

Transcript of Interview with (interviewee's name)
Interview conducted by (your name) at (place), on (date)

Notes

DC:	Thank you for joining me today what is your name	
AK:	my name is George zeno	
DC:	thank you for coming First off I would like to know how long have you lived in this area	
AK:	so I've lived in Tacoma about two years I've I'm a research transplant from Seattle	
DC:	awesome where have you lived before	
AK:	so I am from originally from Louisiana and a town called Lake Charles and which is on the western side of the state it's probably the 4th largest city in the state Louisiana and then from there we moved up to Kent when I was about 9	
DC:	what brought you to this area	
AK:	So my parents divorced when I was really young, my father relocated to Seattle hoping to get a job at Boeing like everyone else did at that time and so we moved up to Seattle and was about nine	
DC:	I'd like to learn a little bit more about your cultural background what is something from your culture or homeland that you wish more people in this area practice	
AK:	sure so I am from as coming from Louisiana and coming from a French Creole family my mother was a Creole and which is a blending of Spanish French and African communities together sometimes German is considered in there as well but if you imagine the blending of people and language and food and you'd better understand what Creole is and that dynamic of being creole is a beautiful way of presenting life into one of the things I would love to have other people experience is our food our gumbo and rice and music or decide to go the the the the way we treat people which is about community and being a community focused is	
DC:		

<p>AK:</p> <p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>what I would really appreciate here and Tacoma seeing more of</p> <p>yeah that's that's that's really a powerful I'd like next next question I'd like to know is what's your experience with microaggressions in this community or in other communities</p> <p>well you know being African American I experience my progress is almost every single day and I think that's pretty hard for people to hear because they if you come from a dominant culture from primarily white culture you may not experience a microaggression so you may not feel the same way as other people feel an example of a microaggression that I experience every time I go shopping is when I walk through the parking lot of the mall you hear the clicks of doors being locked you hear people recycling making sure that that their car alarms are being set and it's my presence that makes them think that that's a microaggression because they've stereotyped my blackness over understanding who I am as an individual so they don't see me as a college educated homeowner contributor to to society they see me as a stereotype in their heads and so therefore they see see me as danger that's a microaggression so I hear doors locking clicking the click of door alarms and things like that quite a bit that's a really a simple microaggression that experience I've experienced many more that that's the one I would probably really other people that look like me can experience as well relate to</p> <p>do you feel a big difference between microaggressions and aggressions and how you feel about them</p> <p>the thing about microaggressions is a misnomer about that misnomer means that people may think that microaggression is micro means small so the aggression means something that is pushed on or are forced upon and so when people hear micro they think small the reality is is that every time a micro every time aggression happens it feels like a cut or sometimes people say it feels like a mosquito bite imagine experience that multiple times a day imagine you experiencing mosquito bite 100 times a day how are you gonna feel how would you how are you gonna react to that when it's the hundredth time someone has done something to you that day you're probably gonna react in ways that people who are on the receiving end think it's always done like like you're overwhelmed by that that person responds like but I it was only something add why are you reacting that way ohh we go through multiple microaggressions and that builds up to a point where you get a breaking point where people are like</p>	
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<p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>it's too much i can't deal with this so i'm going to react back to you and way that breaking point where people are like it's too much I can't deal with this so I'm going to react back to you in a way that does not make you feel good sometimes that's hard for people who don't look like me to experience back because it can be exhausting being a part of the minority oppress group and if you're experiencing multiple multiple times a day it can be overwhelming to the point where you feel like you need to last back out to protect yourself that's that's that's definitely powerful discrimination and oppression exists in various settings</p>	
	<p>can you share your personal experience of when you feel discrimination and or oppression in school your work or in the community</p>	
<p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>sure I have many examples to to give you but one of the ones that probably means the most to you as a student is that when I moved from Louisiana to to Washington state I did not speak the same English as you do I have a Creole background and so I spoke Creole English that means I have a different dialect of English than you would have growing up here on the West Coast and so when I moved from Louisiana to Kent the school district immediately said your dialect in English is not accepted here so we jokingly say I have a I had a swamp accent when I when I arrived right because I come from an area of swamps and alligators and all all those other creatures you can imagine coming from from a place like Louisiana and immediately the teachers thought well he doesn't really speak English I was speaking English but it was not the English that they wanted to hear and so they forced me into speech therapy and so this is what I sound like now it don't sound like it comes from Louisiana it don't sound like I have a southern accent or Louisiana accent which is different than the South but that that forcing of me going to speech therapy to give me a different dialect of English we'll tell you that that the system the education system around me dismissed who I was as a person as a human and said that it was not accepted that my voice was not welcomed they need to change my voice the way I projected my voice my dialect and that's to me it was discrimination I didn't know that until I went to college so when I went to college and I and I studied I have a social science degree and so when I said the anthropology I learned that there's there is an African American vernacular which means we have a different dialect the different imagination then put the predominant culture does the predominant white So what I was speaking as a Creole person</p>	

<p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>was never wrong which is different and that's hard for people to accept it because if you're not from the normal and environment of language and you're going to be seen as the outsider someone's different but the other as we call it and so that's challenging for someone to come who's young doesn't understand why other people want to tell you that you're different and what you're saying is wrong I was never wrong I was just different</p> <p>growing up feeling like your voice was getting silenced make you later now older and more experienced want to louden your voice or make other voices more heard that are different</p> <p>yeah for sure I think that we're now in an era where your lived experience means a lot that means that things that I've experienced in my life need to be translated to other people so that you understand what I've been through because if you just make assumption about what my life has been because you're looking at me through your own eyes through the way you see the world that's that's gonna challenge my reality because our true realities are never never even the same I'm from oppressed people I'm from a lower caste of people meaning that meaning that I am othered I am not part of the main group you are part of the main group and so you have privileges and rights that I've never had or have had to fight for or if you go back through history I've had to have amendments in our constitution to give me the rights that you were born naturally with and so when we look at that as a whole we have to better understand what is what is my responsibility as a person of who who comes from a press group to speak up and say you know what I have a different live experience than you do so your assumptions that you put on me are not real those are just in your imagination because you've never lived my life so you can't guess my reality I can tell you my reality is but if you don't believe my reality then you're gonna continue just assume that you're right</p> <p>on a brighter note who has been a hero for you on inspiration the civil rights and social justice front</p> <p>you know it would be really easy for me to point to all the big figures we know in life you know yeah just give you all the big figures we know life such as Martin Luther King and so on or Medgar Evers there's so many important people that have that we say are giants in our lives in fact what we talk about in our</p>	
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<p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>communities now is that we stand on the shoulders of giants meaning that there's these great people who came before us who are no longer alive or may still be alive who are our elders who are on the front line food to make change happen when I think about my own family history I think about my grandfather my grandfather was one of 13 children born into a white father who married a black Indian woman in Louisiana what and this is like 1915 when they when they got married and so when you understand that challenges the rest they took to to recognize our love together I see I see my my my grandfathers father and mother as my heroes because they they stood in the front of eight and said love wins and i continue to believe that every single day my grandfather's oldest brother every single day my grandfather's oldest brother was the first what they would call back then colored person was the first color person to be tried for murder of a white person and they say Louisiana and not to be convicted why because he defended his family from a sheriff and his hench men who tried to commandeer his horse and buggy and when we think about the the risk that they took to stand up and say no this isn't right you can't just take things from from us because you want to take from us you know shoots to the ground and he said no this is my wife and my baby and you can't you can't harm us because you just want something you want our horse and buggy and so so anyway so so he he's to trial for that for that and was successful in fighting for his rights his human rights and so when I think about here I think about him because he fought not only a justice system that was not built for him he fought an entire white supremacy he fought the Klan who are trying to lynch him and so when I think about heroes it's easy for us to look at Martin Luther King and and Evers and all these great civil rights heroes but I think about the people before them who stood up so that Martin Luther King could stand up because Martin Luther King was not the first he was in the middle of the journey and so I think about the people who stood up at the very beginning of it and restore lives some people did not make it and some others did</p> <p>I really appreciate you sharing that that's a it's a very moving story now if you can recall your childhood do you recall any experience or memory from your childhood where you learned a little bit about inequality</p> <p>for sure you know when we moved up from Louisiana to Seattle the Seattle area you can't particularly my parents you know worked for different different city governments right so my mom</p>	
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<p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>worked at the port of Seattle my dad worked for metro bus bus system in Seattle and you know they were the very first black professionals and in those arenas you know this is the 1970s there weren't a lot of black black folks in in the area who were working in these professional jobs I saw my mom be completely discriminated against because of her race and primarily because people didn't believe what she was saying that she was being harassed sexually harassed we now have me too movement to look at she didn't have that it was just her voice her word against a management system that was not built for her that wasn't ever going to champion her voice and so when she went through that experience she she stood up by herself I had to watch her go through all these trials and tribulations about what it means to speak truth to power meaning that she was never going to let herself be diminished to something smaller because of the people in front of her she stood tall and she said this is not right I'm being harassed and you should acknowledge this and you know what after after two or three years of this fighting she won you know and she helped change the way the port of Seattle operated and I'm very proud of her for standing up and saying talk because she put a lot at risk you know it's easy for to it's easy for people to dismiss out of work because of who you are your identity and and this is back in the 80s when you know we didn't have much of A from our family we grew up poor and so she risked a lot of things to speak up but she knew how important it was not only for being black but being for being a woman and and I'm very proud of her for for speaking out for that</p>	
<p>DC:</p>	<p>culture plays a big role in people's lives how do you identify ethnically</p> <p>you know part of the challenge we have is as being African American is that a lot of folks like me a lost your roots because slavery disrupts understanding of who you are there's only so much you can go back to in history and we don't have a we I come from an oral history background meaning that there wasn't a lot of writing going on as you can imagine slaves weren't meant to to be educated and so there's not a lot of writing of our own history of our own people so tracing our roots back has it's been a challenge I'm lucky that I come from a background where we actually have slave Diaries in my family where we can trace back my family ancestry to a certain point and and I think that that is a blessing in its own little way because we get rooted in our own identity wet of who we think we are that's not true for a lot of folks around us I'm lucky that I come from a place where in Louisiana where where my mother's side of the family is Creole</p>	

<p>AK:</p>	<p>my dad's found side of the family is descendants of slaves there are two different roles and I'm lucky to be able to to navigate both of those you know my dad's side of the family comes from a time a time where they they had to help the the shrimp industry they weren't picking cotton like most people think slaves did and and now the other side on my mom's side of the family you know they have that one little slice of slavery on their side but that they were on the sugar cane side of things so they weren't and the dangerous part of of the agriculture belt that most people understand so today I see myself as as as Afro Korea creole meaning that I come from an African background on my father's side but I recognize myself as Creole coming from blending of life on my mother side which is African Spanish French and European how how does that culture play a role in your life well it plays it plays a significant role in how how I see the world I see the world in a space where people should be collaborating together because they come from a people that is community based in that sense because of my ethnicity calls for that and I come from a language I come from a food come from away of life it's completely different than rest of America that's the beautiful thing about</p>	
<p>DC:</p>	<p>Louisiana especially the southern southern parts of Louisiana which are the French heritage parks we come from gumbo and jambalaya and it's poor boys things that or not imagine that any other space than the Louisiana and so I'm proud of that I'm proud coming from that and I'm it's important for me to share that with</p>	
<p>AK:</p>	<p>other people so that so my my ancestry continues to be passed down to the next generation</p>	
	<p>can you describe what tradition or practice that you have learned from your family</p>	
	<p>then sure you know you know part part of the that the tradition of being Creole is the food and the music you know we come from society go music zydeco music is that beautiful blend of bluegrass and and and country and Blues all wrapped up together and and I love being part of part of that scene and attending synagogue concerts and festivals because it reminds me of where it comes from same thing with food I come from a place where the food is unique and different than anywhere else in in in America you know you're not going to get gumbo outside of outside of Louisiana the way we make about a gumbo does exist in Mississippi and Alabama and to the Carolinas but there's something a little bit different than than the gumbo in Louisiana because we're French based and so we have a room that we own a room is this beautiful browned starter sauce that you make with</p>	

<p>DC:</p> <p>AK:</p>	<p>flour and fat and you just sit there for hours blending this on a cast iron skillet for two to three hours just to get it to the right blend before you start making your combo that's that's that's culture that's heritage that's dedication you know you can't get that anywhere else that coming from Louisiana</p> <p>thank you and then back to your childhood how would you describe your childhood and how does it differ from what you're seeing today and and experiences</p> <p>you know I'm lucky enough to have worked out to to work in education and so I've been able to continue to see how young people are being developed you know social emotional learning is really important now how do you relate to other people you know we're now in an era where I feel like in order for us to understand how to get people to connect together to not be polar opposites of each other fighting whatever it is that keeps us from being together that I rely on the that my old way of thinking and how where I come from and my childhood which is we had to rely on each other we had to rely on the ecosystem of other people helping each other to survive because when you come from an oppressed group especially a place like Louisiana where life is divided between colored and white right you're black or brown you're you're a person of color then you're white and it's very clearly defined right and so the white folks were not there for you they're there for money and so they separated you so they can still take your money right you go drink at this water fountain or you you have your lunch on this count you can't have your lunch at the counter have your lunch and then in a stool somewhere else but they still want your money so I come from a place where you actually have to learn how to navigate the world and the collective space where you actually have to rely on each other to survive I feel like that is true today where in order for us to better understand each other because right now we're in a in an era where where they're they're polar opposites right you could be left or the right you can be liberal or conservative they're just polar opposite of each other and they're constantly at war with each other and because we start seeing ourselves in our own identity as being tribal right you're part of me or you're not part of me and therefore I'm not going to love you because you're not you don't think like I do and so for us to survive and move forward in this collective manner we need to know each other we need to get back to our roots root understanding of who who our neighbors are and i feel like my childhood was was that that i had this great opportunity to understand you understand how I can function with other people because that's how I grew up I grew</p>	
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	<p>up with understanding um who impacts me and and if someone does one thing it's going to have effect on someone else and so we are being mindful of each other and understanding what more can we do for each other besides just for ourselves I think that we need that today more than ever and my childhood 's given that to me so today I'm consulting with nonprofits and business leaders and better understanding what it means to come from their press group so that when they're designing something for other people they actually have a voice in their ear that's telling them are you asking them are you are you creating harm when you're designing this because I see harm with what what you're doing because I've experienced a pattern that you're designing around and so that's important for me today from my lived experience I can bring forward to give to other other people do</p>	
DC:	<p>have you seen any difference from in the past a lot of times hate and disagreements were solely based on race and ethnicity and backgrounds do you see today a shift in not only the hate still being there but maybe not only in the race or the ethnic backgrounds</p>	
AK:	<p>yeah yeah for sure I think that I think that you know life could become more complicated as you get older because you see more things right and I think that uh today we've advanced a number of different rights women have more rights than they did back in the 60s though we're saying that their biological rights are being questioned or taken away from them when it comes to their autonomy around gender and then when you look at things such as LGBTQ rights you know we were talking about that in the 50s and so on and in the six in the into the 60s is only around 6970 when we actually start talking openly around gender issues or sexuality issues that in that particular way has taken that 50 something years like that to advance those right to to go forward and so when I think about today I think about where I started from my own life I've seen great advancements but I'm also seeing a slight A slight back in rights and who has access to those rights we not we're lucky here in Washington state because we live in a very progressive state which which is actually gonna continue to challenge the imagination of other people and saying you believe in this one thing such as gender equality or or something else that might be related to race but is that your reality because it's one thing for you to legislate and create laws about what you're fearful love versus what your reality is that's our biggest challenge today I see law I see what's going on in Tennessee and Florida and Alabama and so these southern states that are passing some some Midwest states that are passing</p>	

<p>DC:</p>	<p>these laws that are based on their imagination drag queen shows things like that that people have never experienced their lives but they want to dictate laws against them because in their imaginations those things were wrong and that's our that's the challenge we have today we have the challenge of people who are trying to control society based on their imagination first is what they're live experience or the reality is people are creating laws about things that don't exist in their own community but it sounds right to them and they feel like they could get to win when they pass these laws because they could they feel like they get to protect whatever they think is normal but that's not the reality of the people around them and sometimes that's their own family members and that's the hardest thing to overcome today</p> <p>well I really appreciate you taking your time and conducting this interview with me is there anything else you'd like us to know about your history or anything that you might deem important to your experiences in the world</p> <p>you know I would say one thing to to that I would encourage the students that Franklin Paris to to to focus on it's not about me I would love for you all to focus on the land that you come from that you reside on because when you dig into the story about the people that that the indigenous people of this land and what they've contributed to to the greatness of our society you're going to learn so much more about yourself and you'll be more you're gonna hold more pride in coming from Parkland and Midland and and Summet Waller communities you you are at the you are at the at the most amazing space where the nisqually and the Puyallup and and the Stiller from people and muckleshoot people they all converge right here in this community to conduct community and they welcomed other people they were the they were the diplomats the excuse me that that diplomats of tribes in our region they're the ones who create inclusive societies when the British came that the British came and learned Chinook language to better understand the people are that the people that are that were original to those land and they formed this amazing beautiful community right here in the parking area and we've lost that we don't know that knowledge so don't focus on me focus on the on on the the the original people of this land because when you learn that lesson you'll you'll hold so much more pride of where you come from</p> <p>Thank You</p>	
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