

A Conversation About Race

Reflections by Lee Roy Berry Jr. and Dan Shenk at Goshen Art House for Goshen Resilience Guild—October 11, 2018

[Begin conversation video; transcript below by Dan Shenk]

Phil Metzler

So we're going to go ahead and continue then with the conversation this evening. Thank you again, Dan, for making ... my introduction of Lee Roy a lot easier with your comments towards the end.

Lee Roy has been here in Goshen practicing as a professor of political science at Goshen College and serving the community as an attorney at present; he has been here for almost 50 years as a resident of Goshen.

I certainly haven't known Lee Roy that long, although I've known him about as long as I've known my wife through their friendship over the years, and so I've appreciated that connection and have been really grateful for the chance to see how you have served the community in many ways here.

We had the privilege of sitting down earlier this week and chatting for a while about some of the potential talking points or ideas that we might want to touch on here this evening, but given the fact that we have this presentation to reflect on, I first wanted to just give you the opportunity to comment on anything that has stood out from the presentation to you and just really leave it open for you to take this wherever you would prefer.

Lee Roy Berry Jr.

Yeah, I just briefly ... Of course Dan said some things that I hadn't heard before, but ... I was basically familiar with it. I think that what is significant for me is that, I mean, we were quite elated, you know, after the passage of this resolution. I mean, it was extraordinary! But then of course you recognize that, as in all things in American society over the question of

race, it's going to be a pushback, and ... it's some kind of retrenching, and we've seen that subsequently to that event.

There has been pushback. People thought that you went too far and so on, and I ... think that is the way race is dealt with in the United States. I mean, you can see the pattern: The Civil War was supposedly (was supposed to) ... it was to resolve this question of slavery, and you're all familiar with "Lincoln," the Spielberg movie—how Lincoln was really **adamant** about we're going to get this 13th Amendment.

He did it, and just a couple of decades afterwards the Supreme Court **limited** the impact of the 13th Amendment, along with the 14th **and** 15th amendments (the interpretation of it), so ... the country returned to what a writer in the 20th century would later call "slavery by another name." And so we have ... this process: this progress/retrenchment pattern, and the question of course is ... What are we facing **these** days?

Now as I think that with the ascendancy of Kavanaugh to the bench we are in one of those retrenching **periods**. I mean, the attack on the Voting Rights Act, I mean ... with Clarence Thomas's decision helping to do that, it's, you know, it's ironical, and so those are the kinds of things that we are going to be continuously facing. But I **also** think that there's a profound (what shall I call her?) I'm not sure what it is ...

I think about the statement that Frederick Douglass once made in a speech that he gave ... I think it was on the occasion of the 4th of July where he was called upon to speak (and some of you are familiar with that speech) in which he said, you know, he reminded white Americans that black people, their destiny, was intricately bound up with, inseparable **from**, the destiny of white people that we will go forward as a testimony for or against this people, and I think that that is what American history is about, and ... Goshen's stories are kind of like a microcosm.

The pictures that you saw of the policemen in their regalia, ... looking as, you know ... law-enforcement guys, what-not, that understanding ... of what Goshen was about—and the statement ... (1936) that "there are no Negroes here" (it's got 2.5% of non-American whites and then 97.5 whites), ... and so we have no crime here (very little or no crime), suggesting of course that crime comes with black people.

That is a rejection in a sense of America itself, because African Americans, whether we admit it or not (many of us do), is that we have been created by the society. This is who we are, and you will see that nationalism reflected in many, many declarations by African Americans. The fact is that with the creation of the United States ... the creation of our [African American] identity ... it's on the same trajectory, you see.

And so ... my view of the matter is that ... when white people in the United States can come to say, to embrace the idea of Negritude as being synonymous with America, **then** we will have crossed over. Until that time, it's a battle within one **self**—its own identity.

That is ... my reflection on it, and I think that Goshen's ... statement itself was exemplary because we found a significant ... A critical majority of our leaders, at that moment in time, found ... themselves **able** to cross over. So that's what I would say ...

Phil

... That's fine. This is an opportunity ... This is why we wanted to have you here ... That was something that Dan emphasized from the start, that if we're going to **do** this presentation, that we needed to have this dialogue, and that dialogue needed to include **both** of you who ... having collaborated to help make the resolution happen.

I guess you, in the statement that you read or that had been quoted from ... your remarks to the council [CRC], you know you talked about freedom as this fundamental value that compels us to respond—both to the history and the need to address that history here now.

What is it about the nature of our response, in terms of how we embrace that history and in terms of how we move forward, that you would **hope** can be seen in that response **today**?

Lee Roy

Well, I think that historically Americans have defined the United States as a white man's country, OK? That's on the one hand. On the other hand,

there's this monument that the French (but somehow or another, I'm not sure what possessed them to do this, but ... I don't know the entire story) they gave us this monument, and it stands in the harbor out there ... (unless the hurricane blows it down; I don't think it ever has), but it's still out there in the harbor with those words, "Give me your" ... and so on ... You know, sometimes I wonder if [Trump aide] Stephen Miller has read that and what it means ... That is ... the contradiction, that is ... the **paradox** the United States would deign to assert:

"We are a society unlike any other in the world. All others were created out of the indigenous forces warring and what-not, but **we** were created as a new, a **new** society from the beginning. We are going to create a nation that's going to be **exemplary**, and it's going to be **different**, and in addition to that, we are **God-ordained**. I mean ... we are destined to be this." So you say, "This is who we are." On the other hand ... as a black person, I take that to be serious stuff. It's a promise.

Martin Luther King said it, you know, a blank check, you know, we've got this check; we want to cash it in now. This is a negotiable instrument here, and so we're asking for justice. That's always been the rhetorical refrain from the black community, I think: "What about us? You've forgotten something, haven't you?" ... for all your professions ...

So ... I think, or my sense is that as white people define themselves, or ... they conceive of themselves as being American and what constitutes genuine Americanism, if it does not include black people or people of color, it is deficient. And ... it portends trauma and conflict and lack of resolution in capacity to move beyond.

And we become subject, I mean, other societies have had this kind of problem before, and it will continue. I'm thinking of the Balkans. I don't think in the Balkans you've ever had any concept that we're going to be ... this is one union—and this kind of universalism ...—that we profess here, so you could become ... the society here could become similar to what you find in those kinds of countries: Balkanization and conflict rife [with] interethnic strife and conflict but if you want to **become** a cohesive society, white people must ... They must embrace the concept of America as a society of people of all colors.

It is, I think, a unique struggle for white people. Black people, we have our struggles too of course: Louis Farrakhan is one of those that represents ... that reality ... but the black Muslims ... their own identity has been forged because of the lack of resolution, the inability of white America to, as I've said, cross over. So I think that is the struggle that we have. That's what white people must do.

We black people (we're like anybody else). We ... are biased; we have our own racism, OK? Black Africans helped to get us over here. Slavery was a collusion between black Africans and white Europeans. I mean, that's the story, but I think that ... our job as African Americans is to continue to assert our identity and yet at the same time take the attitude that Martin Luther King Jr. gave to us in his life and in his death as an example of how we should go forward. That's a lot of words. I'm sorry ...

Phil

One other aspect of this evening that I want to take a moment to acknowledge, which is on the back of your bulletins or your programs, is the effort to take a lot of the information in the research that helps us understand this history and these dynamics better that Dan has compiled in ...the course of preparing for this evening—and organize it into an archive that can provide a foundation for people that want to dive in deeper and want to learn more moving forward.

And so we've been fortunate to have Nahshon Lora and Elijah Lora as interns from Goshen College working with us to try to help develop that archive and do a lot of that ...compiling and cataloging. That isn't quite ready; we hope to have it publicly ready soon on the page that's listed on the back, but they have been able to explore a lot of the materials themselves in the process of researching it, and I wanted to give them an opportunity to either identify any questions that have stood out to you that you want to take this opportunity to ask, or else we can open it up to any questions then that you might have for Lee Roy or Dan.

Elijah Lora

Thank you. I'm Elijah. One thing that I encountered when I was looking through a lot of this data was really ugly, nasty pieces of history, and one question that I have, that either of you could address, is: How you go about, not only engaging that history, but bringing it out and publicizing it in a way that allows people to be educated and not just turned off?

Dan Shenk

Well, it goes back in some way to what Mandela and Tutu said in '94 ...

It is so easy to turn a blind eye to what has happened before. And, you know, even several times as we were making our presentations [to the CRC, the GMA and the City Council], and we were being quoted in the newspaper and so forth, we got ... the retrenchment, we got the pushback of "Why are you dredging up all this ancient history? All this old stuff, you know, this was 40, 50 years ago or something?" ... Even at that initial meeting in November of 2014 with the CRC, there were at least one or two comments to that effect: "Why not just forget all this and move on?"

And what Mandela and Tutu said was that truth-telling precedes reconciliation, and these ugly, painful documents, these stories ... I mean, you can take it to another level, killings, including lynchings. These things ***happened.***

And I mentioned Martinsville as the most researched town by Dr. Loewen, and the reason Martinsville had even more notoriety than Goshen was because in 1968 an African American young woman named Carol Jenkins was selling encyclopedias to put herself through Indiana University just south of there, but she made the mistake of working a little bit too long in this "sundown town."

She saw this car following her, and she got worried, and so she went into this house and knocked on the door of this white couple, and they had, I think, maybe bought some encyclopedias from her earlier or at least had a nice chat with her. And she was concerned, and it was getting toward dark, and so she asked for refuge there, and they were kind enough, and they were ready to be with her and help her in any way they could for, like, a half hour.

But then she felt like she had imposed on them long enough, so she went, she went out, and was heading to her car (just parked a couple blocks away), and one of the men in the car got out and stabbed her to death with a screwdriver, and they found her body just a half a block from this couple's home because she had violated Martinsville's "sundown," you know, legacy and policy.

So there are ... things that have happened, even in Indiana, maybe sometimes **especially** in Indiana. I think the last Indiana lynching was in 1930—in Muncie. So it's not unique to the South, and that's one thing I think I've discovered in my research is that racism is alive and well, you know, all over the country, all over the world, and what we can do is try to light a candle instead of curse the darkness.

Lee Roy

Well ... it's kind of hard to ... know what to do in a given situation. Let me put it this way. I think there are a lot of white people who are put on the defensive when we black people talk about lynchings and talk about how we've been treated. The historical record is clear. I mean, you can't argue with it.

I just recently in, I think, in Birmingham, Alabama ... There's a guy by the name of Bryan Stevenson (you heard of him?), but Bryan has helped to put together this memoriam, memorial, on lynching, right in the heart of Dixie ... in Montgomery, yeah, ... Alabama, and those stories are not going to go away. They are part of the fabric of history.

It's almost as if, I think, white people lived and performed and acted as though there was no ... there would be no repercussions—everything could be forgotten—but life isn't **lived** that way, and so I think that one ... needs to tell these stories. I think we can try to be as sympathetic as we can. And yet, as Bryan Stevenson is ... telling it; he's understanding of the pain that it causes, but it ...

Listen, if you're going to embrace the U.S. as ... the land of the free and the home of the brave, and all of those **good** things, then you must embrace the **downside**. You see, you can't play with history like that. You must be honest. And so I'm glad that we have a press, a vibrant press, that

forces us to recognize that people aren't always pretty, that the story is not always angelic. It's devilish. And so I think that we can have empathy for people, but we must tell the story.

Dan

Just to add something that I heard you say, Lee Roy, in our planning meeting yesterday. The phrase **paradoxical reality** really struck me when you mentioned that. You said, "This country has been a paradoxical reality for a long time," and it **continues** to be.

Lee Roy

And I think that is uniquely American. And why do I think that? Because I don't recall the British ever saying that we are going to ... we're going to be open arms to everybody. Rather it's: "Her Majesty's government shall be pervasive over the entire world, and we shall spread very civilization: civilization, I say, you know, **real** civilization." ... The British don't promise that. The French had their ... civilizing tendencies in Vietnam and ... in other places—*mission civilisatrice*. And the Japanese, I don't think **ever** tried to ... They wouldn't even think, **dream**, of trying to suggest that their societies are open to everybody.

I don't know any society that **is**—that makes this profession the way the Americans **do**, OK? That is our unique **role** in ... the world. We're having trouble right now with a president who says, "**No**, it's America first." You know, I mean, these contradictions ... People ... from Latin America said, "But look, we look to you, we look to you ... you're the example." So, you know, **why**? "Because you taught us to expect that of you." It's a promise, OK? That's ... the point, I mean ...

I ... don't know how we can say it—how one can say it any other way. That's the reality. To the extent that we can embrace jazz, the creation of a music, a uniquely American music. If you watch Ken Burns, for example, his jazz ... There's a place in one of those episodes where he says, you know (in New York City or some other place), the big-time music intellectuals ... are gathering together, trying to figure out what is the course of ... American music, what it will take, what **course** it will take, and

of course they were thinking of Brahms and the European tradition and all of that.

And, he says, in the meantime, Louie Armstrong is playing his trumpet in New Orleans, and **that** is the music that America is uniquely known for. That is the genre, you see? It was Satchmo Armstrong ... He was a **genius**. Wasn't Beethoven but Armstrong. Now the ... point of the question is: Can ... white Americans embrace Satchmo the way they've embraced Beethoven? That is the question.

And I say, you know ... I think we're stronger for it if we **can**. Look at all the creativity in this country—from the various sources of people who've come from all parts of the world here. I'm amazed at it ... every time I turn on the television or something, you know, I'm seeing all these people: ... amazing stories.

Bennet Omalu (you ever heard of him?) ... Bennet Omalu has taught us something about football (American-style football), even though he didn't know what it was in the beginning, when he did the surgery on Mike Webster's brain, and he found ... out about CTE, and ever since then American football has been undergoing change. A **Nigerian!** That's ... the reality. You got it right. Diversity. Something good about diversity. Let us **embrace** it.

Nahshon Lora

No, thank you. We both appreciate it; I think everybody here really appreciates it. I'm Nahshon (but just to reiterate).

Throughout the work and looking at all the documents that Dan gave us, one thing that stuck out to me, even though these were ugly times (and some of the documents that we did encounter were very ugly), we also did encounter documents of **allies** and people doing the work of diversity: churches. At one point we found a newspaper article from Ray Keim (who is father of professor Paul Keim at Goshen College, if you guys are familiar) talking about how Goshen needs to ...

Dan

... a letter to the editor, yeah, that Ray Keim wrote back in the early '60s.

Nahshon

... to include everybody in Goshen and to welcome diversity, and Dan had mentioned, and Lee Roy can confirm, that he came in the late '60s (correct?) to Goshen ...

Lee Roy

'69.

Nahshon

... yeah, and unlike some ... people, including Ray Keim, he had no choice but to, you know, experience some of these things. As white people, you can just ignore it, or you have a choice to say, "Well, it's not my problem," so my question is to Lee Roy, because we've heard a lot of general, OK, this is what happened, this: What kept you in Goshen doing some of this work, and what kept you fighting this good fight—instead of just saying, "You know what, I'm going to go to Elkhart, or I'm going to go to South Bend"?

Lee Roy

Well ... in a way I did, as you suggest, I did make a separation from Goshen College. I struggled at the college on the faculty, OK? The subject matter—government, political and politics—was not something that you would concentrate on if you want to really have a permanent fixture at Goshen College; it just doesn't happen, OK? And I felt ... as an outsider there for the entire period that I was there.

About 25 years of that 40-year period I worked part-time, and then I did my full-time practice, and the only time that I had that was really recreational times were on Friday evening. Now I was going ... because I taught four

classes a year, and ... my attitude was that this institution belonged to the people who created it. It was my choice if, I mean, could have gone someplace else.

One of my professors at Notre Dame suggested I not go down that path. Once I had done it, well, then I decided I needed to ... make a change because Goshen College ... I was not a central part ... I was not one of the critical faculty members ... of the college, OK? And I could understand that. I was negotiable, and so that's why I used what resources that were available to me to chart a legal career, so that I could take care of my family once the doors of future college teaching had been closed to me, and so I ...

Once the children came, then this was *home*. My daughter—youngest daughter—she *loved* Goshen ... You know, this is home, man. We built a house, and so that's ...

Dan

Tell that story of when you were coming back ...

Lee Roy

Oh yeah, we were coming back from law school one Christmas ... break, and our youngest daughter, Anne (some of you know Anne), and she was ... We were getting close to Elkhart County. She was saying ... "When are we getting to **Goshen**?" And I just smiled at her; I said, "You love Goshen, don't you?" She said, "Yes," and then she began to chant, "Goshen, Goshen, Goshen!"

This is home. They were born in the hospital over here, at the hospital down the road there ... Their friends were here, you know, this is the place ... So that's what kept me here. Because I wanted to see my children grow. I grew up as a migrant farmworker. We moved from place to place, and I wanted to see my children have a permanent place, and we have ... They've ... grown up in the same house ... we've been in the same place for 40 years.

Dan

I was reaching for the mike because Lee Roy told that story (just before the City Council voted to approve the resolution) of his daughter's love for Goshen and how, yes, Goshen has this history, but there is also an **aspect** to the community that had connected with your children and, you know, sort of illustrated that generational change **can** happen. I mean, it doesn't happen overnight, and things have been slow and tortuous in many ways, but your children grew up in a different Goshen from say 30, 50, 75 years before that.

Lee Roy

Yeah, it's ... ambivalence, ambiguity; that's the reality.

Nahshon

Thank you.

Phil

I think we might take one, maybe two, questions here, depending on the responses, and then ... I hope you'll give the grace of letting us wrap up, despite having many other questions and discussions that could ... take place yet this evening, but we do want to, you know, be responsible to Art House and make sure we're getting out of here at a reasonable time, as well as leave at least a small window open for anyone that wants to come and talk to Dan and Lee Roy ...directly afterwards—and at least get a glimpse of some of the materials. So I see Evan, and I see this gentleman in the front ...

Eber Rice-Smucker

I was just going to comment about ... if people are saying, "Why are we bringing up this old stuff? And let's get over it and be done with it."

Mennonites have been celebrating for 450, almost 500, years now the terrors that their forefathers had gone through, so, you know, a few years of remembrance is certainly in order.

Dan

Thank you.

Myrna Burkholder

Are you aware of a racial tension in Goshen now? And I just want to say I have some neighbors, an interracial couple, whose house was vandalized about a week or so ago.

Lee Roy

I am, you know, I work an awful lot, you know. I'm just consumed with day-to-day kinds of things, and I don't follow the news very much as I should, and, no, I wasn't aware of any particulars, OK? But ... I guess it doesn't surprise me, especially in this climate, OK?

I mean, I can ... recite some personal stories when my wife and I started to build our house, which is out to the west and south—on the southwest side of town—some ... 45 years ago when we started building, and so the police, coming back from there ... We went out on a Sunday to take a look at how the house was coming. I showed it to some friends of mine—a college classmate and his wife.

And on the way back I looked up, and I saw in the rearview mirror a police officer (a Goshen City police officer) following me, and he followed me to the place where we were then living, which was a house that we were renting from Goshen College on College Avenue, and I saw him pass me by, and then I got on the phone, and I called up ... the police department, and I said, "Why were you following me?" And he was honest, and he told me. He said, "We got a call saying that there was this black guy who was out there driving drunk" ...

Those people who know me, really know me, know that I don't drink, and that's part of the reason why, but ... that doesn't surprise me.

What I try to do is be very careful, OK? And what I did try to teach my, especially to my son, was to be very careful, all right? You always have to be. I grew up in the South when Emmett ... I was a couple years younger than Emmett Till, and we (the black guys about our age) didn't have to be reminded ... about who he was. We never forgot it. You ... listen to the guys who are my age—75, 76, 77 years of age—they know who Emmett Till was because (especially those of us from the South) ... So, no, it doesn't surprise me. What shall we **do** about it?

We must rely upon the police and authorities to be ... vigilant and to be fair, but **that's** part of this ... story, you know? Had I ... If I had been born in other circumstances perhaps I would've sought out another place to live, another country to live in. But this is home, and, you know, that's the way it is. The trouble is ... The ... question is whether my grandchildren ... Will they ... see a different America? Perhaps they will. I hope that they will. But this is an ongoing saga. The United States, I mean, to "make America great again," that is an illusion, OK? It will never happen in that sense. It will only happen, as I've said before, if the United States can affirm **itself**, its own history, the good **and** the bad. If it **can** do that, if its people find within them to **embrace** that ... I mean, I ... think the founders of this nation, man, were ... insightful people. They were smart ... I was thinking about that; they were smart people ... And here they were in this kind of **synthetic** experience: "We're going to create a **nation**, man!" I mean, it's going to ... and they were bright, and they ... had all these great things, and Thomas Jefferson came out, and he was going to, I mean, the Declaration of Independence.

But then there was a caveat, OK? It doesn't include black folks, and they tried to—and maybe ... a little over 100 years later (when was it? 1787, 1789, ... not quite 100 years later) then the Supreme Court came out and it's going to stamp ... its approval and was going to ratify this, and it all came apart, OK? That is a tragedy, and so wise men and women too have come to embrace this idea of the American experience. It is broad. It is varied. It is diverse, and that is the lesson, if we learn it.

I mean ... I'll be 75 pretty soon. I'm going over and looking over on the other side now, thinking about things which are to come, OK? The question

is the **future**, and amidst all of this technology, especially this technology of information, transformation, I mean, think about it, all of you gray hairs in here, you know, you're amazed at what's happening. But then lurking in back of all of that is that awesome technology of destruction, and **that** is the question: the big one. I tremble, I do, but like Barack Obama, I mean, he's a young man ... When I listen to a guy like that, I'm ashamed of myself, you know ... This cat is **something else**. I mean, he has the ability to hope and to conduct himself as a man of hope does ... He despairs, but we don't know about it so much. He's always hoping, and he's **believing** in America.

That is the immigrant. That is the son of a father who came to this country and a mother whose ancestors came to this country, and ... that is the stuff that makes me think hard—and to continue to **hope**—and I hope it's ... (how do you say, ... when it's a disease if it's catching?) yeah, **contagious**. That's the word.

Phil

Thanks again for your understanding and your patience here with us this evening. We will wrap up. Thank you very much, Lee Roy; thank you very much, Dan, for your work and for sharing with us this evening.

[End conversation video]

Postscript 1

Toward the end of the October 11 program, three hands in the audience were raised: by Eber Rice-Smucker, Myrna Burkholder and Evan Miller. Because of time constraints, only Eber and Myrna were able to speak during the public portion of the event.

Later Dan Shenk communicated with Evan Miller, a member of the Goshen Community Relations Commission. Evan told Dan about a book titled *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in*

America (2008), by Elliot Jaspin. Here is a synopsis, adapted from Amazon, of the book:

“Leave now, or die!” Those words—or ones just as ominous—have echoed through the past hundred years of U.S. history, heralding a very *unnatural* disaster: a wave of racial cleansing that wiped out or drove away black populations from many counties across the nation.

While we have long known about horrific episodes of lynching, primarily in the South, the story of racial cleansing has remained almost entirely unknown. These expulsions, always swift and often violent, were widespread in the period between Reconstruction and the Depression era (about 1870 to 1940).

In the heart of the Midwest and the Deep South, many whites rose up in rage, fear and resentment to lash out at local blacks. They burned and killed indiscriminately, sweeping entire counties clear of African Americans to make their area racially “pure.” Many of these counties remain virtually all-white to this day.

In *Buried in the Bitter Waters*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Elliot Jaspin exposes a deeply shameful chapter in the nation’s history—and one that continues to shape the geography of race in the United States.

Postscript 2

A personal encounter that I (Dan) had with Goshen’s reputation came soon after moving back here from Iowa in April 1986. At a block party that my wife and I hosted in our 13th Street backyard in May 1987, one of our neighbors suddenly began rhapsodizing about the “good old days” in the Maple City when “colored people” had to be out of town by sunset. He also complained about the influx of Hispanics and bemoaned the fact that Goshen wasn’t the way it used to be. Even though I had lived in Goshen from 1965 to 1978, this was the first time I had encountered Goshen’s “sundown town” legacy directly.