

>> Stephanie: Hello, hello, hello. Hello, everyone. We are so excited for this webinar. So, you thought NAD isn't here, but we're here and we're back. I want to introduce myself. I am Stephanie Hakulin and I'm Vice President of NAD. We want to welcome you on behalf of NAD. I want to provide a description first. I am seated in front of a blue screen. I have glasses on. I am black and I have reddish, curly hair.

And the topic for our discussion tonight is Black Deaf Perspectives. Let me give some ground rules. We will go around and introduce ourselves. Captions will be activated soon. If you click the bottom of your screen on the CC icon, you should see captions.

Now, regarding the chat, if you have a question, please raise your hand, and we want to be respectful in the chat. There will be no disrespectful use of language. We will respect one another and be accepting of different perspectives. We want to recognize those who raise their hands, so you can make your comments.

We also want to recognize the indigenous land that we are inhabiting at this moment, and I ask that you join me in recognizing our communities and ancestors in our past, present and future and our elders as well. Great. I am thrilled to introduce our panelists and I hope you're ready to dive in, sit back and listen. As a reminder, please be respectful and we will have time for questions and answers. We have Vyron Kinson. We have DeAnna Swope and Franklin Jones Jr., our three panelists. Come on screen.

Come on, come on. Where is everybody at? Great. Are we ready? So, we'll have you introduce yourselves with your names, and we'll start with Vyron.

>> Vyron Kinson: Hello, everyone my name is Vyron Kinson. I am giving an image description. I have locks pulled back in a ponytail. I'm wearing a white, kind of tan crew-neck shirt. If you want me to

change my shirt, please let me know. I'm wearing a black wristband. I have a beard and a mustache. I have gold-rimmed glasses. And you might see a reflection of my computer in those glasses. My name is Vyron. This is my name sign and I am from Georgia. I am President of Georgia RID. I am an elected member, and appointed Board Member for NAD. I do own a business of ASL DX services and I work teaching ASL full time in a public -- in a private school for hearing students and for Georgia State University, part time as a professor. So, I think that is it for now.

>> Stephanie: Thank you, Vyron. DeAnna.

>> DeAnna Swope: Hello, everyone. I am DeAnna. I'm a black woman with locks wrapped up in a bun on top of my head. I have a wrap and locks hanging in the front of my face. I am wearing a brownish colored long-sleeved blouse and behind me is a pink backdrop. And it has some gold as well. It is a beautiful design, by the way. I have gold earrings and wearing a wrist ban. My earrings are hoops, and I represent -- I call myself a community advocate. I do a host of things, but you can just refer to me as DeAnna. And I just want to say, I'm not representative of everyone. I'm representing myself here tonight. I'm from Georgia and nice to be here with you all.

>> Stephanie: Thank you, DeAnna. Franklin.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yes, hello, my name is Franklin. this is my name sign. I have a dark blue background. I'm wearing a white tee shirt that says "black history maker" on it. It has gold, and black on it. I'm born and raised from South Carolina and currently I work at Boston University as an ASL professor. I'm also a PhD student. It is nice to meet everyone.

>> Stephanie: Yes, awesome. So, we have a question for you all in recognition of Black History Month, folks have come to learn more about black culture. Again, for those who need to see the closed captioning, please click the CC button on the bottom of your screen, and if you would like to make comments, please do so in the chat. Are we ready to dive in?

>> Vyron Kinson: Let's do this.

>> Stephanie: Okay, tokenism. Let's have a conversation about this and I'm going to go offscreen, so you can take over the conversation.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here, would you like me to get started?

>> Vyron Kinson: Go ahead, DeAnna.

>> DeAnna Swope: So, tokenism is something that I notice quite often in our field. Before, I didn't really recognize it as much until the Black Lives Matter movement came along, and then it was all of a sudden. They want to hire us. They want to include us. They want to show they are proud. Look, we have diversity here, but diversity is not always a good thing. Yes, it can be beneficial, but how are you presenting yourself to outsiders versus being taken in and being shown off for your skills and your skin color? So, I see so much of that happening, and we really have to think about tokenism as why are we being put in those places. That is my opinion.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin here. As far as hiring, we're not just talking about that. We're talking about presenters, bringing in people for that type of situation. Sometimes, I look at why are you asking me to join this presentation? Why do you want me to come? Is this is a box you're going to check and say, hey, we have the requirements and Franklin fits the requirements. That is it, that is all. What have you done to the community before that? Before BLM, as you were saying, there was not that push for that, so now we have to be very careful. Are you looking at me because I'm skilled and professional? Are you looking at me because of my skin color? Are you paying me? Are you wanting me to volunteer? Why are you hiring? Why are you wanting a black person? Sometimes you get a black person in and they don't fit in the role, and they don't fit because that is not their skill set. Is it based off of tokenism or is it not.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron here. Prior to the Black Lives Matter movement, prior to that, many entities wanted to set up task forces or other types of groups or committees or panels, teams, whatever

those words are, and oftentimes that was based out of the numbers. You know, they would say, oh, well we have so many of these people. We don't have enough BIPOC folks, so those numbers would be full of white people. They would go ahead and pick a black person or a black indigenous person of color and say, oh, well, they can sign and they are black, so come and join this task force. Really, the black person had no knowledge, had no experience, had no understanding, did not have the skill set required. They did not have any of that. They were just, maybe they took care of their family. Maybe they were, you know, someone who just kind of had a couple of skills and they said, I guess they want me. But then they wouldn't know what to do. What is that person gaining from this experience?

Black or black indigenous people of color would join the organization or the team and their skills would not be utilized, because there was no relationship between that person and that group, or that task force. That group would not invest in that black person or person of color, and that Deaf person would be left feeling like, wow, you only want me because I am black and I fit this. Now, it is like the task force can say, hey, we have this black person here. We have this person of color here to show off, but meanwhile, they are not investing anything in them and that is tokenism. So, really, what we as a group, as a community, we have to accept responsibility.

When you meet an individual who is black or BIPOC, and I will focus on tonight being black, this is what the topic is about. So, we'll do the BIPOC later on. When you see a black individual, get to know that person as an individual. See what their skills are. See where their expertise lies, and then if that person wants to be involved then you can say we have these opportunities for you. If that person is willing, go ahead with it. You can't say this black person knows how to sign. They sign pretty well. I met them at the store,

hey, do you want to come over here and do this? That is not going to work. That is not going to be a successful approach.

Us, as a community, we need to focus on what we need is to wake up and say, hey, hold on. They want me to join this organization, but why? We have to figure out and analyze the decision before we go ahead and accept it willingly. Why do they want me? Why are they picking me? Get to the reasoning behind that. Is it going to be beneficial for us mutually? Is it just going to be beneficially for them or for me? Are they trying to get the spotlight shown on them for diversity sake? Am I going to be able to add this to my resume? Is this beneficial to me? What do I gain from this relationship? We all need to wake up and figure it out for ourselves. Sometimes you have to say, hold your horses, literally. Slow down. We're black. We're not going to runaway. We're still going to be black for the rest of our lives, but each person has a different knowledge set, a skill set, a different expertise. Talk with people. Get to know who we are as individuals, not as a color, and that will reduce the view of white people using black people as tokens.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I just want to make a comment about what Vyron said. Yes, we need to analyze ourselves. But let's have a discussion. Let's have some discourse. What is your goal for this? Why kind of research do I need to do before I jump in and get involved in what is going on? Most of these organizations are white people. Most of the entities are run by people who are Caucasian, so we need to make sure before we join that job, before we join that organization, what result do we want to have come out of it? It is important to do that work behind the scenes before you go ahead and accept anything. It will potentially be harmful if we go ahead and join something that is not beneficial to us mutually.

So, it can be very harmful. It can be hurtful if we give a thumbs up to it thinking it is going to be great and it turns out to be something completely different. It has to, that organization, that group has to match our goals and ideals.

>> Vyron Kinson: I want to add.

>> DeAnna Swope: Go ahead. If you want to add.

>> Vyron Kinson: No, you can go.

>> DeAnna Swope: Thinking about what Franklin said and Vyron, too, before I accept a job, I have to look at this organization's history and what does diversity look like for these organizations. Have they had black folks or black indigenous people who have left and why? If they ask me a question like, "what do you need to feel safe in this environment?" That is where I recognize there is privilege there, and I can be free to be myself. But if that doesn't happen during the interview, and there is racism or there is no diversity there, hmm, I'm not going to be interested in that job.

So, thinking about how we can dismantle racism, that should be one of the questions, right? When we're going into a specific space, are we expected to tolerate certain things or do we have the freedom to be ourselves in those spaces? And so, thinking about the work that we have to do to become better, and also to not limit ourselves, and to have accountability, and enter into a safe space or enter into a space and be safe and be able to speak our minds without punishment, those are the spaces that we want to be in.

>> Vyron Kinson: I'm a little distracted. L. Williams said there was a misunderstanding. If you can come on and clarify.

>> Stephanie: Stephanie here. There is a comment saying there is a misunderstanding say to the meaning of tokenism. Is that your question?

>> Vyron Kinson: Okay, that was side chatter while we were disappearing.

>> Stephanie: Yeah, that was a response to Alan. I agree. We're focusing on black and brown folks at this time, and I agree with the

comments that were made. There was a question or comment that came up in the chat. Let me find it. Let me find it. There was a question related to how can we as white people avoid tokenism? It seems like everyone wants to have black and brown folks, for example, when we have workshops on racism. Should the folks who participate in that workshop and present be black and brown, indigenous people of color or is that tokenism?

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Can you give us the question again?

>> Stephanie: Yes. As a white person, how can I avoid tokenism? Everyone wants to have black or brown people, for example, when it comes to conferences or when a member is going to have workshops on racism. I'm curious if individuals should be black and brown or indigenous people of color.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Maybe this is a better answer or not I'm not sure. But how to avoid tokenism is to contact a variety of people, not pinpointing one person, hey you, black person. Come here and do this. Or expecting people to volunteer and do things. There is a difference for me. Vyron, hey, come here. I'm going to put you in this situation and perhaps, Vyron's skills don't meet the moment of that. Maybe he is not the best person for that job. Maybe it would be better open to another person. If you're opening up to a variety of people that would be a better way.

>> Vyron Kinson: For clarification sake, I understand the question, but the last part says, our members want workshops that focus on racism. So, now the members are saying, you have to be black or BIPOC, wait, does that mean you have to be black or BIPOC to join the workshop or present the workshop? I'm not sure what the question is asking. You have to be black or BIPOC for what purpose?

>> Stephanie: That is a good question. Let me see who asked that question. Alan posed the question. Would you like to come on screen and expand on your question? Alan.

>> Alan: Hi, there. Sorry about that. Sorry about the way I'm dressed here. I want to clarify, you're saying, tokenism is not something we want, I agree. But here, we're having a workshop.

I'm responsible for carrying that out and we're sending out to the member, what do you want? Trying to get a feel. Many people want to attend workshops based on racism, okay, great. That is my passion, I have been involved with trying to dismantle racism, so this is excellent. So, people are sending me private messages, hey, you are to hire a black or BIPOC person. You have to, you have to, you have to. You must do that. We're trying to figure out who -- like, these people might not be qualified or you might not like this person as a presenter. So, we're asking -- we're here in Idaho. We're asking how do we put someone in? We don't want to put someone who is BIPOC for the sake of that. They have to have skills.

We don't want, um, do you know what I'm trying to say? We don't want to place anybody. Do they have to be BIPOC? But they have to have the experience related to racism. As a white person, I'm responsible for dismantling that, do we need a black person to teach us to explain to us then? We should be doing the work to dismantle racism and not put that on the shoulders of a black or BIPOC person. That is how I feel. That is how I have been guided. As far as tokenism. We want cultural representation, linguistic, all of that representation. Is that clear?

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I'm going to hold my response for the moment. Did you want to add something, DeAnna?

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. Yes, I applaud Alan for recognizing that distinction or let me go back, acknowledging that. It means, you are willing to make sure that you are not causing harm to black and BIPOC communities, so I applaud you for acknowledging that. And just like you said, instead of selecting a singular person, it is better for you to open it out to the community, so that you reduce the potential to cause harm. And I think that is fine, allowing white folks to do that work, and also bringing in folks they can listen to, because we are thinking about aspiring allies and how they can support BIPOC communities.

What they should do and what they should not do, and that relates to putting emotional labor and burden on BIPOC communities. We're exhausted. We're gassed out, so it is time for you to take up the mantle and do the work. Making sure we ask folk, you know, making sure that we educate the communities. It is time for you to do the work instead of us. Do your research. Find the information, and that is my opinion.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Franklin here. I wanted to add that to some of the previous comments before. So, you need to find someone who is guaranteed to know about the particular topic that we're investing in, right? So, you have to think, is this person able to provide understanding of a workshop regarding racism? You have to think, white people versus a black person or person of color, what is their experience? White people are able to have the discussion to help support and dismantle and improve the situation and black people are likely to discuss their experiences, so each person can provide different content versus a white person versus a person of color.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron here. We would need to know a little more in depth about racism. That topic doesn't just focus on oppression of black people, it also focuses on behaviors that cause, that help to oppress people who are black or other people of color. It talks about power. It talks about privilege. So, racism is a hugely broad topic and you need to specify, what can a white person come in and explain? They can explain about their privilege and how to recognize that privilege as a white individual. so, yes, when we see the word racism, obviously, we expect it to be a black person giving a presentation of that workshop. Keep in mind, black folks are tired. We are exhausted. Franklin is agreeing with that. It has been over 400 years that we've experienced slavery and the aftermath of that.

Maybe you need to develop affinity groups. Here, we are going to focus on dismantling racism. Often, you will have white people

trying to halt your racist way, how to analyze your own attitude, your internal bias, recognize your privilege and break that down. Then you have a black or BIPOC-run workshop where people talk about their frustrations, how black and BIPOC folks have been dealing with racism, how to develop allyship, there are so many different ways to go. Having a white person talk about this, where are your skill set, what are you going to be discussing as it pertains to racism. Then you can have a conference coordinator who would have the important role of having that discussion and making sure they are not participating in tokenism. We have a white person over here. We have black people over here, and they are each explaining their different roles. We have a white person, because they are going to focus on dismantling racism, talking about recognizing privilege and reducing oppression.

So, you need to have this kind of conversation. In your state, Idaho, there are not many black folks to reach out to, it is what it is, so you need to be ready for to have that debate and discussion.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. Thinking about white colleagues who collaborate with BIPOC individual, because that could cause trauma as well. We want somebody who is good, and we don't and the black person to be targeted either. Also, thinking about the disrespect factor that can be thrown out at the black person or BIPOC person. I want to also put that concept in your mind of having a true ally present who is willing to take the heat in support of their black colleague. So, that is one question, you should be asking yourself. Am I willing to fight alongside of or in front of this person and take the heat when they are voicing up and I can take that hot seat, and say, that is enough. You're not going to do that to this person of color. Oftentimes, they kind of leave us on our own and that causes more harm. We already know the Deaf community is so small, and the damage is a ripple effect. It spreads so quickly, so we need to be mindful that you're willing to take the heat for the people of color if you're an ally.

>> Vyron Kinson: Before we wrap up this topic and move on, I wanted to add something. Sometimes we like to add that real-life happens, right? Do you remember at the beginning of this session, I said, I was President of Georgia RID. Georgia RID is chock-full of white folks. Full of them. And the community at large might look at me and say, Vyron is just a token, because I'm the President and I'm black. So, Georgia RID is not racist, because I'm here as the President. The lone black person. So, what does that mean for the community? Will they, in turn, dislike the fact I'm here and want to remove themselves from the organization?

So, I think it was two years ago, I was voted to be President. I was thinking about being Vice President, because I wanted to focus on my life and take care of things I was doing outside of, that but I had spoken with some other potential President, and we had a discussion and I felt like, you know what, as a team, we could do this. So, we wanted us to become in charge, because we didn't want white Interpreters from Georgia to take that role. We wanted to have that say and we wanted to have that authority. We decided the other person would drop out and I would automatically become President. Again, as President, for Georgia RID, I was a member. I was involved in the activities, and you know, it wasn't like I was the one black man show. This is Vyron's show. This is Vyron's organization. That is not my vision for this. Does that make me a token? I don't know. I'm not sure.

None of the members who joined wanted to support that vision that I had. So, it is a little bit vague. It is a little bit blurry, the lines between tokenism and diversity, because without that support, sometimes, you know, without that collaboration, you're not sure. It is kind of. So, that is just an example of where it can become confusing between tokenism and not being tokenism.

>> Stephanie: Stephanie here. We have more questions, but we're going to hold on to those, so we can move on the next question for

the panel. The discussion so far has been wonderful, and now our next topic is related to Black Deaf Mentoring. Let's discuss.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin here. Black Deaf Mentors, wow. That is a huge issue in our community.

>> Vyron Kinson: I agree.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: We need to do better and we understand that not many people went to college and graduated. As we grow up, there's not always Black Deaf people around us, you know, if we go to a School for the Deaf or whatever. Do we have mentors? Do we have access to college? Speaking for myself, we didn't have -- I didn't have that. Nobody was saying, hey, I'm a Black Deaf man and I want you to go to college. Look at me. Look at what I'm doing. It is still an issue in this day and age. It has gotten a little bit better and in specific areas, it has gotten better, but not at large. So, this is an area that we can do on the weekend. As far as me, it was never really an opportunity that was given to me, but now I have taken it upon myself. I do want to share that with other people.

So, again, it just depends on where you are and who you're around if you're going to have a Black Deaf Mentor or not.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron here. I grew up and went to a mainstream hearing school. I never saw a Black Deaf man.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Me neither.

>> Vyron Kinson: I went to Georgia School for the Deaf. I never saw a Black Deaf man there, however, I saw Black Hearing guys. They had to go-to, they were like, what's up? What's good? I saw them and I was like, man, they are so cool, but I was never able to develop relationships. They were hearing. I was Deaf. It was different. We did haven't the vibe there. I never really got encouragement to get education and move up in my academics, and then I was a senior. I think that was the first time, it was the national Deaf Expo that was created that year. It was really established.

So, I went and it was a culture shock for me, because there were so many Black Deaf adults that were there at that Expo. And I remember just being like, oh, my God. Wow. Look at all of these adults. Look at all of these Black Deaf folks. Oh, my God. Wow. Wow. What is this? I was shy. I was nervous. I didn't know how to approach people. I was hanging with my girlfriend and we were walking through the crowd like, okay, look at all of these people. At the same time, it was exciting, because I was getting ready to go to Gallaudet and Franklin was there. I saw folks our age. Black Deaf folks our age, that many feel like, you know what? We're adults now. We've been missing out on this Deaf mentorship all our lives growing up. We didn't have that opportunity. At Gallaudet at the time, I think it was called mentor something. Some programs where you can apply. Oh, let me back up.

This was before, what you're talking about Franklin. We had a real program where you can apply, students can apply for their mentors.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Big brother, big sister?

>> Vyron Kinson: Yeah, my big brother was not a black Deaf man. It was a black woman. Once I went to Gallaudet, I remember -- Linston Dunn became my mentor. We would hang out on occasion. It would be nice. Lindsey Dunn, excuse me. We would see Black Deaf folk. There was Fred, there was this person, that person, we would meet up and chat. It was an inspiring experience. And I felt like, finally there are people who would qualify as Deaf mentors and they are the reason why I'm here today. Keep in mind, I never asked anyone to be my mentor. We went with the flow. We would hang out in our dance group. It was real cool. It was real good.

There was a Black Deaf Mentor who was really, really valuable to me. At Gallaudet at that time, I think it was 2008 or so, they established KTP, "keep the promise" was the name of the program and that was really, really, really good. We were able to get together as a group, maybe I would only talk to two or three people, and the

rest of them, I never spoke with them before. So, we would go out to Ghana. We went to the Deaf school in Ghana in West Africa. It was really nice to build those bonds, maybe not permanent bonds forever, but we were in the practice of building relationships with one another. I wish Gallaudet continued with the "keep the promise" program to inspire more Black Deaf relationships, more of that bonding that we need.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yes, I agree.

>> Vyron Kinson: Yeah, back in the day, 2008-2009, man, we hung thick as thieves. Were able to, you know, establish those relationships and stick together, and graduate. So, now out in the real world with several jobs that I have, I remember in the Atlanta area, they invited me to go to their school to do an assigned story, prior to COVID, prior to COVID. They invited me to come out and there were three of us, Atlanta Black Deaf advocates. Three of us went out. There was me, um, the former Treasurer and the secretary. We all went out and we would sign the stories in the elementary school and middle school. We would talk with the kids and it was dope. I wish we were able to continue that type of thing on an annual basis, and not just in the Atlanta School for the Deaf, but other schools for the Deaf.

Now, I'm here in Philadelphia at the School for the Deaf. They invited me to come out and read and sign a story with the elementary school kids, and to chat with the high school students later on in the day. I'm super excited for that. That kind of thing, that is what I want to do. Having Black Deaf student, Black Deaf folk, we need to inspire one another and have a Black Deaf person that we're able to look up to.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. Yes, I believe those relationships are so crucial. Growing up in a small community in Georgia, I think we had about 2,000 folks in there. It was really small. But the exposure to Black Deaf Mentors was almost nonexistent in that area. Thinking about school system, elementary, middle, high

school, I didn't meet any Black Deaf folks until 2005 when I was in a competition for a pageant. I was the national Deaf black advocates pageant. When I went in there, it was black excellence. Like black kids, you would see black people everywhere and I was just, whoa. Older folks, you know, they were just out there. And I would be in awe of them, like we have all of this as black people?

So, looking back on that, that strong black identity, plus Black Deaf identity that I struggled to form all of my life, I feel like I was lost in the forest and I had to find myself until I was in that space. It was more like, something to aspire to. I was meeting so many people, and it was amazing. And just, wow, my life would have been so different had I met them, so much sooner a long time ago. I mean, without a doubt, I would have thrived, because it took me until later in my 20s to get that exposure. If I had that before then, something someone to lead me, guide me, give me expectations, tell me about the world, help me navigate through challenges and difficulties. Someone that would have helped me appreciate my experiences more, and my journey, but having met these folks at the pageant and in my work, meeting more Black Deaf folks and building a support system that has, yeah, made all of the difference.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin here. I wanted to add a comment as far as education and teachers and having Black Deaf male teachers that is so rare. It is probably almost never happens until you get into college. I have been a teacher for almost three years now, and I ask my students, have you ever had a Black Deaf teacher in your life and they said, no, you are my first one. You're my first one almost unanimously. I'm the first black teacher that many folks have. There is such a low percentage of Black Deaf males who are teaching, 2%. Can you imagine that? Black Deaf males make up a small portion of the teaching community.

So, I grew up going to a school for the Deaf, and there, I didn't have any black male teachers. But I did have a resident assistant

who was there. I had black ones there. They were not teachers, but did they inspire me to go to college? No. It took until I graduated from Gallaudet to want to get my PhD, but prior to, that I didn't want to go to Gallaudet. I didn't have anyone push me. It is important to have Black Deaf people who will encourage you and show you the possibilities that is lacking right now.

I asked myself, why did I not have any support? Why did I not have a principal to say you should go to college. I never had anyone encourage me. I never knew about MBDA, I asked my mom and she was like, I don't know what that is. It is ironic, because the person who explained to me about MB DA was someone involved in the organization and I had no idea this was something I could do until I entered Gallaudet, among other things I didn't know I could do. How come I didn't know about this? How come my mom didn't know about this? I learned about Carolyn McCaskill and all of these Black Deaf people after I got into Gallaudet. Imagine if I knew about these Black Deaf people prior. This would have motivated me. This would give me someone to look up to, some goals to establish for myself. I had none.

So, now as we're dealing with young people, we are responsible to give back to the Black Deaf Community. Young people are looking at us. They want us to reach out and offer mentorship. These are opportunities that we can provide people that we were not given ourselves. We can inspire the next generation. We are able to understand where they are coming from, so we have to practice how to be mentors. We might not know naturally. There are some workshops, that we can probably take to figure out how to do it, but we need to do better for the next generation.

>> DeAnna Swope: Deanal here. I just want to add a quick comment.

>> Stephanie: Go ahead, DeAnna.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here, thinking about the future generation of kids, we need to give back. I can't do it just for myself. I have to invest back into the community as leadership to help them with their identity development and have the skills, etc.

>> Stephanie: You're right, April. Pay it forward.

>> DeAnna Swope: I believe we have to give it back and whatever specific skill you have, give it and pass the torch.

>> Stephanie: That's right.

>> DeAnna Swope: For me, leadership includes that as well.

>> Vyron Kinson: I want to add more. There is so much more I can add.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I have one brief comment. Mentorship does not mean it is only for young adults with young kids with adults. You can mentor someone as the same age group as you. You can help each other out. You don't have to, diminish someone else's ability because they are not at the same level as you are. You can mentor them. You can help build up their skill, if they are willing to do that, that is fine. Come along with me. Let's practice. Let me help you improve. We all have a variety of skills that are at a different level. We're not great at everything. Some things we're great at other things and you can find someone who is great at those particular things and have them walk side by side with you and pick out what you need to work on. You can find someone in your community who is willing to do that. Sometimes you're like where is the mentorship? Where is the people? We do struggle in the black community in terms of supporting and being visible to one another and sharing that information. It is important to information share. It is important to develop our skills and help one another, so where you're weak, I can be stronger and I can learn from you and you can learn from me and not saying this person is not able to do X, Y, and Z, so we're going to move along with them.

People struggle. Provide feedback, so they are able to improve and grow and that is how everybody gets better. We need that feedback.

We need that encouragement and understanding, so you know, you might feel like, I don't want to bother that person. It is important for you to bring people out to give them the opportunity, to give them those changes, so you see someone who is struggling, pull them along. Open up and bring them along.

>> Stephanie: Stephanie here. Franklin that is perfect for our follow-up question. Can only Black Deaf folks mentor Black Deaf students? I will leave you to answer this.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Anyone can mentor anyone. If they look at you and are inspired by you then go ahead on. You have to develop that relationship. If the relationship is there, it will work regardless what your race is. I do know there are some mentors who some people look at mentors and they are not black. They don't share the same race. It just depends on that person, what inspires them and what lights the fire and you can go from there.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron here. I wanted to add to that. Someone mentioned about BBBS, big brother, big sister. Did you know that Atlanta, Georgia Haas have a big brother, big sister. I know about Atlanta I'm sure other states have it as well. I wanted to get into a partnership with them between big brother and big sister of Atlanta and the School for the Deaf. It was agreed upon. I started it. I reached out to big brother and big sister and they were like, oh, well, um, um, we don't have Deaf kids on the roster. I said, the School for the Deaf have all of the Deaf children that you need. We had a meeting. The discussion was rich. One issue was lack of ASL Interpreters. Big brother and big sister did not want to pay for the Interpreters. The School for the Deaf was ready to go, but the big brothers and big sisters, was like you have to come over here and do your thing and the School for the Deaf said, this is what you are supposed to do. So, the whole thing ended up being dropped.

We had all of the resources we need. We had paperwork, we had so many Deaf people. This was not just for black folks. This was a diverse group of people who wanted to be mentors. We had a list of

folks and big brother, big sister dropped and that list got put in a file. I struggled. I reached out to attorney offices and they said, yeah, we can't do this and we can't do X, Y, and Z. It turned out that, you have to pick your battles, and at that time, I shifted and focused on Grad School and moved on from there.

My point is, sometimes when you have companies that have these tools, they have the resources, but they don't want to use them to provide access, to provide Interpreters, meaning, we have to have Deaf services to partner with them in that. We have to have community services or interpreters who are willing to say, you know, what I know it cost money, but we're going to come in and do this. We're going to do this. It takes people doing that, but we have to work together. We need to have access for these types of situations.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here, definitely.

>> Stephanie: We have one person who raised their hand. Can we have them come on screen for a question? And that is Erica. Erica, come on screen and ask your question.

>> Erica: Hi. I'm sorry if my screen is awkward for the viewing. I have a question for all three of you panelists. Tonight, things are changing quickly compared to years ago, right. Now, we have gatherings of black folks. We value one another. We value our time. We have technology where we can text one another. We're a touch away from one another as black community. So, my question is, the term mentor is that the same meaning as it had in the past? And also, thinking about mentorship and influencers that seems to be very popular in the black community, for example, we have different influencers like Arlene and other folks who vlog often. We have Raven Sutton, so with those folk, I'm curious how that relates to mentorship. Can mentors become influencers or is there is a difference and how do you decide which term is more important?

>> DeAnna Swope: Beautiful question.

>> Vyron Kinson: Do you mind staying on screen? This is your question, so stay on screen. SI, social media influencers, I'm going to term that SI. Social media influencers have a broad range of influencers, it can be look at me dance or they can explain black history. They can be teaching Sign Language. There are people who sign songs, so social media influence is a big umbrella with a variety of people. Social media influencers can become mentors if they are looking to work and partner and discuss and support and inspire and share, if they are looking to be in that genre, sure, it depends on what their goal as a social media influencers is. Why are you on social media to show off your dance skills? Show off your body? To show your fashion, your style? What is that as a social media influencers that is a broad term? If you're looking to support, inspire and mentor and lead and guide the next generation, because remember it takes a village to raise a child, right, so that type of idea, that type of mentor in my mind is different than someone who is just an influencer.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin here. I think, yeah, those are two separate terms. A mentor is, as Vyron said someone who leads, who guides, who wants you to be successful and shares notes and tool and resources and wants you make sure as you struggle as you fall, they help you get on your feet. Social media influencers just want people to follow them. Your Deaf, you're black, you have this information and you want to inspire your followers that is one thing. But you have to be very specific. What are you trying to teach me? There is a gray area here. Maybe a person can be both. You could be an influencer as well as someone who is a mentor. You have to be very specific and niche in your posts and what you are trying to influence, because there are a lot of black people who don't know about Black Deaf folks. Our community is rather behind, but there is a separation. There might be some overlap here and there, it is possible, but to me, a mentor is someone who is guiding, nurturing, forecasting growth and helping you achieve the goals that you have, so that is my perspective.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. I love that question. For me, I don't want people to focus on social media influencers alone. Right? Riding on coattails that kind of thing. I don't want that. But a mentor is a person who allows someone to have a platform that allows for, you know, entrepreneurs or business owners or people who have programs to be invested in. They say, I want to be invested in you. I want to be invested in X, Y, Z. This is me making sure you are on the right track with these things. there are also someone who can listen. They are not someone who always talks to you. And not all Black Deaf adults and speaking about adults, not children, not all Black Deaf adults have the opportunity to sit with someone and have wisdom imparted on them and get feedback.

So, the same thing when we analyze social media influencers, it is all eyes on them. The show is about them. We're not investing time into this person. And so, social media influencers are not always about, you know, those vibes of I'm investing in you. I'm taking care of my time. My time is precious. It is all about me. Come on. Look up to me. They don't necessarily want to support other folks, so it is that kind of thing that makes the distinction clear. What is the person offering you or are they only wanting you to invest in them? And there is not a playbook for that, right? When we're thinking about leadership and leadership skills, and we're taking the evaluation of a person, we have to think about, hmm, what are they really wanting? Is this is a mentor, someone I want to be with? Someone who is intentional to journey along with me?

>> Vyron Kinson: Yes, a social media influencer can be a mentor if they are offering different type of feedback, how to determine that inspiration, yes, they can be someone who does that, spread it with the world, internationally. But you have to know how to provide that narrative, know how to provide that story.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin. For social media influencers that is great. There are two different functions, however. So far, we have seen people who have come on social media and they want to

tell their stories. I don't think I have seen people who says, yeah, I want to be a mentor. I want to be a good mentor, here is someone who can mentor you. People want to get on social media and talk about what they are doing, and who they are, and will that affect the next generation the way a mentor will? I don't know. Will that person become a mentor? I'm not sure. They are saying, here is my content. Here is what I'm doing and throw it out in the world and they are not receiving any type of feedback. To me, as far as leading and guiding the next generation, I don't see a social media influencer doing that.

>> Vyron Kinson: It is possible.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yes, it is, but I haven't seen it. There might be some people who would be good in that role. For example, someone who wants to be a scientist, but that scientist is not on social media trying to be an influencer. Do you feel me? We could have it, but I haven't seen it.

>> Erica: There is a doctor on social media, I mean, their intention is to uplift and recruit more future doctors, so they have discussions about different topics and they are like, it is okay to become a doctor even if you're poor. There is a way to get access to information. All of this information is out there, and it is on social media. And so, looking at the leaders who are already out there, not everybody is about themselves. Some of them are on social media to share information and represent, too. And so, imagine folks who don't have access to technology, et cetera, technology has given us the access to see everything.

So, is social media all great thing? I mean that is up for discussion, but social media definitely increased the number of mentors, and that is why I ask, can social media influencers become mentors. So, it was just something to talk about.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Franklin here. So, social media influencers, do they have mentorship skills? Maybe, maybe not. What type of skills do they have? Maybe someone is watching it and they are

inspired, like you're saying to become a doctor. He is a black man. He is a doctor. I can become that, how are they taking it to the next step? How are they leading to what to do that is practical? Is that black doctor on social media going to do it? Maybe, maybe not, but it is something to talk about.

>> Erica: You're right. Good point. Thank you.

>> Student: We enjoyed your question, Erica. And yes, social media influencers can be a positive force. I remember growing up at the Deaf school and have a black mentor, someone I really looked up to. I graduated and they were such a big support for me. We also have big brothers and big sisters with us as well. So, I didn't have one at my institute, but once that time period was done, that was missing until I got into social media and technology. And so, thinking about in the past when we didn't have that, and now we do, and we have less access to mentors. I don't know. Just thoughts about mentorship in the past versus mentorship nowadays. It is ironic, you're talking about Black Deaf Mentors.

I remember as a child and I was a student. I had a mentor who would discuss things about Black Deaf leadership and "keep the promise" program. I agree, we should bring that back. Nowadays, we don't have that kind of support. We need that support and influence. That was such a strong program and there is still a need for that. And sometimes the community looked down on it and say criminal, they are in poverty, look at their behavior, look at this and there. The point is, there are not enough mentors, not enough people providing support to black students if they are Deaf or hearing, we need to shift, so we can fill the gaps. Filling the gaps can help each other. Are you ready for the next question?

Let's see, next round of questions. What is it? So, the use of black ASL, BSL or BASL, should we use it?

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Franklin here. So, we have to choose what we're saying in terms of terminology. Are we going to say Black

American Sign Language or black Sign Language. I prefer BASL, because there is less confusion with British Sign Language. We know there is a distinction between American Sign Language, but should we use that in our daily language? Is that what the question is? The terminology of it or should we use it as out in the world? So, that is what I think we want to discuss.

>> Vyron Kinson: You can't just light the fire and say, hold on, I'm done with this.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: No, no no,. We have to continue our discussion, but yes. Should we use black ASL in our everyday life, when we go to work, hanging out with our friends. We should sign what we're going to sign period. That is what I'm saying. So, I use ASL and sometimes I feel like, I need to keep some of my old signs. I should keep some of my black ASL. I don't want to lose that, sometimes I sign this, in the classroom and I sign this in the real world, at the same time, I don't want to forget what I was raised with. I want to add on to that.

People are like, what does black Sign Language look like? It does look different because of separation and segregation back in the day. White students went to one school and black students went to another school, so Sign Language developed out of that. I'm not saying, Deaf, hard of hearing or whatever, there was more mouthing of English, you know, in the white communities and less of that in the black communities. So, we notice things have merged a little bit more, but there is that separation that we should continue to maintain. And there is the standard ASL and there is black ASL. Of course, you should use black ASL, but as far as teaching it, I don't know about that. Where is there documentation of the linguistics of black ASL in depth? What does that look like? Where do we find information regarding that? Where do we see that in the future? It is kind of muddy. It has been passed down from generation to generation, but there is less of that. People growing up in hearing families, once they went to school, the School for the Deaf, they

went there and learned sign, so everyone has a difference in that. Of course, you should use black ASL, but in terms of teaching it in classroom, I don't know about that. It is something that should be passed on, shared in families, but I don't know about the intentional teaching of black ASL. It is hard to answer that one.

>> Vyron Kinson: I wanted to add, often we assume black ASL all people in the south sign the same way and that is not true.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Exactly.

>> Vyron Kinson: Each state, each region has its variances. For example, I sign this for rabbit. What do you sign for rabbit? In Georgia, we sign --

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I thought you were signing rabbit.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is a dorm parent. In Alabama, they sign this for a dorm parent. What do you think about that, Franklin?

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Is that a snail or something?

>> Vyron Kinson: No, this is what they sign in Alabama.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I never seen that.

>> Vyron Kinson: So, there are regional differences and people expect black ASL, we should teach that as if it were one standard thing.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: How?

>> Vyron Kinson: There are so many of those signs that are now disappearing, because black folks back in the day who went to the segregated schools for the Deaf had their experience, but now they passed away. They have Alzheimer's or in hospitals, no one knows they are there, or they have had mental health issues, you know, so people are not as involved with them. So their black ASL signs have been kind of kept under wraps. They are kind of muted so to speak. People think, they are not talking, but it is because they are Deaf. Now, in this current generation like Franklin is saying, we pick up culture from one another, but black folks sign big. We tend to sign with both hands. I mean, it is what it is.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. Speaking for me, hold on. Let me start again. Growing up, I grew up signing exact English, okay?

Then I went into high school at 15, and I was in a culture shock. I was ASL? All this ASL, it was overwhelming for me. I had to really shift myself to accommodate and acquire ASL. And now, thinking about black ASL and claiming that as mine, I'm like, yeah, black ASL, I would say, I'm more of a black ASL user, because I don't sign ASL in the way they expect me to. I'm like all of you people over there, you people over there, no, I'm a black ASL user. 0 so, excuse my language, but there is too much of a damn divide. Oh, you're an ASL user, you're over there. You're a black ASL user, you over there. What is the point over there? Everyone is critiquing everybody. You sign wrong. You sign wrong. How are you going to tell me how to sign based on my cultural identity? This is how I sign. This is my facial expressions. And that is BASL, okay, honor the culture and respect the culture. Don't deprive the potential for communication in BASL just because we're in mainstream settings and they expect us to be immersed in ASL, using ASL.

and come back to our peers and we are signing BASL and they say we're signing wrong? They going to tell us we have to sign in a particular way? No, that is like putting us that we have to put BASL in a particular way and we're not honoring our elders and all they went through. What is this?

We're not just coming up with this BASL. Never mind. Never mind. This is DeAnna signing for DeAnna. This is me saying what I think. This whole concept of changing my BASL to accommodate ASL signing style? It is a no for me. I'm still BASL, but that is my two cents.

>> Vyron Kinson: So, have you read about Joseph Hill's book? Have you heard about that? You bought his book? So, person teaching how to read and write English. I'm just wanting to comment that BASL, is that parallel to ebuttonnics where someone said you can't be taught to read and write ebonics, so you can't read and write BASL.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: That is a good question. I have no idea, but I know ebonics is a spoken version, that is what black folks speak, I guess. Reading and writing, I'm not sure how that differs from BASL. I know there are region a varieties, perhaps. Perhaps there is standardization, but there are so many distinct differences. For example, signing pregnant like this. Like stuck. So, we, you know, we weren't there back in the day, but we know that was the sign that was used and has been carried down, but as far as learning BASL and teaching that, who is going to be skilled and qualified to teach Black American Sign Language? Who taught it back then? No one taught it.

A lot of people use black ASL back then who don't remember what they used back then, because of the standardization of ASL, and you know, being assimilated, so being told, no, you don't use this sign, use this sign stead. Maybe there were young people, at that time, were great, but now don't have that skill as much. I know for example, in the state of Louisiana, there were people told not to use those signs. There is a history behind black ASL, but I don't know if anyone would be qualified to teach that. DeAnna, you're talking about generations and how we sign, and all of that, that is something completely different from person to person. In my family, I learned signs from them, from black folks and then I learned signs from the white community and what was right, what was wrong, there was none of that. When you grow up exposed to science, it depends who you learn the signs from, you learn from your community, right? That is how you're learning your ASL.

So, this sign right here, people say oh, that is beautiful BASL. I'm like, that is not black ASL. This is not a sign from black ASL. How do you decide what sign is black ASL and what is not. People assume that is black ASL, but that is not true. You probably, to speak honestly, probably don't know what black ASL looks like. If I sign this, people believe that is black ASL if I'm signing pregnant. If I

sign something else, oh, my gosh, that is beautiful. Black ASL, but how do you determine where my signs came from? Did a black person teach me this sign? Did I learn it from the white community? It is hard to determine.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. Stephanie, what is with you disappearing off the screen? Welcome back.

>> Stephanie: This discussion about ASL versus BASL. And you're right, this discussion about what we sign at home with our families and the Sign Language that we use, is that considered black ASL versus when we go to the Deaf schools and we see what Deaf schools are using and their signs are different. Is that black ASL? That is a question that is up for discussion and debate currently, just as Franklin said, this concept of teaching, you know, discussing the history of black ASL, and discussing ebonics and if there is a written form of that. Are those parallel? Can we compare those two? How we express ourselves in real time versus how we express ourselves in written form versus how we express in books, thinking about the indigenous languages and not having it in text. There is so much to discuss with black Sign Language.

So, now, huh does that become embodied in the culture and how does that become a curriculum and making sure that is not lost and how do we preserve our language and pass it down to generations? So much to consider when we're discussing the signing communities and the hearing community, and you're right. We've all been brainwashed that spoke English is the best. We hail spoken English and we throw out other cultures. DeAnna, your comments are right, all of this forced colonization and trying to keep what we have and move forward and preserve what we have, but who decides when to change language and culture and when to get rid of it for something else? So, this is such a great discussion happening. I am not the queen of black ASL and it was never explicitly talked to me. As Vyron said, it is interesting growing up, we did use signs like Vyron showed that was for cornbread and other people use other signs. It

is interesting the different perspectives and learning from one another and the exchange we're having in this discussion. It is nice.

>> Vyron Kinson: Someone mentioned Florida? You mentioned Florida?

>> Stephanie: Yes, we were discussing Florida's Governor decided to get rid of the curriculum related to culture and black history, the Governor of Florida decided that is no longer allowed in the curriculum. All the books that had the discussions including LGBTQIA and they only focus on white culture. That is something going on in Florida right now.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: There is a comment about home signs. I come from a Deaf family. Fourth generation, so my cousins come from six generations Deaf. But home signing ASL were different. Home sign were home sign. My mom is third generation Deaf and she uses ASL in addition to home sign. There are some signs that we use at home that has become our sign and we call it our family black ASL. It is not black ASL, but it is what our family does. Like this sign for shrimp and that is from a home sign that we use in my family. has become our sign for that, but it started off as a gesture and became the black ASL in my family. But you know, now it's disappearing and we use the standard sign. We've been influenced from the community to change our signs.

I stick adamantly with the family signs. People try to criticize our sign. That is not right. You should do this. So, we assimilate, why don't you sign shrimp this way? No, this is how we sign. There are people who don't sign our way of shrimp, so we accommodate to other folks, so the home sign is what black ASL is for a lot of people.

>> Stephanie: Stephanie here. Vyron, go ahead.

>> Vyron Kinson: Karen Mchaskell's book, "the hidden treasure of black ASL" remember that is just one book. It is just one book.

>> Stephanie: You're right. We need more. Hopefully, we need more.

>> Vyron Kinson: We need more research. Franklin, you're going for a PhD. You're a PhD, student, right? Franklin is next in being a scholarly academic. We need more people in research and people connected to the history and using black ASL or whatever the case might be, anything that is uplifting and advocacy of black ASL. Right now, we have one book.

>> Stephanie: Yes, hopefully more are coming.

>> DeAnna Swope: When I learned from what I know, since 2019, we have nine white PhD in the histories of the U.S.A. and no BIPOC PhDs. I was like, where are we at? How many of us in this room? 248 people. I am hoping some of us come with PhDs. Come on. We need to help us speak our truth, and it needs to come from real people with our skin, and it starts with us. We have to be willing to take up the mantle, do the research of our history and pass it on, not rely on them white folks to whitewash it. So, hopefully, somebody in the audience is working on their PhD. I don't know any one of y'all.

>> Stephanie: You don't have to have a PhD to write a book. Let me be clear.

>> Vyron Kinson: You took the words right out of my hands. You do not have to have a college degree to write a book.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I'm co-signing on that. You can do a book.

>> Vyron Kinson: You can do a 20-page paper.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: You can sign a video.

>> Stephanie: Yes, it can be a kids' storybook, you can publish anything. It can be a one-pager. Just do it. Are you ready for the next question? Can we get the next slide? We have about 40 minutes left. Should a white Interpreter voice us, Black Deaf people all times?

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin responding. Yes, and no. Yes and no, meaning what? Let me explain. Hold on. I'm going to explain my two answers. so, if there is a presentation related to bucket, black culture, the history of black folks that type of thing, you have to have a black Interpreter. You have to provide a black

Interpreter, because it will help us understand if you go to a doctor, you want to have a black doctor, because they understand better. They are not going to ignore, overlook who you are as a person.

Most of the time, I'm going to prefer a black Interpreter. When I give a presentation, I talk about black ASL in my class. I prefer to have black interpreters. Currently, we have two white Interpreters, because we don't have a lot of Interpreters in Boston. We're back in person, so I don't have the option. So, the white Interpreters will say, "see you later" and I close my classroom with the double peace sign. Peace out. See you when I see you, catch you on the flip side, but the white Interpreters voice it as, see you later. When I had black interpreters, they knew what I meant when I did that. Had a feeling when we have white Interpreterrrers and I knew that was going to change. I did request black Interpreters, because that is who I feel comfortable with, so that is the yes and the no.

>> Vyron Kinson: So, I am a black male that is undeniable. My skin is not going to change. So, when you talk about white Interpreters voicing for me all of the time, the all of the time is where I'm coming in with the no. I don't mind Interpreters of any and all races, as long as you get what I'm trying to say. As long as you have the expertise and the knowledge, then when we meet, you met me before, you know who I am, you know how I roll, you know me. Sometimes you meet people, and they are struggling with me, but I give them a chance. Let's build a relationship, let's have a discussion, let's get food, let's chop it up and see where we're headed with this. So, if you see me as a black individual, and it is like, I better assign a black Interpreter to this man. Don't just assign a black Interpreter to me because I'm black. This is me. This is Vyron's comment coming from Vyron. Franklin, you're a little different from me and that is cool. Just because there is a black individual and Franklin is saying what his preference is, it does not mean that applies to all black individuals. Everyone is different. Everyone hasn't different experiences, different approach, different

comfortable levels. Try not to think, there is a black person, I have to assign a black Interpreter to them. Don't make that at carte blanche for all that you work with. If this person prefers a black Interpreter, cool. That is not the case for me.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna signing. I have the same thinking, but now I kind of change my perspective on this. So, growing up, I was not exposed to black Interpreters until I was 15. No, black Interpreters. Nowhere in sight. So, I was used to white Interpreters. And then, when I met the first black Interpreter was in a church setting, and then in a professional setting, I met an Interpreter when I was pregnant with my son during delivery and I was thrilled. I said, black Interpreter, you mean there are more of you out there?

The point of my comment is, at work, when I'm doing workshops, I had a black Interpreter and a white Interpreter. And so, the Interpreter said, the black Interpreter said why is the white Interpreter here. And I said are you asking me this in front of this white Interpreter? I was kind of dumbfounded in the moment. It put me in an awkward position, like, huh. I said this Interpreter has been working with me since I've been working here and there are not enough black Interpreters in the area that I live, so that was a moment where a light bulb went off for me where it changed my thinking. Because it wasn't really applied to me. It was applied to the audience of having a white Interpreter speaking in English from my signs, and the audism that is implied there and what the audience is hearing and learning through the voice of a white Interpreter.

From then, when I knew I was giving a presentation, I requested for some folks who are highly skilled at speaking English for me. So, there was one person that was really close with, I said would you mind having this person assigned for me and they would move their schedules around even if they were busy, they would move their

schedules around to make sure they provided the English interpretation for my work. And so, recently, I gave a presentation at a woman of color conference, and someone raised their hand and said you two know each other and I said, yes. The way this person matches your expressions, your attitude is spot-on. I said exactly. That is the point. I want to put my voice out there through the Interpreter, not have it filtered. I want to be black. I want to sign. I want to express myself and have that put out into the world, my intuition and everyone applauds her every time she gives English interpretation for me. We're always together when I am giving a presentation. It is important for me to have black representation for me.

If it is a general space, I'm good. If I'm presenting, move aside. I'm going to have my black people. I'm sorry. When people are wanting to partner me with hearing people and they think of the time and effort that is required is not a big deal, I said, I never worked with this Interpreter before me, so it is a no for me. The way they sound and match you, it is a no for me. I want someone who has the dynamics that I have rather than having the monotonous. It works for me.

>> Vyron Kinson: I need to clarify. For me giving a presentation, with my content, where I'm talking about black culture, I'm talking about black stuff, I'm talking about blacky-blackness, for sure, you know I'm going to prefer a black Interpreter to represent me, of course. Of course. That is not an automatic for every single thing I do, every space I'm at I need a black Interpreter. Sometimes I'm like, let's meet, let's go out and let's get a chance to know each other. You can know me. I can know you. We can figure each other out and you can see the tone, and when I'm ready to give the workshop or presentation it can be of excellence with the Interpreter.

So, I don't want to have that experience where I have, just because you're black, maybe you don't have the skills for this, but you're black. Sometimes it happens. Yeah, there is a black Interpreter, but they don't have the skills that I need for that particular instance, so I'm more focused on building relationships, especially if it is a white Interpreter to see where they are at. I don't focus on the race.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin here. To piggyback off of DeAnna, what you said about growing up without black Interpreters, yes, yes. I knew someone whose wife was an Interpreter, she was not super skilled, but I understood what she signed. I was never exposed to having access through Interpreters. I went to the School for the Deaf, white folks were there and a variety of Interpreters there. A lot of different people, um, dish don't know how to spell their name, but different Interpreters I had along the way. That was that experience.

Now, here at Boston University, I'm in a new space and I don't know all of these people. I come in and I'm like, where are the black Interpreters. I contacted a friend and said, do you know anyone? They pulled people into my class to inpretty. I am like, here are names of black Interpreters in the area, but it is difficult to get someone to come in, sometimes at the last minute, if someone needs a sub, this is what we got, you have to work with that. Virtually speaking, it was a different story. I had black Interpreters, they matched my style. They matched my voice, you know. But when you're talk about in person, the options are limited.

Last week, Saturday, I gave a presentation for the black health symposium, so I was there and explaining the importance of Black Deaf health inequities compared to hearing folks. I presented on that and told the person in charge of setting up the accommodations that I wanted a black Interpreter. They said, yep, we respect that. They searched for two black interprets. Searched for two weeks, three week, finally got black Interpreters. I met

them same day. I tried to sign up and I sign fast. I gave them that warning. This is what I use for that, here is my presentation.

So, I found one of the Interpreters was really spot-on. Really applauded their voicing. One of the people, I was like, okay this is one black Interpreter, but where are others who are like you? When I'm doing a presentation, this is what I need. When I'm doing a class or things like, that that is another story and I can be more flexible. But when you're doing a pregnant, you want to feel more comfortable and you want someone who matches you.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. I want to add, VRS. I remember one time, I was calling to have a conversation with my cousin about a wedding and I wanted to ask if they could join me for a wedding. We were chatting, having our conversation, and at one point, my cousin got mad and went off on me and I said what the hell? Like blew up on me and I was lost. Let me tell you, this Interpreter was not matching anything I was saying. I was excited and dynamic and this Interpreter was going so off point. It didn't match at all. And so, I called my mom and explaining what happened, and my mom knew instantly, because she is used to hearing me through an Interpreter. So, at that point, I was like, I'm confused. I don't know what is going on and my mom said, it was the Interpreter. What color was the Interpreter? I said, white. My mom said, no, it was the Interpreter so, my mom had to call my cousin and that was not DeAnna. That is not what DeAnna was saying, the Interpreter was the issue. My cousin had to call me back and apologize. I was pissed off.

I was saying, I did not say any of that. It forced me to read lips with folks, because I just felt like, hmm, this person is going off. This Interpreter is going off, and so from then on, I felt it was better to read lips rather than risk having these miscommunications with my family. I learned my lesson. That experiences made me read lips. VRS is for the birds.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: This is Franklin. As far as having a black Interpreters, I think black Interpreters struggle to have the work opportunities. For so many years, people have been interpreting and there have been black interpreters and they are out in the community, but people look at them, as you're mediocre, you're not as good as the rest. They don't have the opportunities to work, to go to workshops, to practice. Workshops are expensive. Sometimes Interpreters don't have the opportunity or the money to pay the fees for certification, for testing, things like that. It has become harder for black Interpreters to keep up in the field just based off of these situations alone.

For example, I won't mention a name, but there was a person who was black, hearing Interpreter. They were knew and they voiced for me. I contacted the agency and I said, I don't want this person coming back. I spoke with a friend and the friend said, this person is new. Calm yourself a minute. Don't shoot off at the mouth and disparage their name. We want to support new and black Interpreters. We want to give them the opportunities. I contacted the agencies, please, I do want to keep this Interpreter. I didn't want to, but I do want to keep them, but I need to work with them and have this person come and mentor and have them learn and work in the community and to support them. So, that way, they can learn who I am. They can learn how to voice. We can give them opportunities we're not just like, they don't have the skill, next, and move on. We want to give them the opportunities to improve. So, think is an important thing for the interpreting world. We need to come beside them, help black Interpreters develop their skill, because that is not that many and we need to help them as they improve.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron. Deaf Interpreters need to be included as well.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yes, we need more of those.

>> Vyron Kinson: We need Black Deaf Interpreters as well. What is important in rephrasing how the hearing Interpreter speaks out and gives the English out is as important as an Interpreter signing. We need to pair these Interpreters with the Deaf Interpreters. Yes, they need encouragement and uplifting as well. We need to grow our numbers of Interpreters. We don't have that many Interpreters Deaf or hearing. We need to have more in the field and we need to encourage them. White Interpreters are aplenty. Black Interpreters are not what we don't have enough of.

>> Vyron Kinson: I became a certified Black Deaf interpreter. We have to have more. Come on, Stephanie. You're next.

>> Stephanie: Stephanie here. Definitely. Having the conversation about use of Interpreters and platforms and when they are needed, I'm thinking about some folks who say, we don't need a black Interpreter for this. And they look at language as a determining factor. And so, they are trying to decide, should we use a black Interpreter or do we need a black Interpreter and the truth is, we need to expand the pool of Interpreters of color and we need to support them. And so, sometimes it can be based on preferences like Franklin said, and then other times, it can be just, you know, a choice of what is available. But having -- I have for example, a choice of Interpreters that I prefer to work with, and there are other Interpreters who want to work with me who might be in different regions, states or communities who might be in rural areas or rural communities.

For example, D.C., y'all have plenty of Interpreters of color, whereas other places have very few, so we need to support those places who have Black Deaf and hearing Interpreters, to make sure they have a larger pool of Interpreters available to them. Indigenous Interpreters as well, yes. We need to support one another and we need to raise our numbers. And one of the struggles relates to finance, another is mentoring, another is recruitment, and so that is a different story, but we have maybe 10 minutes before we need

to wrap up and open up for questions. So, I will move on to the next and final question for the panelists and we will wrap up after your discussion. So, the next question is, --

>> Vyron Kinson: Oh, this is so important to discuss this. This is so important.

>> Stephanie: Okay, you think this is important? Okay, how do we build a relationship between Black Deaf Community and Black Hearing Interpreter Community? Let's discuss.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: I'm excited. Vyron, go ahead.

>> DeAnna Swope: You are jumping out of your chairs. Go for it.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is overdue. We need to discuss this. We all know Atlanta, Georgia is like the black Hollywood, right? Okay, like --

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yes, it is.

>> Vyron Kinson: There are so many Black Hearing Interpreters in Atlanta, Georgia. Unfortunately, we don't see them a lot. Many of them are not certified and that is fine. That is not the issue. It is not just because of the interpreting they are signing as well, but previously, I was in charge of the black Atlanta -- the national Black Deaf advocates and that was early 2015 or so.

We really wanted to establish some type of collaboration with our hearing Interpreter Community, but it became such an issue and such a struggle. I was like, why is this such a struggle to get Black Hearing Interpretters to collaborate with us? It became very frustration. We felt neglected. We felt overlooked. We felt the hearing community was like, oh, you just want our money, right? And that was not the point at all. So, how we ended up building that collaboration is that we ended up, we needed to meet together, as the officer, as the Chair, we need to get together. We need to discuss about having some type of event that we can co-host, and not just one event, but ongoing events that we can co-host. Yes, there is going to be money involved, there is going to be a cost. Money comes and goes. We are not replaceable. Money is

replaceable. Life is short. We have to value each other. We have to cherish each other. After you go to the cookout, you can go and get into an accident and not be able to interpret anymore. You could be gone. What is important is having the discussions, getting together for coffee, chopping it up and having the chats and that is the kind of community we were seeking to build.

You know, having a physical get together, because we do value our black Interpreters, and I do know there are some black hearing Interpreters who value the Black Deaf Community as well, but we need to see action. Action is the keyword. Talk is cheap. Show me what you're trying to say. Show me what you mean. Let's do it. Let's go for it.

>> DeAnna Swope: DeAnna here. I can use an example. So, I decided to replace complaining and saying, oh, where the black Interpreters at? Oh, here we go again. I need to build my pool of Interpreters for work. Oh, this Interpreter I prefer is not available or these other folks are available, we need to give black Interpreters that are indigenous and people of color opportunities too. Instead of complaining, I said you know what, I'm going to decide to go to NAD and we have a chapter here. I said, let me see who is in there. Four years ago, we offered a mentorship program. I said, okay. All right. Um, does this only apply to hearing Interpreters this program? They said no, Deaf folks are welcome to mentor the Interpreters.

I said, okay, I will volunteer myself to mentor the Interpreters, I volunteered myself to be a mentor to the Interpreters. Yes, to mentor the Interpreters, and so, I think I had five Interpreters.

>> Vyron Kinson: That is pretty nice.

>> DeAnna Swope: And the crazy part is, the Interpreters were so frustrated, because they were working so hard to be certified and they kept failing the certification test. I think we had 10 weeks together. I said, all right, y'all are frustrating? Let's meet

one-on-one. You're failing your certification test, all right. Let me see over here. I'm going to work with you for 10 long week, okay, and you're going to take the test in two or three months, and we're going to make damn sure that I help you pass it. You will not fail on my watch.

I pushed them beyond their expectations, beyond their potential. I was on them. I love these hearing Interpreters, okay? So, one of them started off like a very, very baby signer and I said cut that off. Sign it black. And they are, okay, I have to get rid of this white schooling system in my head. Let that go. We sign it like that, we do it like that, let it flow. Here she go, she was improving. I said, let me know if you pass it or not. Two months later, she was nervous. I said rest, take the test, and when I tell you this Interpreter passed, this Interpreter passed! Now, before that, I was meeting one-on-one with them. I was taking time with each and every one of them and I said have you ever done that before? And they said, no, we haven't. That is the problem. That is what you needed. You needed to have a person that is. You, assessing your skills. You're over here practicing with the hearing people. They can't give you nothing. You have to be in our community.

I said come to us first. Make sure you get it from us first, because we have your back. Trust us to have your back, because we got you. Y'all are not going to throw the blame on us. We trust you. You have to have the option to trust us, too. So, that's what it is. I told you, I built that relationship. I went into their organization, their Interpreter organization and I said, come on. You're relying on each other, come over here. I said, you sit over there on that corner, that is it. Enough of that. Come over here, let me give you a hand up, boo-boo. Let me help you. That is the way, so keep that in mind. You need us. We don't need you. You need us. So, flip that script in your mind. And I'm telling you, I was proud.

And the reason why, we are the reason you need a job, and it is not easy. We don't need you. Your livelihood literally depends on us. And we are a small community, so stop it. Allow us to build this trust with each other, invite them in and you invite us in. Accept the criticism and don't sit there and be offended and be upset about it. We know best. We can help you. Take our feedback, and take it with love. Okay?

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Preach on, preach on. Mic drop. This is Franklin here. I agree with what you're saying, DeAnna. Like you said, that attitude is so important. There are two ways you can go, I'm doing this for money, or I'm doing this because I value the community. Folks who value the money have the attitude, they go to work and they interpret, but they don't hang out. That type of attitude, how are you going to improve your skills if you're not hanging without the community? If you're not socializing. It takes you going work, going to Deaf community events. We come and we support you. It is a two-way street. Your skills will improve. That is not me going to work, that's it, that's all. There is no separation in terms of your skill development, you working versus going to a Deaf event or whatever. You have to do both in order to improve your skills. It is not just going to a workshop. It is not just going to work. You have to be able to get in with the community. You might not have friends who are Deaf.

For example, here in Boston, is there is a black Interpreter group where they support each other? I have no idea. I met a black Interpreter and I was like, I haven't seen you before. There is one black Interpreter, there are two black Interpreters, a couple over there and a couple over there. You do get together. How do I join them? I want to improve myself, I joined the black Interpreter crew. They come out to black events. It is works both ways. It is a two-way street. How are we supposed to improve as Interpreters if y'all are not out here doing what you should be to improve your skills? You have to not be satisfied with where you are at. It is two

side of the coin, so you have to do both. Donating your money, donating your time, your energy, whatever it takes. Get out there in the community and your skills will thrive.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron and I think -- oh, I'm going to go ahead anyway. I think I should mention that I remember long ago, back in 2015 when I moved to Atlanta from Alabama, I was thrilled. I was like, I'm going to join the LB. I'm excited to get in with these black folks. So, I join it would Atlanta chapter. I offered an ASL immersion, because up until that point, they were using their voice in their meetings. So, they were focused on how they voice interpret. We can do an ASL immersion. They told me no, we don't need it. I was like, oh, word. I'm volunteering. You don't have to pay me. They said, no, we're good. We don't see a need for that. I was dumbfounded, like, okay. And I remember that was 2015 when I made that offer. From then on, I stopped offering, because that was very painful in terms of trying to develop a relationship with them.

>> DeAnna Swope: Wow.

>> Stephanie: do you want to expand on that?

>> Vyron Kinson: What it is now?

>> DeAnna Swope: The national alliance of black Interpreters. Yeah, national alliance of black Interpreters, NABI. So I'm the last question, because we have about 10 minutes left. So, we will do the last question and we will wrap up. Can we have the slide for the last question? There it is.

>> Vyron Kinson: I thought we were running out of time. I thought we were supposed to have open questions, right?

>> Stephanie: Any comments about this?

>> DeAnna Swope: I think we can yield it to the audience questions.

>> Vyron Kinson: Yeah, I think we should let the audience ask questions at this point. Because I noticed, like, there are 100 questions or something.

>> Stephanie: That is a lot. There is a lot. So, let's pull up the questions here. And I'm proud, they are saying the Interpreters are doing an amazing job and recognize that Black History Month is every month and we want to recognize the Interpreters and the panel here. You know, we have all of these different professionals present every day and y'all are all important. So, the last comment or anything that you all want to share or message or quotes that you want to impart before we close tonight?

>> Vyron Kinson: I have two things I want to say. I do not want people who are watching this to think that Interpreters should be relying on only experience interpreted interpreted. Interpreters should also rely on Deaf/Deaf professionals, Deaf Interpreters, we should rely on those folks, too. Not 100% relying on other Interpreters. There is a 50/50 going on here, a symbiosis. That is develops the whole profession. The Deaf community, the hearing community of the Interpreters, you hearing Interpreters, you will not have a job if it was not for Deaf clients, right? Without Deaf folks, you wouldn't have a job. You wouldn't have a career, so really you need to work with us in the Deaf community.

And my second point, I think I have forgotten already. Maybe I will let someone else come in at this point.

>> Stephanie: We do have a hand raised. Becky -- Bucky, do you have a question? Bucky, please proceed with your question.

>> Vyron Kinson: Come on, Bucky.

>> Stephanie: Don't be shy. You're the last person to come on screen.

>> Vyron Kinson: There is Bucky.

>> Bucky: Hello. Great discussion. Amazing job. DeAnna, your recent comments about mentoring the Interpreters, just astounding. I love discussions related to Interpreter so so my thing. I wanted to raise my hand several times, so my question I want to ask you all is a little separate from the current topic of discussion, but I want to ask it. Thinking about vlogs from before about Deaf

folks and hearing anxiety. Now, the v blog was from white Deaf folk, but they were talking about hearing anxiety and being sick of hearing folks, always having to teach hearing folks communication and how to interact, so they have that hearing anxiety and how they internalized that, especially growing up with hearing families and mainstream families as the only Deaf person. Now, they are in the hearing world and once they get in the Deaf world, they are like, we're finally with our people.

But they still encounter hearing folks who never met Deaf folks, who never knew about Sign Language, so there was part of the discussion earlier that made me wonder if black people sister white people anxiety, where you feel like, ugh, here is another white person who doesn't know about black folks. Here is another white person who never socialized with black people, so I wonder if that is the case.

>> Vyron Kinson: That is a dangerous question. That is dangerous. You're going somewhere with that.

>> DeAnna Swope: It is a good question, too. I mean, just let's burn it all down if we're going to talk about it. I mean, to answer your question, I'm not going to lie. If I said no, I would be lying. I will say yes, there is an anxiety there. The over thinking, how much of myself can I bring to this? How can I talk in this space? This whole, idea of being a black person in a white space. will I be accepted? If I go into this space, will you take advantage of me? Yeah, there is anxiety there. It is exhausting. And people don't understand the trauma and the re-traumatization that we experience every single day with all of the thinking, do I pass? Am I accepted here? Can I live as myself? Am I going to be alive at the end of the day? The answer to your question, yes, there is white anxiety.

>> Vyron Kinson: This is Vyron here. I think we have to be careful, because our higher ups are white, typically. We have white folks we have to answer to. So, it really depends on our experiences, being

raised as we grow up, what we have gone through, sometimes what we call "black fatigue." That term, we call that instead of white anxiety. We call it black fatigue.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yeah, black fatigue.

>> Vyron Kinson: Meaning working to educate. I have to explain. I have to go back and deal with these Karens with their attitudes, like you're over it. You're tired of it. I just want to go home. I want to be at home. If you're talking about black fatigue, yes, we have black fatigue. I personally experience black fatigue.

For me, that means, when there is a white person and they say or do something that is very triggering, we don't want that white person. We don't have to treat everyone like we have to treat you. Oh, you're looking at me, like this is a black person, so that means, blah, blah, blah. Hey, guys.

Did you know I voted for Obama twice? I signed up for Obamacare. I don't care. I know I'm black. You don't have to change up to please me. Just be who you are. That type of thing the fatiguing. There is the issue when it comes to something more negative when you're having white people who are literally scared of you because you are black.

>> Franklin Jones, Jr.: Yeah, it is more stressful and tiring, not the anxiety, but stress all of the time. Like am I signing something that is appropriate for a white person to understand me? Am I being treated as a peer? Am I being treated as an equal? Will people say something about me because they don't understand me? Always going back and questioning yourself. Did I code switch enough? That is stressful. All of the question, over and over, having to make myself seem less threatening you have your countinesness, but there is a sub conscious train of thought that is always going and that happens on a daily basis. As I'm dealing with my student, I have to be careful what I say and how I say it, because of obvious reasons. Yes, it is very stressful.

>> Bucky: Thank you so much.

>> Stephanie: Thank you, Bucky. Wow.

>> Vyron Kinson: Are you frozen?

>> Stephanie: I was freezing?

>> Vyron Kinson: Better now.

>> Stephanie: I have been warned that it is time to wrap up. This is perfect timing. This is great discussions from the Black Deaf Perspectives you should be proud of yourself. The Interpreters, you have come through with this panel. The webinar is recorded and it will be uploaded to the NAD site. Sorry we couldn't answer all of the questions. Please e-mail us at [NAD.org](mailto:info@NAD.org) and thank you for watching. We will see you next time.

>> Vyron Kinson: I want to say to everyone in the audience, I want to let you know, you have had amazing questions. So many things I wanted to answer. We have not ignored your questions, we have wanted to answer. E-mail info@NAD.org and we will try our best to respond time permitting. Thank you for your participation. Thank you for your questions. Thank you for watching. Good night, everyone.

>> Stephanie: Thank you, CART. Thank you Interpreters. We will see you at the next panel. Bye. Peace.