

Narrator: Omar Eaton-Martinez

Project: AAAM Oral History

Interviewer: Dr. Robby Lockett

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Transcriber: Al Wheat

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[00:00:00.00] Q: My name is Robby Lockett. I am professor of history and director of the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University. Today is Monday, July 26, 2021. It is 2:02 PM Central Standard Time. Omar, could you tell us your name and spell it for our record please?

Eaton-Martinez: Sure. Omar. O-M-A-R. Last name is Eaton-Martinez. It's E-A-T as in Thomas-O-N as in Nancy, hyphen, M as in Mary-A-R-T as in Thomas-I-N as in Nancy-E-Z as in Zebra.

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

Eaton-Martinez: Yes you do.

Q: I just want to begin with some biographical information and background. If you could tell us a little bit about, you know, where you're from, when you were born, a little bit about your family, and how you grew up?

Eaton-Martinez: Sure. I was born in Washington, D.C., December 1, 1972. I was raised in Silver Springs, MD. My parents came to the D.C. area from Puerto Rico. So my father was recruited to be an engineer at NASA Data Space Flight Center. My mother was a teacher on the island and

she taught there for about seven years and then came to Washington, D.C. to teach thirty-four years in D.C. public schools and I have a sister who is four years younger than me.

Q: And tell us a little about your educational background. Where did you go to school?

Eaton-Martinez: Sure, sure. Went to Kennedy High School in Silver Springs. Went on to University of Maryland-College Park, earned a degree in African American Studies, then went on to Clark Atlanta University to pursue a master's in the same. Did not quite finish, but I was there for a few years and then I went on to, I end up going, after working a little while, went back to school again to get my master's in educational leadership from the American Intercontinental University in 2009. And, then in 2014, I entered into a Ph.D. program in American Studies at University of Maryland College Park, where I've now finished my course work and I'm on the verge of becoming a candidate.

Q: Great. Now, before you came to the museum field, did you have any kind of professional experience? What were you doing or did you come straight into museum work out of college and these graduate programs?

Eaton-Martinez: So, when I left University of Maryland and went to Clark Atlanta, just did the average jobs that most people do in graduate school. Anything from bartending to waiting tables to deejaying and all those wonderful things. Then, I decided to go to New York and went to New York. I ended up becoming a teacher. So I was a teacher in Bushwick, Brooklyn, at a place called Enrico Fermi I.S. 111, where I taught self-contained sixth grade bilingual, and in a

neighborhood that had been slowly gentrifying, had been traditionally a Puerto Rican neighborhood for many years but then had a lot of newer immigrants come from different parts of the Caribbean and Latin America to the point now, where, you know, it's more people of affluence from what I understand. I haven't been there in years, but I've heard it's changed tremendously. And I left there and I end up teaching in the South Bronx in a place called Bronx Regional High School, where I was a social studies teacher and I taught economics. I taught global history and then I was allowed to create two electives; one was African American history, the other was Hip Hop as a Cultural Art Form. After one year of being there I was promoted to be the head of the department and I stayed there for an additional year. So about three years after that I went down, back home to the DC area. My wife and I had just had our first child and we had an opportunity to come back here where both of my, both of our parents were at the time and so, I ended up working at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center as education specialist, education outreach specialist. So, I was working in a place where basically we took six or seven different missions and we produced educational products out of it including teacher workshops, school administrator workshops, informal educator workshops, and I did a lot of direct students services as well. Anywhere from festivals to going to in classroom engagements, and I also, when I was there, got to really create a documentary called "**Places...**" I was an associate producer. What we did was took the scientists of NASA and put them in conversation with indigenous cultures, like went and filmed on location in Guatemala. So we went to the Mayan peoples and we kind of interviewed them and filmed them for a few days. We went to Alaska and we talked to indigenous communities, the Yupik nation over there, where they talked to us about their cultural history around the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights. And, then we went to Ireland and we talked to them about the ancient observatories from the ancient Gaelic culture. So we put those

three experiences in conversation with NASA scientists around the relationship between the sun and the Earth that, at the time, we were working for the sun Earth...the sun and Earth connection program. Then, I was a contractor for that, so once that contract ended in two years, then I went back to teaching, and I taught in DC public schools in a place called, well at the time was called Bell Multicultural High, now it's called Columbia Heights Education Campus, is where I taught World History and DC History and that school the highest population of new immigrant students in the city. So, most of my students were from Central America, mostly from El Salvador. But I had students from, you know, Guatemala, other parts of Central America, some Dominican students. Had a lot of students from different countries in West Africa, East Africa, as well as China. And, so I did that for a couple of years. An, then I went into...and when I was at NASA, what I failed to say, that's when I started peeking the museum stuff a little bit because, in my informal, with the informal education conference that I had to create, other people that we were reaching out to were basically anybody that was doing education outside of the classroom, which involves after school program folks, youth development programs, like, you know, Boys and Girls Club, but also museum educators. So that's what I really started really getting an interest, we had an interesting relationship with, that was right when the National Museum of the American Indian had opened and we had a relationship with them and some other, and we also had a relationship with the Koshland Museum of Science, which is the science museum that's attached to the National Academy of Science in downtown DC. And so that's when I first started getting a taste for...for museums. Fast forward again past the, when I left DC public schools, then I went to the National Park Service, and I became a park ranger. When I was at the National Park Service, I started working at the Mary Bethune Council House Historic Site, so one of the former headquarters of the National Council for Negro Women. I did that for a few months, and then I

was given the opportunity to work in our central park administrative unit which is called the National Capital Parks-East, which is located in southeast DC. We had oversight over historic sites and parks in DC as well as in Prince George's County, and I was put over a lot of the youth programs, and which really was parks service speak for internships and fellowships. So I did that and I started a program called the Anacostia Watershed Ambassador Program where really talked about the idea of environmental justice and what that means to the community. So, we taught and trained the students, both at the high school and college level, on what a watershed was, what is watershed education, and how we do create activities and, different educational materials to go out and teach the whole community around the watershed, specific around the Anacostia River. And that was a great opportunity but when I really got into museums in the park service was when I was asked to serve on, for the office of the National Museum of the American Latino Commission. That commission was legislated back in 2009 towards the end of George Bush's, probably 2008 because the end of George Bush's second term. And, then when President Obama came in, they finalized everything, and so twenty-three commissioners that were appointed from both sides of the aisle, from both the House and the Senate, and from both Presidential administrations, and then they set up *[Zoom call stalled]* ...

Under the National Park Service. So for, for two years intermittently, I supported the efforts of that commission, which led to the final report which, what the commission was tasked to do was to write a report on the feasibility of the National Museum of the American Latino. And then that's when I really got really close and acquainted with the Smithsonian and really, really close and acquainted with the politics of public history. And, then we turned in that report May 5, 2011, and, for those who don't know, it's finally been legislated as of early this year, and so now

we will have that museum be part of the Smithsonian family. Then, I got the opportunity to apply for an opportunity at the Smithsonian at the National Museum of American History. So, I started there November of 2011, and I was the intern and fellows program manager for the, for that unit and I was basically tasked with creating a recruitment plan to expand the diversity of the applicants that came into our academic appointments, which include interns, fellows, and research associates. My predecessor had her numbers fluctuate from 18-22%. Mine never were lower than 33% and were as high as 50%. Pretty much because I partnered a lot. I collaborated with anyone who would listen, and would now that, that just didn't include the Jackson States of the world, but also included, you know, the University of Maryland, and the University of Mississippi, and all the other PWIs that certainly have students of color there as well. And we were able to really create some great relationships with those schools and increase the amount of applicants and therefore the amount that were end up being selected, and work well with the research fellows too. And, as a result, I was able to be asked to be a part of the inaugural diversity advisory council of the National Museum of American History under the former director John Gray and ended up before I left being the co-chair for that for most of its existence and was one of the earlier unit-level or museum-level advisory councils at the museum, at the Smithsonian, excuse me. And, then, the Smithsonian also has a central office of fellowships and internships and they, too, have their own diversity council they asked me to be a part of as an inaugural member. And so we worked together to really build out the type of recruitment that I was doing solely for American History, but then we locked arms with all the other units that were interested in doing the same, we were able to cover much more ground that way. We were very successful, especially around the increase of Latin-x students who were coming as interns and research fellows. And then, you know, throughout the last few years that I was there, I was

there almost seven years, we were able to, I was invited to become part of a lot of different diversity advisory councils whether it was Smithsonian-wide or sector wide. I worked on the American Alliance of Museums Working Group that ended up creating the “Facing Change” report that ended up leading to the gift that they received for the “Facing Change” initiative from the Walton, Ford, and Mellon Foundations. And, then in 2019, I became the inaugural fellow for that same initiative where I helped museums increase the diversity of their boards and create inclusion plans, and I had the distinct pleasure of being placed in Jackson, Mississippi. So, I got to work with the International Museum of Muslim Culture, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and the Museum of the Mississippi Delta, and so we were closing out that fellowship at the end of this calendar year, and it’s been a really great experience with those great institutions and learn more about Jackson, Mississippi and its histories. And, then of course, worked on the diversity and inclusion task force for the American Association of State and Local History, and then I joined the board for AAAM last summer and was able to participate even prior to that as a member of the planning committees for the Hampton annual conference in 2018 and then joining the you, sir, last year, and now chairing it this year, and we’ll see what the future brings. I think that’s most of what you needed.

Q: That’s great. So, can you just talk a little bit about, I do want to come back to AAAM, the Association of African American Museums, but just talk a little bit about your position now and what you do on a day-to-day basis.

Eaton-Martinez: Yes. So three years ago I left the Smithsonian to become the Assistant Division Chief for Historic Resources at the Maryland National Capital Parks Planning Commission,

where I work more specifically with the Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County. So, I am, I get to help manage around fifteen historic sites in Prince George's County, Maryland, which is one of the counties that border Washington, DC. I have six historic house museums, three archaeological parks, one paleontological park, and I have a black history program that has three, four historic sites now, excuse me, cause another one is going to come online next year. And then we have also the College Park Aviation Museum, which is the only unit that I have that was actually, what I call a true black box museum. It's actually a structure designed to be a museum as opposed to a historic site converted to a museum. And so, we've been able to do a lot of great work, it's been really interesting, especially the last fifteen months for most people. But when I came in, I had seven direct reports one of them was a person of color. Now, three years later and some change, I have nine direct reports and six of them are people of color, and I attribute that to, number one, the support of, of my staff and support of, of our leadership, but also because I was intentional about what I was going to recruit for what, for why. And a lot of was aligned with what we were building over the last two or three years which was these strategic pillars around enhancing visitor experience, both quantity and quality, transforming education activism, tracking the diversity, inclusion, and belonging and really working from a center of acting in honesty, integrity, and respect so we could build trust with our communities. And as a result, one of those positions that I was able to hire last year was the, the new position called a lead historic interpretation and community engagement officer, and what he is tasked to do is to do two main things right now: that is to lead a brand new mobile museum that we're developing that's now called the Sankofa Museum, Sankofa Mobile Museum. And then he's also tasked to support and provide training to the rest of our staff around inclusive interpretation at our historic house museums, whether it's black history programs, or the College

Park Aviation Museum. And so, cause we're able to lean in that way, we've been able to see tremendous change and even pre-COVID, the unfortunate tragic latest murders of African Americans, we were really in the position and poised for this to really uplift the county even pivoting into virtual, because we were already thinking about these things. And, we always understood the history is part of the continuum and not blips in the matrix, so we're always look at how the past influences the present and prepares you for the future. And so that's how we try to frame our interpretation. That's how we want to consider in terms of how we partner with people, how we do, how do we do exhibition development and the like. So, it's been good. We opened back up again now as of two months ago and, and we're getting a lot of good feedback, a lot of feedback in general about our new interpretive schemes and we hope to continue to build those out. And lastly, I'll say that we're also, as a division, because we have nature sites also in my division, that together we unified, we are starting to develop an impact plan. So we're working with Randi Korn to do that, which allows us to really imbed intentional practice in our work, as well as really hone in on two or three audiences that we want to develop.

Q: Thanks. So, there are a couple of things there I want to pursue. But one, I just wonder if there are, maybe misconceptions about the work that you do or unknown aspects of the work that you do in the museum world, that might be informative for folks?

Eaton-Martinez: Yeah, you know, I think one of the things that I feel like that gets missed by some people, especially people who are looking at career changes or are in school and looking to see what they want to do, is that, you know, they don't understand fully that this is a place for social access and social change. Like, we are building these institutions and some of them have

been that way since the beginning and some are converting to be so now, to be these places of social action. So if that's something you care about, this is a wonderful job, or a wonderful career to consider because now you put yourself in the position to really immerse people in history and art and culture and science and form their conscious so they can be better informed citizens in our communities and hopefully avoid a lot of the polarizing rhetoric that we get into nowadays.

Q: Yeah, and along the lines of that polarizing rhetoric, I'm wondering how you are intentional about addressing some of these complicated topics and the way that they polarize our communities today and how the work you do must meet the needs of the diverse audience while being kind of social action oriented as well?

Eaton-Martinez: So I think what we've been trying to do while we were shut down is fully prepare our staff to help them understand that when we open back up again, we're not opening back up the same audiences. Number one, people have been severely traumatized, and some of us been traumatized two, three, four times over. And so we have to prepare our staff for that; how do we use and utilize trauma-informed care and not just how do we greet our visitors and create experiences for them. How do we even imbed that in our interpretation, so we've been slowly start to work on that with some of the work that we've been doing. Also, we, we understand that as we start to build out these new interpretive schemes that everybody is not gonna be ready for that. I mean, it's interesting because I shared earlier that we've got a lot of feedback. Well, all of that hasn't been positive, depending on what you're, what you call positive. Some of it's been, "well, why are you doing this, and why are you doing that?" For example, one of our museums, who's really leaned in on making sure that the enslaved voices

have been raised and we're starting to decenter the slave holders of that particular house has gotten feedback from volunteers and maybe some public saying, "well, why are you trying to convert such and such museum into a black history museum?" Well, the unfortunate implication of that question is that, that means we were a white history museum then and are we okay with that? So we had to really lean in and interrogate those notions with good historical evidence and very keen and strategically organized tours. So that's when we've been doing and we're engaging people in conversations about this. We're not trying to shame anyone, we're not, we don't want to do that. We don't find any value in that at all. We find value in all feedback, whether we deem it negative or positive, it doesn't matter, we want to answer, we want to spark dialogue. Because at the end of the day, we feel like we're doing this for the community and the community gets to be served through our interactions. And, conversely, I mean, we've gotten, when we sent out some social media posts to tell people we were open, one of the things that we learned was that we really didn't do all that we could to talk to people about how we were making some of these changes to interpretive schemes. So, of course now we were sending out these social media posts to people who have now been reading for at least fifteen months, some of them fifteen years, about how, you know, you're not supposed to do certain events on, on a plantation space, and so if they saw something that was sent out by our social media that didn't meet that criteria that people are now being awakened to then, you know, quite frankly, we got lit up. And so, we then took that as another opportunity to engage those people who, who made those comments and had those critical questions and really talk to them and say "hey, you know, we hear you, loud and clear, and this is what we're doing, and what do you think we could do better. In what ways can we engage you and your community? Why don't you come on by and see what we're up to now?" And, it's just been a great opportunity to be able to really lean in and

help people understand this idea of an apolitical public historian is not, does not exist. Everybody takes a stance. What we want to do, is we want to create an exhaustive experience so people are immersed in it and you can come up with your own convictions based on historical evidence.

Q: And, in that regard, what are some of the biggest challenges you face in doing that work and, and then maybe the flip side of that, what's some of the greatest rewards in approaching that work like that?

Eaton-Martinez: Yes. I think that the biggest barrier is to really engage and inform some of our more traditional visitors in what we're up to. And that's what we've been doing. It hasn't been incredibly difficult in the sense that anybody has gone to great extremes to stop what we're doing, because to me, that would be difficult, right? Because then we got to deal with it in a whole different way. It's just difficult sometimes, of course, having these conversations which to some of us may seem to be commonsensical. But, for others it's very difficult because they've been socialized to think one way for so long, it doesn't matter how educated and intelligent they are. They just have leaned in on this one way for so long. And the idea behind some of our interpretive schemes and the way we've been approaching exhibition development and partnering is that we want people, we want to help train our audiences to, to be critical and analytical but with a nuanced lens that everything is not monolithic. You can create these buckets if you wish, but you're only going to create just another division within the larger scheme that we've been already been dealt with. So we want to try to avoid that by framing questions and provocative questions throughout our historical tours. We want to avoid that by really giving equal voice to our partners with whom we co-create programs or co-curate exhibitions that we're

not trying to take over. We're not doing partnerships from a paternalistic view. That we're not doing, that we're actually acting as co-stewards and not co-owners because there is a difference, and explaining to them what that difference is. I think what has been different for us is that we've been so clear and dedicated to our vision, although it may not be all spelled out, line for line just yet as we continue to develop, but we've been so clear and consistent with it, the people are starting to buy in. The people are starting to at least be open to what we've done and time will tell to see how they've been, how they'll be convicted later.

Q: And is that related to what you see as kind of the greatest rewards in doing this work?

Eaton-Martinez: Yeah, I think that is part of it. But, I also think the, the greatest reward also is to see some of our, our freedom fighters and stakeholders of this county, who we've been able to work with see the changes and be heartened by that. Seeing people I know have fought so long for those voices to cosign on what we've been doing and to really tell us things like I've always wanted. There's this one person, he's a descendent of one of these slave families at one of our sites, and he's, now we have a new manager there that's doing some great critical thinking and progressive work, and his family's story has always been sort of on the margins of the larger interpretive scheme of the house. Now, this director's bringing it to the center and giving equal voice with the slave holding family and it's interesting because now this gentleman is telling us how that he's always wanted it, right? So the thing was that we didn't reach out. It's not like we never talked to him. We talked to him plenty of times. The gentleman has had reunions at that space, so we've engaged. We've engaged, but we never asked those type of questions, and we never asked those type of questions because we were acting, we were engaging that gentleman

and his family through the lens of like a paternalistic partnership. You know, we are this commission, and we own this property, and we're going to invite you to tell your little story, or your story, and then that's it. Now we're like hey, you are partners. We are co-stewards in this struggle together and now we can start to decenter dominant culture and really bring up the voices in a way that it's supposed to have been brought up.

Q: Great. So, a little bit of a different question: how has your museum work evolved to meet the demands of this kind of ever-changing modern world, especially now in the age of Covid-19?

Eaton-Martinez: Well, you know, we did a lot of the virtual programming and we learned a lot about ourselves and something that I really wanted to do pre-Covid, and I think we've had a lot of hesitation because I guess we didn't have to? Some people felt we didn't have to do those type of things. But then when we were sort of, you know, put in the position where we had to, it was amazing what we produced, quite frankly. It was amazing to see how, how far our audience was willing to come from to engage with us on these programs. For example, we worked with Joe McGill from the Slave Dwelling Project, you know. He came to us in 2019 and, you know, we did the traditional in-person program with him at one of our sites. We had 150 people come, which at least, up until that point, the most he has ever seen in person. But I think he was floored by, was that was the most people of color come to a site, which was really an interesting feedback to hear from him. Fast forward to 2020 and, you know, we can't do these in-person things anymore. We brought in a production team of some folks who used to work at CNN and we did a really high-res, high quality live stream. We brought in Joe and we had him just, him and one of our staff members in talking about the legacies of the enslavements. Our staff

member, Marvin-Alonzo Greer, just interviewed him and talked about it. Then we fielded questions from people who were, who were joining us live and it was great. And, we had like 400 people, you know, come to that online. So we were, you know, alright, we went from 150 to 400 people, that's great. The next night, we did, we extended it and we switched roles a little bit. We made Joe become the moderator, then we invited Rico Newman, who is one of our elders from our, our indigenous nation, Piscataway nation, and that went from 400 to 4,000. And so then we understand hey, these are new audiences. People care about these programs and are edified by these programs above and beyond our geographic region. So that was a wonderful discovery to make. Really, just, you know, again, we're doing this work in Prince George's County. We're competing with the National Park Service, we're competing with the Smithsonian, and all these other wonderful museums and institutions, and it's wonderful to see that type of confirmation and affirmation, quite frankly, from all the people who were coming to tell us how much they enjoyed the program. So, for us, it's been great to see that type of growth. But really, I want to say one more thing is that when we got to hire new managers, what we also did was, we were very intentional about the type of leader we wanted. You know, we did not acquiesce to the traditional HR jargon that usually is involved with these job descriptions. We actually said what we wanted. You know, revolutionary, right? We actually said what we wanted and listed our pillars, and we got the most amazing applicants from literally all over the nation, right? And so, you know, people are thinking, you know, people only travel across the nation to come to work for the Smithsonian and the National Park Service. Not so. I had people come from California, we had people come from Missouri, we had people come from Virginia. We had people from all over because we said what we wanted and the people responded.

Q: That's wonderful. I want to return to the Association of African American Museums, AAAM, which you spoke about a little bit and talk, maybe you could tell us a little bit more about your experience and history with the organization and your relationship to it today.

Eaton-Martinez: Well I have to say, I attribute my connection to AAAM to two people. One is John W. Franklin and the other one is Deborah Mack. And, if it wasn't for those two individuals, I would not be in the know. And thank God to Dr. Mack, who invited me to speak to the first one that I went to, which was the one in Memphis. So I guess that was in 2015, 2016. And it's been a love affair ever since. It is almost magic, the feeling, the connections that you make at the Association of African American Museums. As I stated earlier, you guys can figure out that I am on, involved with a lot of these different associations, and they all have served a great purpose in my life, but AAAM is something different. Something very special about the members, very special about its history, understanding that the founders were these grassroots scholars and activists who really stood strong for the black experience, providing these types of, you know, these tours, these historical programs that really continue to influence people, even today and see all these organizations of different cultures, including predominantly white institutions, now lean in on, on community first; understand that black museums have been doing that for half a century. It's just amazing to see that legacy. When I went, you know, to Memphis and I got to see and visit the museums and meet the people, I have built friendships and mentorships and mentees that I still hold on today and even through these last two years of virtual conferences where we were really concerned and quite devastated that we would lose some of that homecoming feeling, I feel like we have done a really good job of maintaining that as much as possible, considering, you know, the dire situation of our country and our world. And I'm

certainly looking forward to what we get into in a couple of weeks with the conference. But I'm very much looking forward to what we can get into in Miami next year.

Q: So you're chairing this year's conference. How long have you been on the board?

Eaton-Martinez: I joined the board July of 2020, so just about one year.

Q: Alright. Now, you mentioned Deborah Mack and John W. Franklin, which leads me to another question about the people who've impacted you from AAAM and the black museum field and if you might say something about them? About, you know, Deborah Mack and John W. Franklin specifically or those people who were most impactful on you and why?

Eaton-Martinez: Oh boy, you done...you gonna have to, alright. This is going to be a long one. So John Franklin. I came to the Smithsonian. He accepted me with open arms from the, because I came from the National Park Service to the Smithsonian, and for people to know, John Franklin, he is all-everything to everyone and so I always get a lot of colleagues in the National Park Service who knew him intimately. So, when they knew I was leaving that agency to come to the Smithsonian, it was probably the top name that was given to me and I reached out to him without hesitation. He opened his arms, and he treated me with a lot of love and care and allowed me to really dig into the institutional knowledge that he has of the Smithsonian. So it was great. With Dr. Mack, she was actually on the panel, I can't remember what conference it was, but it was her and actually Claudine Brown. And, I know Claudine Brown because I met her at that point already, I had not met Dr. Mack yet. And, saw both of them engaging these two powerful women

speaking truth to power as they, they just had no choice, that's all they know how to do. And, I got to meet Dr. Mack and, again, she opened her arms to me and I was really intrigued with the work, especially around strategic partnerships. Because to me, I feel like that's, that's the core of my work to really collaborate with internal alliances and external alliances and she has just done so much in the field around that. And, and it shows through all of her affiliations to different associations that she belongs to and she's impacted and so she's been great. I've had the, actually Claudine Brown, you know, I think about her all the time. I mean, she's another one who was another name that was given to me when I was leaving the National Park Service. You know, she was the assistance secretary of education and access. She had a small, storied career at the Smithsonian, had kinda gone back and forth, I know she worked at the Nathan Cummings Foundation for a while as well, before she came back to the Smithsonian before she left us, left this Earth. And, I miss her calmness, her knowledge, her encouragement, I mean, all these people had always instilled in me and led me to believe that I was a leader and that I would be a strong leader in this field, and it was because of their encouraging words and opportunities that they gave me, I began to develop as such. I can't leave out folks like Lonnie Bunch, who, again, always opens his door. I mean, you know, course a little bit hard now that he's Secretary, but even then, I've gotten to be, I've gotten able to sit with him and talk to him and he's always been great. People like Spencer Crew, always been great. I love, I love the fact that when we were in the Hampton, I was sitting there talking to Amina Dickerson. (Laughs) It was like Amina Dickerson here, and like Thelma Golden right there, and Sandra Jackson-Dumont right here...it was just, I mean, those types of conversations only happen in that space. I promise you, I go to a lot of these conferences, and I have had some great, great conversations there, but nothing like that. Nothing like that. And so, it's been awesome to meet these folks, hearing from Sam Black,

and all the work that he's done. And of course my current colleagues now on the board, I'm enriched by all of them, and so it's been an outstanding experience for me.

Q: So what do you see as the future for the field? What's your vision?

Eaton-Martinez: You know, I got an opportunity to kind of play around with that question. I guess it's four years ago now. The American Alliance of Museums asked me to write an article and it was by, it was a whole effort done by Elizabeth Merritt, who is the Director of the Center for the Future of Museums for the American Alliance of Museums. So what she did was she basically took over an issue of the museum magazine, it's published by AAM, and she wanted all the people to write articles in the future. And so, what I chose to write about was how I saw museums as a place for racial healing and truth of reconciliation. I chose to see the museums as not just sites of social action, but sites of transformation. Where people can come in and have these experiences and immerse themselves fully in what it is to be a certain type of identity and to have the context, the history, and the culture, and the science that makes people are who what they are. And, for me, what the future holds is museums being this type of space where people can come in and have a brave conversation about difference and, in the spirit of conciliation and justice. And then, when we have museums take on that role, this whole idea of reparations won't be so, it won't be madness to people anymore. Because, at the end of the day, you're going to see me as human, and then you're going to understand, now that you see me as human, you're going to understand how important it is to make me whole again. So the idea of reparations, reconciliation, and justice for any particular group or groups won't be foreign and won't be such a radical thing anymore. It'll just be the right thing.

Q: Great. Last question, any recommendations for people who want to enter into this work and any other closing comments or thoughts?

Eaton-Martinez: Yeah, I mean, what you waiting for? Come on. We want you, we need you. We want to build you up, we want to understand what your goals are. We want you, to help you think about museums more broadly. There's a lot of transferable skills from other sectors and other interests that I think people are not in the know, that are really important in museum work. So let's have conversations about that. Let's talk about how literally not to wait anymore. Like, some people are telling me that "well, I didn't join this such and such conference because I didn't take Dr. Luckett's Intro to Museums class yet." Don't wait. Are you interested in museums? We'll find a way for you to get engaged with it, whether you come through AAAM or other conferences or other associations, there are so many ways for you to know, you can volunteer. You can intern. Or you can just sit down and have conversations with people like us who love this work. And, I guarantee you, if you give us an opportunity, we'll soften your heart to it. Because it's just an incredible labor of love for all of us.

Q: Thanks for that. Any closing thoughts or anything you think that we missed that we need to discuss, that you'd like to add?

Eaton-Martinez: Register for the conference? (Laughs) If you see this before August 4th. If not, you know, just think broadly. Everything, all the work that we do in museums don't only occur in institutions with that word in its title. There's cultural centers. There's galleries. Sometimes

it's just a corporation, like Coca-Cola has its own museum. There's all kinds of spaces and places where people do museology that are not necessarily a museum centered space. And so just think broadly and cast a wide net.

Q: Well thanks Omar. This has been great. Absolutely perfect. I really appreciate you. And, yeah, thanks for joining us today and being a part of this project.

Eaton-Martinez: Aw man, it's my pleasure. I can't wait to see how everything turns out for you guys.