you forward. Like all of that just becomes chatter because then it's like, hey, I'm not I'm not letting you get in the way of my trajectory. I know where I'm going and either help me get there or, like bounce. Like if you're a teacher, that's not going to help me get to my, my trajectory, my goal, I need another classroom, I'm going to go see Mr. K. He's going to walk me down to the counselors office, and we're going to get me into a different classroom. Right. That starts with knowing the trajectory that is being hindered by all of the other challenges that come with being a Black student and a very white area.

Irene Rasheed [00:43:03]

Thank you. Meanwhile, Side note... I think culture is the thing noticed, like working with the kids. They... The Black American children, because obviously Black just is not monolithic, don't know anything about Black culture. Even to hear that they haven't been around ten or 12 other Black people. It's like, don't you have Black families? So the families aren't doing it. They must be very superficial or immediate families because they're not even getting and they're a life experience opportunity with a large gathering. But having kids tell me they don't even know what greens are... Normally of opinion about our food. Like I don't like that or... But just to not even know, to not even have a clue, but to be a whole Black child and American Black child, you know, like, you know... Who's families are, you know, descendants of enslaved people from this country? I just am like, how is that possible that you don't know anything about your culture?

Michael [00:44:07]

And I'm glad you brought that up because I didn't articulate. That's, that's partially what I meant when I said self-knowledge. And I was saying, knowing your future, your vision, your trajectory and self-knowledge. I think part of a significant part of that self-knowledge is you

can't know who you are if you don't know where you come from. And the fact that so many of the children, especially because in the history books, they don't see themselves represented, their history is not there. So they don't know that history. How are you going to have self-knowledge without knowing that? Right? And then not just from the history books, too, but that experiential knowledge, Right. That experiential knowledge. Once you experience roots... I mean, think about... Think about just... You know, I'm a hip hop head. You know, I'm a hip hop head. I'm 30 years I've been a hip hop artist. And the person who named hip hop was Afrika Bambaataa, who was a gang member and gang leader of notorious Gang leader in New York, and changed his name to Afrika Bambaataa and created Zulu Nation after he a trip to Africa. He had an encounter with his roots that not only change the trajectory of himself, but of an entire culture that I identify myself with. Right? And so, yeah, I think with self-knowledge, a big part of that is roots. It's culture for sure.

Irene Rasheed [00:45:54]

I'm saying we do see ourselves in the history books, but it's only slavery. Martin Luther King... (laughs)

Michael [00:45:59]

Rosa Parks...

Irene Rasheed [00:50:00]

Thomas Jefferson, Rosa Parks... Which... That's a whole other conversation. I can't stand, that I can't stand. I think it makes our children not see the value in because the Blackness they're taught is the most depressing, downtrodden Blackness ever.

Michael [00:46:18]

Absolutely. And I'm glad there is at least some strong educators that I've encountered who are who are changing that narrative. And in all the programs and things that I've been a part of that teach Black youth, when they encounter that history that they never got like, they're they're moved by it. They feel empowered by learning it. They feel robbed that they didn't get to to learn it. But also they feel extremely grateful and empowered by learning it. And they teach it too. They they spread that knowledge. So, I know that there's an opportunity there.

00:47:02:06 - 00:47:07:20

Irene Rasheed

Yeah. So I hate that our Black man said the only thing great about being Black is Egypt.

Michael [00:47:07]

Mmmhmm...

Irene Rasheed [00:47:08]

That's the best thing that's ever happened. That is important. Anyway, I think that your interview was amazing!

Michael [00:47:13]

Me. All right. And with that illumination Project, Springfield History Museum, I'm the host, but we decided as a as a team that I might be able to add to the conversation. So, I hope that I've done that and signing off till next time.