Narrator: Brian Carter | Project: AAAM Oral History

Interviewer: Dr. Robby Luckett | Date: August 27, 2021

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[00:00:06.00] Q: My name is Robby Luckett, I am director of the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University and professor of history. Today is August 27, 2021, it's approximately 11:15 a.m. central time. I'm here with Brian Carter. Brian, for the purposes of the record, can you state and spell your name for me?

Carter: Sure, Brian J. Carter. That's B-R-I-A-N, middle initial J, last name C-A-R-T-E-R.

Q: Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Carter: Yes.

Q: Thanks. Let's begin with some background info. Tell us a little bit about where you're from, how you grew up, what your family background was like, your education, those kinds of things.

Carter: Sure. I'm from a fairly small town in central Washington called Yakima, which is known as the "Palm Springs of Washington," so that's what it's called, but it really is a small agricultural town and like I always tell people, I'm really glad to be from there. It was very conservative, very much ruled by the planting class there, but one thing that it did teach me are some of the deficits that exist within the cultural sector. I think that spurred kind of where I went in my career. So growing up there, going to museums on class field trips, going to the theater, it's rarely that I

would see folks who look like me on the walls, or under the vitrines, or on the stages, and I was raised by a father who always told me it's not really a problem unless you have a solution. So growing up, the question was how do you correct for this deficit? Where specifically was African American history...and my mom's Spanish, right? So they're going to have no Black history in these places where I grew up, and there's rarely any kind of Latinx history that they're going to be telling and they sure as hell weren't around any kind of critical mixed race theory to merge those two and try and make sense of it. So I feel like I always grew up with this kind of cultural deficit, but I also had a father who'd take me to the library and he said "let's go look through the whole card catalog and if you have a question, this place, this institution, will have an answer for you," and so I always felt, I guess, empowered. So anyway, that's where I'm from, from Yakima and ended up going to school and studying history. I had a short stint in law school, ended up in museum studies at the University of Washington, and out of the University of Washington, I was involved with a project, the Northwest African American Museum, first African American history museum in the Pacific Northwest. There wasn't anything else for a thousand miles around us. I was very fortunate to help start that museum in...2008 is when we opened, and for me it was... yeah, how about I end there. That's the general background, how's that?

Q: That's good. Back up for a second, and ask you about a little bit more about your museum studies experience. I'm using these oral histories...of course we're keeping AAAM, Association of African American Museum's collection at the Margaret Walker Center, but I'm also using them in my intro to museums class, which is a virtual class this semester. So I'd be interested for you to describe your museum studies experience for my students who are going to be listening to these this semester.

Carter: Sure. I think I was unique in choosing that master's program at the UW and also the way in which I went through it, and that's for two reasons. The first one is I went in because I wanted

to start an African American history museum in Seattle, that was my purpose. I stood up on the first day and people said “why are you here?” Well, I love museums. I grew up, I want to intern. I was like, I want to correct a problem and that is that this does not exist for me or my children, and that's something that we need to fix. So I went in with a real desire to get the connections more than anything, the relationships is what i was looking to build, because I knew in trying to build something that had never been there before, I was going to not only need to know how to do it, but those people who had been through it before and I would need their help in kind of negotiation, that creation process. So that was somewhat unique for me, so I had a real purpose. Like, it wasn't abstract, it wasn't theoretical; I was really asking of the program, “what do you have for me?” I've got this goal, I want to do this thing, I will do this thing, what do you have for me? And I think that's a very different way to approach it, and I think that that played out in the way that I went through the program. Because this is the second reason I feel like I was somewhat unique and going through that, is that anytime I had to write a paper or there was some kind of research, I would always think about the money, right? Like, I'm paying money to go through this program...and I didn't think this way as an undergraduate. I thought oh what a wonderful thing that this institution chose me and I'm so lucky...and at the University of Washington, it was always a test, and the way I defined success going through that program, was could I find some way to take this assignment, this moment, this learning experience, whatever it was, and make it useful to the museum that I was trying to start. And so as I went through, every paper was about the Northwest African American Museum, every collections related topic, every curatorial related topic, every administrative related topic, was related to this museum, and actually would be used. I'm going through...I think this is first year...there's a collections management, and I use that opportunity to write a collections management policy that’s still being used at NAAM. As we're going through creating this long, god it must have been like a semester-long budgeting exercise...best thing I've ever done. Ever. Especially for the job that I have now, but it was a fictional budget for the Northwest African American

Museum, so I felt like I was flipping the thing on its head. I was like “I'm going to use you, institution,” right? And the money that I'm paying and the talent within the instructor staff to create the necessary kind of foundational documents, processes, and I think knowledge base for that museum, so it was different, I was also working full-time as I went through the program, which is somewhat unique, but that's...I don't come from a rich family, so for me that was kind of necessary economically. But also, it was a bit of distance between me and the other students. I just felt kind of like a mercenary I guess. I was like “what do you have for me? Anything you give me, I'm going to take and give back to this museum, and where it is in its evolution right now, and thank you.” So it was just different. I feel like as an undergrad, I was like, sitting underneath trees, reading books, I wanted to chop it up with everybody in the hallway, and when i went through the master's program, it was like “I know what I want to do and I want every dime to count towards what my goal is for this particular community.”

[00:07:12.00] Q: So you did your undergraduate in history. Did you know coming out that you wanted to go into this museum studies program, or did you do something else for a while and what led you to the museum field?

Carter: Yeah, this is a crazy story. Yes, I knew I wanted to go into museums. There was a small African American cultural institution in Tacoma, which is right outside of Seattle. When I graduated, this was 2001, I was like “oh I can go to these places, they're going to want me.” So I go through this interview process of this really small non-profit and I'm telling them all the things that I can do, here are my research skills, here are my writing skills, here are my talents, here are the internships that i've had, and I remember one of the questions in the interview was “well, how would you feel about cleaning the toilet?” And I was like well, I've had jobs, you're not telling me anything new, like I'll clean a toilet as long as I have opportunities to do other things, and we got around to the negotiation and it was something like 15 hours a week at like $12 an

hour, and I remember thinking my student loans are a thousand dollars a month, how am I...so anyway, I didn't think that path was going to work with a B.A. So that's really the story, is that I can't even sustain any kind of life. I can't build anything, and so I thought well, what's another way that I can enter the museum field? And that's where I thought well, I'm going to go to law school, right? Like everybody who ends up with a history degree at some point, you're having a conversation about is it time to go get a J.D., and how can I use that? And my thought was, okay, if I go to law school and I make my focus arts and antiquities law, at a certain point I'll have enough skills and a museum will hire me. It was just this convoluted route, plus I was like the Huxtables, and so I thought, well Claire Huxtable, maybe go that route like a lot of us, right? You grow up and those are your models from what you think...I literally think, to me, it was that simple. It's like, well, she could do it, I could do it. So I end up in law school as a kind of a roundabout way to get into the museum field, and I end up at the University of San Diego and I hate it. It's the worst experience that I have ever been through, because I was so far away from what I actually love, which are the primary documents. Which is exactly what you're doing, it’s talking to the people, it's gathering those narratives, processing, making meaning out of them, and I was so far away from that in law school. After a long conversation with my father, I decided to drop out and I thought “I'm not happy, this isn't what I want to do,” and I thought “how can I enter the museum profession through the front door?” And in talking with a lot of folks there are these museology programs. So I'm looking at, I think NYU, or maybe Columbia has one, the George Washington one...you know, they're just these kind of well-known ones that everybody talks about; and being from Washington, the UW had a long, established program that was really like, it was anthro heavy...it continues to be that way based on the museum that its affiliated with, the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. But in talking with some friends at the University of Washington, I thought “alright, I want to start this museum. The legal field is just not for me and it's not the right entree point, but what if I go through the front door through this museum studies program?” So some of those kind of formative experiences at law

school really told me to be focused and if you're going to spend money, make sure it's going to what you want. So I think that really, at least for me, it pushed me into like a hyper focused approach to the UW and that museology program.

Q: So it sounds like you had a vision for what you wanted to do kind of from the outset of getting into that University of Washington museum studies program and that the Northwest African American Museum was immediately on your mind. Can you talk about your kind of transition from graduate school into actually making the Northwest African American Museum happen and what your work was like there?

[00:11:10.00] Carter: Sure. So my entrance essay for the University of Washington, I think it started out with something like “I’m going to build an African American history museum in Seattle.” That was it, and it was telling well here's what i'm bringing to the table, but three-fourths of it was “here's what I'm looking to extract from this program.” So I knew what I wanted to do and I knew how I wanted to use that program. So I’m bouncing through this program and I’m like “I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this, I’m going to do this for the benefit of the community.” But it was very much an I thing, and I think it was midway through my first year, I had one of my instructors send me an email and he said the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle was starting a museum project, or they were embarking on a museum project, to build an African American history museum, and I had never heard of this project. I didn't know what was going on, and what I was able to do is reach out to some of the folks that were involved, specifically one of my mentors whose name is Barbara Earl Thomas, a really, really well-known artist, and I said...I remember the email, I think I probably still have it...and I said “Look, I just want to talk with you about what this project is. I think that our visions, and it sounds like maybe our values, are aligned.” So I sit down with Barbara one day, midway through my first year in the museology program, and I say “Tell me what it is and what's going on.” So she explains the

project and I say “Look, I want to be part of this,” I said “and here are the good things that I have,” I said “right now, I can work for free.” This program demands I have an internship, and at that point nobody was talking about paid internships and so I said “I can work for free, I have this particular skill set, and I believe in this more than anything I've probably ever believed in my life,” and at the time I thought “oh my god, I hope she takes a shot, I hope she chooses me,” and looking back, I know she was like this: “Did you say free? You're in this program, you look like you live and love this, this is your area, this is not only your content area, this is not only your community, this is your dream.” And so I think she recognized that synergy of my own interest, my own background, and just channeled it, and said yeah, come aboard. So I jump onto this project and it's really centered around a particular space, which is the Coleman School, and the Coleman School is located in the Central District in Seattle, which is the historic Black neighborhood in Seattle...changing now, changing significantly at this point...but the location was really important, the school was really important. I'm from the east side of the mountains in Washington, but everybody, every Black family on the east side has family who lives in Seattle, right? So all these Yakima people and Seattle...its true in every state, you got rural and the city cousins... and so my city cousins all went to this Coleman Elementary School. So I'm familiar with the school, it is at the heart of the Black community in Seattle, and so we jump onto this building and it's an interesting museum project in that the Urban League had this vision of a mixed-use building. So it's a three-story building, it's about 50,000 square feet, and the idea was, let's have mixed usage. So there's apartments on the top two floors, and then there's...what was it..a small 10,000 square foot museum on the bottom floor, and that was the project that I signed to help. So we ended up raising $23 million, I start out as an intern. I then move to education coordinator, and you know small museums, they give you whatever title if you do the job. If we need these things done, now you're the museum educator. So anyway, that was the first year, and then after we opened, I was promoted to deputy director and then shortly thereafter, head curator. So a lot of my work was going out and aboutbefore the museum

opened, a lot of the work was collecting and I collected a lot of things. I'm collecting obviously artifacts, ephemera, and that sort of thing for display. Collecting stories, oral histories and that kind of thing, but more than anything, it's collecting the people around the pacific northwest who needed to belong and feel like this place was for them. So I drove every kind of place, all over, for years and years, sitting on folks' couches; it is the best period of my life, I loved it. Helping to feed the interpretive plans of that museum, or helping to shape what public programs were, helping to shape what our educational initiatives look like, and I think, importantly, fundraising, getting to tell the story. I realize now one of the crucial things that I got was the ability to believe in a project, to sell it, and that has not always been true after I left the Northwest African American Museum. I don't know if I'll ever believe in anything as much as I believed in the need for that entity, that thing to exist, and from a fundraising standpoint, that's gold. That's authenticity. I didn't have to get up for it, I didn't have to pretend, there was no messaging. I was like “Let me talk to you about what I love, and I will convince you to love it, too, and I want you to give some money towards it,” and it was an easy ask. And so now...I mean I don't have to ask anymore, because i get to give money away...but when that comes up, I think I got to find something true in my ask, I got to find something that my heart actually cares about, because that's the only thing that matters, that's the only thing that allows me to sleep at night when it comes to fundraising. So I'm always looking for that kind of heart alignment. So anyway, museum opens 2008, and I'm just in hog heaven. Yeah, you know what it is man, it's the dream. These stories that the community says “Alright, we've been holding on to these because nobody else gives a shit about them from a museum standpoint, what are you going to do? You young kid,” well, I'm 23 at this time, “what do you know? What are you gonna do?” and I was like, god I’m this link in a chain of trust that if I screw this up right now, I could set back the reputation of this institution decades, and that was just a solemn responsibility that, at that young age, I just relished. I just relish sitting on the couch and having somebody say “that's not important” or “why do you want that” and overcoming that and saying “well, here's how I think it fits into a

larger narrative about the Black experience, here's how I think we could use that, here's how I think it could help other people, here's how I think sharing it might help you," and I think it was just that relationship building, that was it for me, and I think that is the center of Black museums, that's the center of Black museum movement. It's not the space, it's not the glitz and glamour, it's just that people have ignored this story for so long, and you and I realized how important it is, and that we want to share that with others, and let's undertake that work together, and that's why I loved it...best job.

[00:18:01.00] Q: So how long were you there and kind of how did you see, not just your work evolve over that time, but how did the museum itself evolve over your time there?

Carter: Let's see, how long was I there? I was there about nine and a half years, so it was a significant part of my early life. How did the museum evolve? I guess to begin with, there was just a ton of skepticism. This actual building itself, and I didn't know this at the time, there were countless people who had tried this effort before. There was an occupation of the building that I always want to acknowledge, one of the longest continuous occupations ever. It was over twelve years that these folks broke into this abandoned school, at that time, and said "we don't want this to be torn down. We demand this be kept for our community." So NAAM would not exist had it not been for those folks who occupied it and said no, and that's so much of the story that's important. But they had versions of a museum. I always want to give credit, because it wasn't the best plexiglass, it wasn't a $10,000 sign package for everything, it wasn't like Applebaum came in and did all the exhibits, right? Those things that you chalk up to museums, but it was real. They were in communication with AAAM, these occupiers were in communication with AAAM. They're reaching out because...I went through and looked through all of their correspondence they left in that museum...they're reaching out to AAM and saying "hey, we exist, we're doing this." They're having exhibits in this...I'm talking about, there's no hot

water, there's no lights, they're bringing power from the outside; this building's literally falling down, but they're staging exhibits, and they're having symposium, and they're inviting colleagues from around the country to come participate with them. But what happened is that that occupation ended, and the story behind it is contentious and disputed, but it ended and the museum is boarded back up, this building is boarded back up, and lots of other entities then come in, and there's power plays, and this plays out over decades. But the result was a community saying "yeah, I know that everybody thinks this should be a museum, but I've been asked before, you've asked before, and then it closes, or it stops, or there's a giant fight that plays out in the front page of the newspaper. Why would I want to trust that it's actually going to happen this time?" And so I think that the evolution, for me anyway, was rank skepticism, where everybody in the community was like "for real this time? Yeah it sounds like a good thing but really?" Or is it which side am I on, and who's going to be calling, who's auntie am I going to get in trouble, and I feel like we had to overcome that skepticism, and when we opened, the governor's there, and our two state senators are there, and the thing happens. But there's also a protest. Those early occupiers come in and express, during that opening, the difficulties that they had with the vision that we were trying to realize. Anyway, so overcoming community skepticism. When it opens, there's then this kind of "Is this it?" It's 10,000 square feet. And you know how it is, everybody's like "we should have what the Seattle Art Museum has, we should have what the Met has," and those expectations of Black museums, and I've talked about this often, they can be overwhelming, because the levels of sustained support are just not there. It's not the world we live in where a Black museum gets to be as big as the Met, right? It just doesn't exist, and so I'm sitting there at 24, or whatever I am, and I'm just like we raised $23 million, we have the only Black museum within three states, we've got all this amazing talent, we've done all of this, and the question was "Is this it? Why don't you have more floors? Why isn't it bigger? Why are you in the basement of a school?" And so it went from skepticism to "this is it?" I feel like it was really critical for us, in that moment, with our messaging - and this is just

people to people, this isn't like a giant banner that we had out - but the message is this place exists. And I think this is true of Black museums, it exists because it has the ability to evolve, and that's what I would always tell people, is that what it is right now is not its end state. But damn it, somebody had to start, somebody had to take a toddler step, somebody had to open it up, somebody had to write a collections management policy, and I never thought of myself as NAAM. I thought this is my gift to the community. I'm going to give my time, my service, my love, my heart to start an institution, and that's what I believe in. I believe in institution building. So I think that's the third phase for me and an institution, I think, a good institution realizes that its capacity, its willingness to change, defines its long-term sustainability, it's viability. And so it was that message of yeah, you might not like it right here, but that we exist is a significant accomplishment. It is a huge, monumental...that we have built the foundation such that, unlike a lot of smaller museums that start off and they're like “we're gonna be a $5 million a year thing and blah blah blah blah, that's our annual operating budget.” We were like “we're under $1 million, we're fine with our size because that is sustainable. Until we can prove that we can raise $2 million, we're going to be a $880,000 museum because we know that means we'll be here in 2008, 2009, we can do that and let it grow.” So I think that's how you build institutions, you make them right size to begin with and you have the things...like if you don't have your bylaws in place, if you don't have your your correct chartering documents, if you don't have an approach to collections management and the right kind of documentation, if you don't have an interpretive plan for your exhibit, those are gifts, that if you did not like the output of that moment, that you could then as the next iteration - I'm so glad you're going to be talking to LaNesha after this right - the next iteration can pick it up. And I hope when you talk to LaNesha, she says “I didn't like this, I didn't like that, I got to fix…” Anytime I hear criticism of anything that I left there, in my own head, I'm like good, I’m so glad to hear that. I hope you think my collections management policy is shitty, you're going to build a better one, but that one was there for you. You could come in and you could choose when you wanted to make that improvement, as opposed to when I came

in, there's nothing there. It's just a blank slate. So that was the evolution, I think, the institution building and then as the museum continued to progress, I think people saw...I mean, as a startup, what you have is a short track record, so everybody thinks that first exhibit is all that you are. So if they loved it, they love you. If they don't love it, they're like “why can't we ever do this?” You stack up another exhibit, they're like “oh, actually they have other functions, they have other facets, angles.” Third, fourth, fifth, move forward twenty exhibitions, and people are like “alright, I get it, I get it. Museums can't tell it all at once.” But as you have rotating exhibitions and public programs, you're able to get into more of these stories that I might be interested in, and that's just the other feature of institution building, is we cannot be all things to all people all the time. But wait, give us time, partner with us, and we will find ways to incorporate, and that's what museums do. I don't think they can be measured in one year, six months. I think it's that long view, that long perspective, is how you should measure museums. So I feel like the community warmed up once they saw that there was the ability for us to incorporate all these different, various, diverse voices and perspectives. It's like it's this plurality, I think, of the Black experience that people are scared about. Are you only going to talk about the Civil Rights movement? Wait, are you only going to talk about slavery? What about east African immigrants? What are you doing talking about refugee stories? What are you doing talking about youth? What about skateboarders? What about LGBTQ+? Give us time, give us opportunity, and we can get to all of this, because that's what we do. An institution hopefully processes and moves and evolves. And then the last phase for me, and I think for the institution, was those early birds who had been there. You have to make a transition, and I always believe in pipeline, and I don't think it's often linear. I like to think more like an ecosystem, but are you looking behind you and are you looking next to you for who should be coming up next. d We have a shared friend, Chieko Phillips, she was an intern in the museology program and I went to IMLS, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, got one of those grants, the African American history grants, because I wanted interns to come in and be paid.

So it's the pipeline, but it's how do you feed the pipeline? I'm going to get money, I'm going to pay an intern, and I want the next, I don't even call it a generation, I want the next group to have this opportunity, and at a certain point, it was time for those of us who had started it to move on, to free up those opportunities for others, and I think, even more importantly, to take that, to me anyway, essential essence of the Black museums movement, and what you learn, and how you're brought in, and how everybody just kind of embraces you, and that was true of me. Everyone was like “What do you need? How can I help?” And then you have got to take that and you've got to give it backward to the people that are coming up behind you, and I think, even more importantly perhaps, you've got to take it and try and infiltrate the white museum field with these ideas to bring about change. So I thought what the gift that I was given, I had to look backward and I had to look externally. So those dictated what I had to do with the museum. I think that was true of a lot of us who are those founding staff members, is that we recognize that we are simply place keepers and that we had to free up these opportunities for other people to move it forward.

Q: That's great. I am glad you brought up LaNesha DeBardeleben, and it's gonna be, I think, interesting for my students to hear her story paired with your story as she's followed you to the Northwest African American Museum as the executive director there and also in AAAM, from our immediate past president, being yourself, and now LaNesha as our current president, so that that'll be wonderful. I do want to come back to AAAM, but you kind of prefigured my next question here, and that really is kind of what led you to leave the Northwest African American Museum, and what has been your career since then?

Carter: Sure. I think, as I said, it was just time for me to create space for other people to come up. That’s really the way I felt. Also, there's only so much you can...I gave a lot. I’m 22 when I start...yeah maybe like 22, and you know how it is with startups, it's like 100 hours a week, no

joke, and I didn't know it was 100 hours a week. I get now that people count their hours, especially so they can talk about it at conferences, but I wasn't going to conferences at that point, I was building a museum. That's all I did. I didn't go to AAAM, I had never been to AAAM until like 2011, I didn't go to AAM. I focused on this museum and its source community, that was my focus, because I thought it deserved that. It didn't need me on a panel, it didn't need me with the title, it needed me on somebody's couch. It needed me in the collection space. It needed me...I mean, I'm in the gallery. I have so many stories being in the gallery at 2 AM. My father's in the gallery with me, helping me paint. That was my focus, how can I put out the very best product in partnership with this community, such that we are all proud of what we have. Anyway, all that to say man, I was exhausted. Just exhausted. And you know I'm not getting paid six figures, I'm barely getting paid anything. It is a labor of love. So that was part of it, is I had put in probably two decades of time, that's the way that I felt, and I knew that I needed to create space, because I didn't want to be bitter towards it. It was such a beautiful thing that I didn't want to begin regretting the time that I gave to it, or having some kind of feelings about it that I felt maybe I hadn't gotten as much from it, when that was not the case, so that was a part of it. The other part was I had started to poke my head up, right? I'd started to present at AAM, attend AAAM, like other local people...you know, you're the curator at the Black museum, you're going to get invited, you're going to be asked to talk, and people wanted to know what is this, how does this community-based approach work, to not only creating a museum, but then how it operates, how it operates from curatorial or programmatic standpoint, and these folks are like “well, we want to know how this looks, and how it works.” And so I’m casting my eyes up and one of the things that really got me to think about moving on was the IMLS grant. So we got two of those, I believe, in a row and we got one of the features that Mark Isaacson, who ran the program, still runs the program, one of the features was a gathering of recipients of those African American history grants together. And so i'm sitting in a room with Marion, who served in AAAM with us...I can't remember who else was there...but I just remember I'm talking with these

folks, we're sharing stories, and there's so many similarities to what they're going through and what I had been going through for the past six, seven years, that I just felt at home. But in the overall, people are asking me to tell my story. They're asking me to talk about the museum, they're specifically asking me about community-based museums, because that's what it's called then. We're talking about diversity, this is 2010, we're talking about diversity. Some people are still talking about multiculturalism and people are just starting to kind of look over at Black museums and say “wait, wait, what's going on over here, and how can we pilfer some of that?” And so as I’m talking more, I realize that I'm constantly criticizing white legacy institutions all the time. I talk about why NAAM existed, why there was this deficit that I felt had to be corrected, and in that I realized that there aren't a lot of “me's” at white legacy institutions. That there is almost this, I don't even know how to describe that feeling, it's a tough one; anyway, what I felt is that how in the world is the museum field going to change unless we get some door kickers into some of these other institutions? So that was also one of the reasons that I left is because I had a question. It was like the Black museums movement, and my participation in it, has taught me so much that I now believe to be true and necessary for the success of any museum long-term, and these are the things that we're talking about now in the museum field that i just feel like Black museums have been talking about for decades and been doing for decades. And the question that I had was like “well, how can I take what I've learned and make the museum field better?” and so my next move after NAAM was, well, what is a white legacy institution that could use some of what I've been taught and what I've been given? And the Oregon Historical Society had an opening for a museum director and the Oregon Historical Society is the state history museum in Oregon...it's a lot of wagons, it's a lot of pioneer history, and especially in Oregon, this is the end of the Oregon Trail, so you got all this 19th century lore and white conquest and colonialism, and you've got a 100,000 square foot collections facility and more wagon wheels, more wagon parts, more white stories than i even knew existed in that state. But as I went through that interview process, I thought if you believe that there is a better way to do museum

work and if you believe that that work is necessary for these places, like the Oregon Historical Society, to actually exist in 100 years and be relevant to the community it purports to serve...I always go back to what my father said: it's not really a problem unless you have a solution. So I got tired of talking about why white institutions weren't doing this and white legacy institutions weren't doing that, yada yada yada yada, and I thought well, what can you do? You're a pretty forceful person, can you walk in through the front door, kick the doors down from the inside? So I ended up at the OHS as a museum director, really frankly because I wanted to see what could be done. I thought that is as far away from what my experience had been at NAAM, but was I good enough to build a bridge to make what I learned and the skills that I had to help that institution be better. I didn't know what I was in for, I had no idea how entrenched, I had no idea why the Oregon Historical Society and other institutions operate the way they do and why it's so difficult to make change. I had no idea how hard it would be, but that was the next series of moves for me, is like I want to make change within the museum field and somebody's got to demonstrate that to those institutions that have not been making these necessary changes. So that's how I ended up at OHS after that, and this is just a family move to be closer to family. I want to move back to Washington and the Burke Museum, which suffers from some real similar issues as OHS, and I thought “god, I've practiced this there, what could I do at the Burke?” And then lastly, I'll tell you how I got into funding, is I went from a Black museum, which is just like bath water to me, it's like home, it's comfort, but I knew I had to push myself in an effort to hopefully push the field, at least locally. So I worked at these legacy white institutions and, at the Burke, something dawned on me, and it's something that had been dawning on me for a while, is that I'm constantly pushing for change. I'm a critic. You've heard me, I don't love museums most of the time, I think they suck for a lot of different reasons,.I do. I'm a malcontent. People are always like you must love museums, you must love culture. I'm like “no, most of the time I think it's done poorly.” I think the history is done poorly and I think that it's not representative,it does not look like what changing demographics look like in this country. It just disappoints me.

So anyway, as I'm making these changes, I'm like "you should do this, you should do that," I realize the power of a development department. So at these institutions, I would say well we should do this, we should...I mean, I was at OHS and there's one of those big timeline exhibits, it's like the history of Oregon from blah blah blah to the present. We spent like, I don't know, $2 million, $3 million to redo this thing and I was like - I didn't redo it, this happened before I got there - and I was like "I don't like this. What I would like to do is take that kind of timeline exhibition work with our native partners and have the story of Oregon told through native voices and through native eyes," and I was like "I haven't seen that done before in the Pacific Northwest. I think this would be groundbreaking." And so I sit down with my development department, they're like "well, funders are going to run away, donors are going to run away from this. You're going to scare the hell out of people, Brian, you're moving too fast. What does this even mean? Why can't you just make a small exhibition? or can't you do a public program?" and that happened more and more in my career, where I was told you can't get funds for this, you're going to alienate our donors and our board, and it really started to bother me that the changes that I thought needed to be made, within the museum field, that are really rooted, to me, in the Black museum movement, those changes were being thwarted because people were afraid that the values of funders wouldn't align with the values of an institution as it evolved towards a more, what I think is, equitable experience for guests, and that just it bothered me. And so my question, and it's always a question for me, why do I make career moves? My question was well who gets to decide where money goes? How does that work? Because it seems hella problematic to me. So then it was really a choice, and I said I've worked in museums - it's like 14 years at that point - I want to see how funding works, and I want to see if I can take these same values and swim upstream and try and change the values of a funding entity to be more in alignment with where I think museums and cultural organizations need to be. So 4Culture, quasi-governmental, we're a public development authority in Seattle, and we're tasked with distributing lodging tax to cultural organizations and individuals, and so the opportunity came to

run the heritage department funding, so this is grants to historical societies, history museums, and I jumped at it, because I thought man, what are the values, what's the moral code, the values that are guiding where these dollars are going? Why isn't somebody with a purse string demanding that the Native voices be told at these heritage societies around Washington state? How can you still get money and you have nothing in your exhibition that talks about Native stories? Where is the indigenous voice? And so that was what I saw, why in a collection are you not forced or required to have something about the Black stories that come out of Washington state, and it's because the purse strings don't demand it. So me working at 4Culture, a funding agency, and specifically starting in heritage, was about how can I change this, how can I change the guidelines on the grant to more align with good history? That's all it was. I was like do your fucking job, I'm not asking you to prioritize one particular story, I'm just asking you to do your job. If it happened here, you should be talking about it, and you should be generally kind of agnostic about who the people are. That's just good history, to me anyway. So that was that, and then as always, I thought well that's history, but we also fund arts. We fund public art, we fund historic preservation, how can we change the values and what we're believing about those and that's why I knew I want to be the executive director of that place, because I go from giving away, I don't know, less than $1 million a year to an agency giving over $20 million per year, and so I think there's just real power that a lot of folks who work in museums need to be thinking about when it comes to funding. The rate of change and the ability for change is directly tied to a necessary infiltration into funding systems and I would just like to see more people who are like-minded and have similar values move into funding. So Chieko, you know, AAAM member, came over and now she runs the heritage department at 4Culture, and it's the same thing. I'm looking at a pipeline of how do I move more folks of color, who have more progressive views when it comes to museums and cultural institutions, into funding, whether it's at 4Culture or other funding sources. So I see the work is really similar in my life, it's just different, it's different venues and different formats.

[00:41:29.00] Q: Well obviously I need to line up Chieko Phillips for an oral history as well. It's funny how these worlds connect. So executive director, 4Culture, what do you actually do on a day-to-day basis?

Carter: Oh let's see, what do I do? I think it's vision and I think it's trying to create and make sure that a system is operating, by which good people are brought into the system and they are allowed to make change, truthfully. What do I do on a day-to-day basis, I try and create a system at that organization that changes the structure of the way in which dollars are distributed. So it's something ridiculous, like only four percent of all philanthropic cultural dollars go to POC-led organizations. It's outrageous, it's ridiculous. So, to me, it's like gross triage. How do I redistribute wealth to those who have been historically marginalized from cultural philanthropy? How do I do that? The mark, at the end of the day will, yes, be who follows me, it'll be yes, how well we do, but to me, I can add up who gets money right before I got there and what that composition of that group looks like, because we collect demographic information since I got there. So I can tell you how many folks of color, I can tell you how many folks from the LGBTQ community are on a board or on a staff, I can tell you what audience that particular organization tries to serve, and for me, it's just how can I move funds from those groups that have got the lion's share of it to those groups who haven’t? And so to me, it's a redistribution of wealth, and so the question every day is “how can I make that happen?” Some of it's working with our board, some of it's working with our staff, some of it’s bringing on new staff, some of it's populating an old process with a new idea. One of the things, I'll just give an example, are equity investments. As a quasi-governmental funding agency, we cannot use race as a determining factor in giving away dollars, so how hard is it to say historically marginalized? And you're like “who are you talking about?” Well, we can't ask you...well, we can ask you if you are POC-led, but we cannot give you funding specifically because of that. So one of the things I

came up with, and this is a new idea into an old process, is an equity investment. We use geography. So, as in a lot of counties, we have a program called Communities of Opportunity, and so these Communities of Opportunity, you set census tract level data to determine high levels of poverty, lower performance in education system, food scarcity, housing issues, and there's an index that's created, and in this index it's like hot: the red means that these are places that have been historically disinvested in. Well, if you overlay that damn map of who's been historically disinvested in by who makes sidewalks and fire departments and investors, banks, it's where all the Brown and Black people live. It's the simplest thing. So for me, you're not going to let me use race as a determining factor? Fine. It's not legal, you're not going to allow me to do it, I'll get sued? Great. I'm going to use geography, because that, I feel, is what has historically been used as a dog whistle for race. And I'm like well shit, you shouldn't have hired me, because unfortunately I learned that, and now I'm going to use it against you. So that's what I've done, and I call them equity investments, and really what it is, it’s just prioritizing those organizations and individuals that lived in those communities, for extra dollars. It's simply a bonus, it's a kicker, it's a redistribution of funds based on geography, when in fact it's actually race.

Q: Sounds like you flip redlining on its head.

Carter: That's it man. And nobody can say anything. Literally what can you say? It's actually the county who created the community of opportunity index. It's King County who did it and I'm just like “I’m just going by what you said. You said these areas are historically disinvested in, I would like to give some extra dollars to them.”

Q: So changing gears a little bit, looking back over your career, the work you do now, the next two questions are kind of related. The challenges, the misconceptions, the kind of unknown

aspects of your work, but then the flip side of that, what's been some of the biggest rewards?

Carter: Unknowns...like, what a challenge...

Q: Yeah, what are the biggest misconceptions and challenges and unknown aspects of your work you've faced over the years? For my students, what are the things that might not be readily apparent to someone looking from the outside? And then what has been the biggest rewards?

Carter: Yeah, I would say the thing that's not really available or seeable is the amount of compromise that's necessary. So like when I moved to OHS, they never had a Black museum director before. Ever. Ever. In the history, 200 years or whatever it was, never. When I came to 4Culture, they'd never had a Black male employee, let alone a person of color who's the executive director. Never happened. But as I always tell people, the rate of change is something that I'm very cognizant of. In my mind, I have a vision...I told you I would like to redistribute funds. I could do that tomorrow, I could do that. My vision of how that would look and what would be successful, I could do it tomorrow. But if I make that radical shift, I'm gonna be out on my ass and I have no idea who's going to follow me. No idea. I assume that they would kind of repeal or revert, and you get somebody really conservative who wouldn't be interested in making that change. So I always think that compromise, to me anyway, means that - maybe this is of use to the students - being able to see the change that you want, what that end state is, recognizing where you are in this moment. So here's where we are as an institution, as an individual, whatever it is, and then being able to clearly identify the change you can actually make, and I think in recognizing that I’m not going to be over here, right? That's not me, that is a different person, and it takes, I think, humility to be able to do that. So at 4Culture, I can see an end state of what our funding looks like, but I know that won't be me. It's not me. What I am is steps one and two, and somebody has got to take those steps and if I push, because I want the

success indicators of steps 15 and 16, I'm going to fail. Not only that, I'm going to push so hard that they're going to repeal, the entrenched systems that exist are going to repeal the successes of steps one and two because I have gone too far. And people could say “well you're an incrementalist, you're a gradualist, that's bullshit, where's the radical in what you do?” And to me, I believe that my vision is radical. I believe that my tactics are actually accomplishable and...what’s a good word for...hand off-able. I always envision I'm going to take these two steps that are fucking hard, they're so incredibly difficult, and then I'm going to hand it to you, with the ability, with the things properly done in place to take steps three and four, and hopefully you realize you're going to have to hand it off to somebody else. So I think that, to me, is compromise, and does it sometimes feel like you are shucking and jiving? I mean, yeah. Does it feel like I wish I could tell somebody to “f-off?” Well yeah, I wish I could do that, but that's not my evolutionary period. That is not my chapter. I've got to have two sides, I've got to have two faces, I've got to play this game really, really, really well, because once I open those doors, all these people can come in behind me and they don't have to go through the shit that I'm going through now. But I just feel like I try and have broad shoulders, I try and have humility, and I try and realize you are the start of the change, you are not the end of it, and I feel like that's the compromise that I think most people don't see, and if they do see it, it can be disappointing. “Oh, why are you accommodating this? Burn it down, the hell with that.” And I’m like yeah. There was a demand...god, I won't even get into that, I'll just go to the...I know we're running out of time, I'll go to what's the greatest reward. You know what's a really good reward for me? Man, Vedet. I just got to be honest about that. That, to me, is exactly what I was just talking about. Vedet Coleman, the current executive director of AAAM, she just sent me a text message, and there were like a thousand members. I mean, how many members does AAM have? How many does the bigger...great. Other people have 10,000 members, 50,000 members. This is growth, it's real. A paid executive director - when before it was all volunteer - a paid executive director calls me and tells me about progress that, I think, is exceptional and well paced and, to me,

that's a great accomplishment. It's exactly how I operate. So I guess I'm so proud that you and I and the rest of the board are able to raise enough funds to bring on an executive director, that executive director gets to work, keeps the institution evolving...it's that institution building and I just see it in Vedet in a way that I'm just so proud. I don't need anything from her, I want zero recognition, it was just cool. That was my chapter at AAAM, that was the compromises that were necessary for me to recognize a rate of change. I just think it exemplifies how I approach my work and it just made me smile. That was yesterday, man, that she said that and all I did was smile. I was like good, I'm glad this worked.

Q: Well, which is a perfect segue into kind of the last few questions I've got for you and the Association of African American Museums, AAAM, you were there at an incredibly important time, and certainly you and I remember the move from when we were an all volunteer organization to now an executive director. Can you talk about your experience and history with the organization and what that's been like?

Carter: Sure. Like I said, when I first started off in museums, I wasn't attending a lot of conferences, but NAAM would always send a representative to AAAM, so that's how I heard about it. Chieko would tell me about it. You just knew it was like, AAAM is out there and, as I said, when we got those IMLS grants, that's when I got to know more of the people that were involved with it. And then, as I was thinking about leaving NAAM, the new museum, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, was starting up and had a curator spot open. So I'm looking at it, I go out to DC, I'm talking with them and I meet Dr. Debbie Mack, and in meeting her...when was that...2011, she reached out to me and just said "hey, I like what you were talking about at those interviews, it was really nice meeting you. I'd like to talk to you about serving on the AAAM board." And I was just like "nah, I don't know, you know, maybe, blah blah blah, I'm really busy, I'm focused on the museum, I'm having this career

transition," but I say alright. So I go out to Charlotte - I think it was Charlotte, that's when I met you; that was the first time I met you, Robby, out in Charlotte - and joined the board. And it became clear to me that there's something I can do on this board. To me, there was so much good energy, there was so much love, there was so much passion, and I thought "man, this is going to fill me up." This AAAM is going to be like a needed replenishing fluid in my body, that's the way that I felt. A lot of people talk about 'it feels like home, feels like family,' but I also realize that everybody has a role within their family, right? There's something people have to do. You got to be useful, you got to have utility, and I just thought I could see it. We're an all-volunteer board, and it was always a capacity issue. It was never a vision or an energy issue. Everybody in that room had more than enough vision and they were leaders of institutions. These are EDs and CEOs, everybody could say "I think we should do this, we should have a strategic plan, we should have a $1 million budget, we should do all these things," and what most of the people in that room were used to was having the capacity, because you have staff, to actually see that vision through. And I thought to myself, in that moment in Charlotte, "oh the greatest challenge that this place has is the inability to acknowledge their lack of capacity to carry an idea forward." That's not heart, that's not love, that's just the cold realities of life is that if you want to stuff a thousand envelopes because you think that's how you're gonna raise money...it's one thing to say it's one thing to write it down, it's another thing to actually have six volunteers who are ready, and do it, and put it in the right place, and dump it in the right bin, and I felt like that's what AAAM needed. They needed capacity. That was it, and that capacity was not going to come through more volunteer hours, it was going to come with that great leap that organizations make from all volunteer to their first staff, and it's like light years of difference when you have 40 hours a week of somebody being paid to do something. So I felt like, from the beginning, the question for me always was "how can you help this entity, this organization, move to a place where not only does it have a paid executive director, but it has a strategic plan in place that will be able...that that executive director knows what the vision is?" That they're not coming in,

having to create that, but instead this brain trust has done that work. So I thought “what are volunteer board members the best at?” Thinking and talking. In my honest opinion man, that's it. It's not implementation, it's not doing, it's the thinking and the talking, and let that brain trust do what it does, and then when that kind of thinking, that brainstorming, that iterative period is over, you need a person. You need a person in a chair who has 40 hours a week, and so that's what I felt like my role at AAAM was during those six years that I was on the board.

Q: And of those six years, you were the board chair for the last three of those, is that right?

Carter: Yeah, I believe so, yeah.

Q: And it was during that time that the work happened that put Vedet in place, Vedet Coleman-Robinson, the executive director. Talk about just that really quickly, what that specific work was to that led to getting an ED for the organization.

Carter: Sure. So through a grant from IMLS, and I think it was their national projects, national grants, anyway, there was something like $200,000 that...and this was Dr. Mack who was able to secure this, through her relationships at IMLS. Andthe project was a real reflection, it was a moment for AAAM to bring on some consultants. So these are development consultants, these are organizational planning consultants, these are retreat facilitation, and I have been through enough grants that are broad and sweeping like that to recognize that if you don't use that moment to build something, and I really mean build something that you can step on, that money can just go out the window. So I was lucky I got to work with Dr. Rico Chapman, I got to work with...who else was on that group? It was a subcommittee that went through a strategic planning process for the organization, and I like strategic planning because you cut out all the bullshit. You're like, who are we? What do we believe in? What are our values, and how are those going

to show up based on the capacity that we have? And that's it for me with strategic planning. Other than that, it's all just process. Anyway, through that process, we're moving and we're articulating who we are and what we want to be. It's the thinking and the talking, and I was like, that's great. Let's take all that thinking and talking that this board loves to do, and put it in a plan of here's where we want to go, and I think that plan really revealed that we weren't going to do that on our own. There was no way. You got a full-time job, Robby, you've got kids, in the same way I had a full-time job and I had kids. There was this much amount of time that everybody on that board had to give to AAAM, and so to implement that plan we needed an executive director. We needed a paid executive director, and luckily through IMLS, we got to work with a fundraising consultant and so we sat down and created a development plan. Just a standard development plan. What are the sources of revenue that are available to us that we can actually get money to bring an executive director in? So there were asks at the conference to help pay for it, there were requests to individuals, there were grants that we wrote, but I think the most instrumental one was this consultant gave me an entree to sit down with the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and I was told before I went into that room that this was not an ask. They were not giving us any money and that they just wanted to know who we were, and this was kind of a courtesy based on the relationship with that consultant. I was like, that's bullshit. That's not how I operate. You take me to New York, you put me in that brownstone with the Mellon Foundation, I'm going to tell you what you need to do. So we sit down with them, and they're asking me, literally it was extractive, "what's going on in Black museums? How can we do better? How can we do this?" And I'm just like this is a free consult, and to be honest, it was tough for me. And I was like "ah, this doesn't feel right," and so what I did is I just turned it, and I said "here's what I think you need to be doing as Mellon," and I said "you need to be supporting those organizations like us, like AAAM, those kind of umbrella organizations that exist and already have these links and ties and relationships. You need to repay Black museums for the years of dedicated service they have around community involved processes, around equity, around what

I think is shared authority and narrative storytelling. You need to repay the work that these people have been doing for free, and those that have already invested their time and labor and love into it," and I said "so I don't want to talk to you about your next POC curatorial fellowship. I've seen it, I don't think it really works." "Well what about this in collections?" I said "you just need to fund the people who know what they're doing." So I just made a case for AAAM being a wonderful vehicle that coalesced so many of the people they were trying to reach through fifteen different distinct programs. I was like, you can create fifteen new programs and try and reach these members, but we all come together once a year. I said "help us do that better. Help us use what we have already built." So I leave the room and I was critical of them, and I was really honest about what I thought that they should do, and I think it was two days later I get a call and they say "we'd like for you to submit a proposal to Mellon." And I was like, good. So anyway, we submitted a proposal, they ended up giving us...I don't know, what was it man? It was enough money for us to bring Vedet on full-time for, I think it was three years of runway, and that was the moment. So not only were you able to do that, we're able to take the other fundraising efforts and conference revenues that we're able to get, and we're able to bring in a part-time administrative assistant. To me, the minute we hired Vedet...so there's this whole hiring process, Vedet Coleman is chosen, it's board members who go through this long interview process, we're all meeting up in DC to do this; I thought it was really good. It was a really good process. Weren't you on the hiring committee Robby? Yeah that's right, yeah you were on it with us, and we chose her, and when she was hired and then we bring on that administrative assistant, and to me, I just think of Charlotte, 2011, 2012, whenever that was, and that moment right in 2018, maybe 2019, I don't remember the date when she was hired exactly, but that is a monumental shift for an all volunteer organization to go, and I thought "I don't know what we're going to do." I remember at that moment, I was like "I don't know how much of the strategic plan we're going to implement." I hope so, but I realize we now have the possibility to take the words and the talking and the brainstorming that was done and translate that into services for the field,

and that's what it is. It's the conference, it's all the things that you guys who are now on the board that I've rolled off, it's all those programs you're able to do. It’s the initiatives. There's actually somebody, somebodies, to take the ideas that exist and turn those into action, and I think what an incredible thing, and not unlike NAAM, I feel the same way about AAAM. I don't know what comes next, but I know now there's enough institution, there's enough bedrock and foundation there for that group to iterate and be what it wants, and that was capacity.

[01:02:43.00] Q: So I believe we must have hired Vedet in 2018, because by the time we had the conference in Jackson in 2019, she was on board, and so it was in that period. Last couple of questions. You mentioned some people like Debbie Mack. Who are the folks who've impacted you the most in this field, Black museums?

Carter: I think Barbara Earl Thomas, she was my mentor and the executive director at NAAM; hugely impactful on me, and she was impactful on me because - maybe this would be good for some of your students to hear - I was arrogant. I was 22 years old, I'd gone to Stanford, I'm in this master's program, and boy I knew everything...I was slick, I had every answer from a technical standpoint. Here's what the literature is telling us, here's what best practice is, oh you can't do that, museum standards tell us that's not what we do. And I wasn't great with staff. I thought there's a hierarchy and everybody blah blah blah blah blah, and she was like “your bedside manner sucks.” Literally, it was like my first week as deputy director and I was trying to light somebody up for something, and she just sat me down and really said that. “Your bedside manner needs improvement. You cannot be this way.” Because I had not had this experience, that there is such a kindness that you can lead with, and she helped me to see that. So she had a significant impact on my leadership style. Next, I'll take Dr. Debbie Mack. Dr. Debbie Mack and I, I think we had a wonderful relationship through AAAM, because Dr. Debbie Mack is a woman who is about getting it done and she doesn't really suffer a lot of conversation that's not

going to result in some kind of output, and that's what I really loved about working with Debbie, is that we would get on the phone and I would say “hey, this is what I think we need to do to get this strategic plan portion done, to get this retreat finished,” and Dr. Mack will move heaven and earth (right?)whatever it is. If you need a person, if you need a resource, if you need an introduction, if you need advice, she can give you the thing that helps you get over the hump to achieve the outcome that you're looking for, and I just love that about working with her. There was no BS, there was no...I didn't ever feel like Dr. Debbie Mack was trying to mentor me and make me feel good. I never felt that. I think she realized that I was just about getting it done with a clear rationale and justification for why I wanted it done, and I felt like she helped me understand the avenues that existed, make the connections that were necessary, get in the right room to be able to do the work that I wanted to do. So I think she was fantastic. Marion McGee is another person who, as I said, I remember Marion from the first IMLS convening for those grant recipients, and I remember sitting next to her and she's telling me this story about the John G. Riley House in Tallahassee. She's telling me this story and at that point she's being groomed to take over the executive director role, and I thought “oh my god, we're 20 or whatever,” we were very young at the time, “she's going through the exact thing that I'm going through.” And she had a certain quality, a certain bedside manner, a certain tone that I thought man, this is something that I could really learn from. And she was one of the kindest people, one of the nicest people, and I think she's just been a friend to me over what is a decade now, and helped me through some tough times. She's always there if I got to pick up the phone and you make a call to her, she's always there. So I think that maybe those are just three different aspects of what I feel folks have given to me from a mentorship standpoint, a friendship standpoint, that have helped me at those moments when I just needed it.

Q: What's your vision now for the future of the field?

Carter: I think financial sustainability. I think the tragic murder of George Floyd revealed that there's an economic response in moments of national crisis that involve the Black community, and necessarily involved Black museums. And I feel like what it revealed is that that energy, that that every...you remember this, when everybody had a blackout? It was on social media, do you remember this? It was like, turn your social media, and it pissed me off. I was just like “what's that do? What does that do?” I get the sign, I get the symbolism, I get the togetherness, but I just always think about how are you changing an entrenched system? So anyway, what I would like to see for Black museums is a real focus on sustainable financial models, and I use the term right-sized all the time. I think being right-sized means recognizing what your limitations are, but also your opportunities for growth. And so what I would like to see is, if things are changing - this is what people tell me, I don't know if they really are - but if things are changing, and philanthropy, or white dollars, or dollars in general, are moving towards Black-lead efforts and causes, I would like to see those dollars move into sustainable models. That's what I would like to see. Such that when the buzz of the moment in donations wear off, that people have not taken their staffs and increased them by 70, or now our conference is going to be $300,000 instead of $150,000, because those things don't sustain the organization. I would like to see it built into the bedrock, but I'm boring that way. I’m about the foundation of the institution, because those are the things that last after you leave. So what I would like to see is people really focused on either endowments or just what right-sized budgets look like. How do you cultivate one-time donors into believing in your mission moving forward such that it's replicable, and I think that's the key to sustainability, is if you do not know the features and elements of your operation that are replicable, what is it that you did that was successful, how in the hell can you do it well again? So that's what I would like to see. More financial sustainability, which I think takes a recognition that you might not make the leap from a storefront to a fifteen story building, and I think that, within Black museums, there is such a...it's not even competitiveness. We always want to matter. We have been told for so long that “oh you don't need that, you don't

need that." That the physical, the size, the grandeur, I think that's part-and-parcelof the existence of a lot of black museums, and I think if people could let some of that go, you end up with a more sustainable model. So that's my fear, people grow too quick, they want to be too big, they see their neighbor next to them doing x, y, and z, and think that's what success means. But that might not be success for us, so it's that uniqueness of operation from a financial standpoint that I would like to see taken more into account.

Q: Alright, last question. What are your recommendations, closing comments, for the students, for the people who are thinking about entering this field in this world, what would you recommend to them?

[01:10:21.00] Carter: I think number one is what you see is true. I think within the museum field, there's a lot of mystique, there's a lot of legacy, I think there's a lot of title, there's just distance that's created within museums because it keeps up the mystique, and if you see cracks in that...I guess what I'm trying to say is there are things that are wrong in the museum field, and as we were talking about earlier, I've made an entire career saying "here's what I think is wrong, here's what's wrong, here's what's wrong, here's what you don't have." I just told you what I thought was wrong with AAAM. I don't know if I'm supposed to do that. Maybe I'm supposed to only say what's wonderful, but I literally thought "here's a problem with this entity that needs to be fixed," and that's what I think I would tell students, is be okay saying that the thing is not working, whatever stage of your career you're at. And part and parcel with that, is it's not really a problem unless you have a solution. So you can point out the problem, you better jump in the trench, you better hop in the boat, you better start rowing towards the solution. If not, what difference does it make? Don't say it if you don't want to help with it. So I think if you make a contribution to the museum field, be willing to expose the cracks, the fissures, the issues, the challenges, and also be willing to help fix them, so what you see is what you get. And the last

part is just say yes. Everything good in my life has come because I have said yes. Dr. Mack said "hey, do you want to be on this board?" I had all types of reservations, all types of concerns, but I said yes, and I met the most incredible people. My career has been marked by "hey do you think you could take this on?" and me having no clue, all kinds of imposter syndrome, not knowing whether I could do it, but yeah, I think I'm going to give it a shot. So I think say yes. And lastly is that you owe. So your students, anybody, whoever, there's an incredible amount of privilege that comes with being able to say "I work in museums." We always say "oh we're poor, and this and that," but I don't think you really choose this career if you don't have a little bit of money in your pocket. You also get these incredible experiences where you get to meet these people, you get to hear these stories, you get to learn. You're constantly in a state of like learning and excitement, and you have these skills, these incredible skills and talents, and I think you owe. I think there are incredible gifts that you get as you move through the museum field, and you owe. You might owe your cousin, you might owe... but you owe, and I think that a lot of times students do not feel that they have something, that they have a responsibility to give back when they're students. So whenever I talk with students at the UW in the museology program, I always tell them "you have things now that are of use to somebody else." I know most museum studies students, most students in general, dream about whatever the brass ring is. So within the museum field, you're like "now everybody wants to work at the National Museum of African American History and Culture." Everybody wants to work there, right? But if you go through a program like a museology program, or a class like you're talking about, you probably know how to do certain things that maybe somebody at a small library, or an all volunteer org doesn't know how to do yet, and so you're getting this gift of knowledge and experience and skills that you're able to build, and I just always say, who needs your help? Does the Metp need your help? Probably not. They're all right from a collections management standpoint. So if you want to go volunteer for them because it looks wonderful on Instagram, go do it. I'm happy with that. But you also might think that there's a small place right in Riverside,

there's a small library or cultural center in Houston that might just be so excited that you show up and say “hey, I’ve got skills, I've got energy, and I can work for free,” and I think that's a magical thing to be able to give somebody.

Q: Brian Carter, thank you very much my friend. I appreciate you.

Carter: Absolutely.