

Episode 60 Jamil Jivani

Hello and welcome to Episode 60 of the decarceration nation podcast, a podcast about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system. I'm Josh Oh, among other things, I'm formerly incarcerated a freelance writer, a criminal justice reform advocate, and the author of the book writing your own best story addiction and living hope. We'll get to my interview with Jamil Jivani about his book "Why Young Men" in just a minute, but first the news:

Thanks to everyone for their patience, I'm trying to work out how I want to proceed with episodes. And all of the different members of the decarceration nation team have been off on different summer vacations. I've recorded a bunch of new episodes and they should all be coming out in relatively short order.

It's been an odd week. In the middle of the week, I heard that my friend Alice Marie Johnson was applying to have her supervision cut short, I was pretty happy to hear about that. As you probably know, Miss Alice's sentence was commuted by President Trump after she spent 22 years in prison for first time drug offense. Now I have absolutely no way of knowing what Alice was like before she was incarcerated. But I know very well who she is now. And I met many members of her large and loving family. I've met people who knew her in prison. And I've also met people who knew her in prison. But we're not incarcerated whether for instance, I've met one of our prison chaplains, and he, like all the rest of us love the person she is now. So I was pretty surprised to find that the US District Attorney Michael Denovant had taken time out of his busy schedule to write a brief accusing Miss Alice of everything from masterminding a multi state drug operation, to putting a hit putting hits out on people in and he was asking for her, you know her call for denial for them to remove her supervision to be denied. Look, I have no way to tell you what happened all those years ago. But why in the world is any of that relevant to miss Alice is a risk to anyone now,

what Miss Alice, who served over two decades in prison is asking for is for her supervision and early and reading Mr. Dunbar whole brief. I was wondering why in the world any of what he had to say had to do with why her supervision should be continued. I don't mean to belabor the point. And I'm not just mentioning this because I want to defend Alice Marie Johnson, but also because the point of supervision of parole and probation should be to ensure a clean path from incarceration to successful reentry. Alice Marie Johnson has returned from incarceration successfully there is no government interest in continuing to supervisor there's no risk there's no threat she poses to the community. The continuous a continuation of supervision should be about only one thing if you believe the logic probation, not about your past crimes, not about if someone is sufficiently contrite. It should be about only if someone remains a danger to the public. And if there's a public safety interest in continuing supervision. The only other possible reason to continue to seek supervision is to ensure that someone is getting the services and programming that they need. It seems why wildly inappropriate but sadly very consistent for this federal attorney to explain his grievances with the commutation process and to attempt to re litigate the case as a reason to extend supervision and I suspect this happens far too often on a regular basis when prosecutors oppose the idea of getting rid of supervision and getting rid of probation and parole. I hope that this is not the case, but I have deep suspicions that it is. Okay, let's get to my interview with Jamil Jivani.

Jamil Jivani is a lawyer and community activist currently is a visiting professor at Osgood Hall Law School where he focuses on community organizing and local economic development. He also co founded the nonprofit, our Ohio renewal with JD Vance is the author of the book why young men? Welcome to the decarceration nation podcast Jamil.

Yeah, thanks for having me. My pleasure.

I always ask the same for question, which is going to be a little tricky on this one. Because, in a sense, it's the story of your whole book was your life journey that led you to the place where you were ready to write this book? Why young men?

Well, I think there are a few things going on in my life. One is that I had come from a place where the idea of writing a book seemed impossible when I was 16 years old, I was considered illiterate, by the public school system in in Canada, where I'm from. And that was part of a more of a reflection, I think of my effort than my ability. But it was a sign of how much my life was on the margins of the society I grew up in, and how high the risk was that my potential would never be realized. And in that period of my life, I came very close to making a lot of mistakes that I write about in my book to remind people of how easily a person who can be a contributor to in their community might wind up punished in ways that make it impossible to come back from, or, if not impossible, very unlikely. So I was having a hard time of it. And I think that's, that's a big part of my book is exploring that, that that process of redemption that need for second chances, and I was able to get those as a young man, and prove myself in school. And so writing became a way to talk about my experiences and share what I've learned through some of the dark periods of my life where I certainly didn't think of myself as someone that anyone would want to listen to, or that anyone would even, you know, have a kind word to say about. As I got older, I wound up in Yale Law School on a scholarship, after I was able to kind of discover my academic potential. And one of my ways of coping with the privilege that going to a school, like Yale comes with, was just continuing to reach out to people who were living lives like I had when I was a kid, you know, so when I was in New Haven, Connecticut, where Yale's located, I got really immersed in the local neighborhoods and doing community service work and youth empowerment work. And that set the tone, I think, for the rest of my career, I've been out of school now for five years. Actually, I've not to date myself too much, but six now, and, you know, I, my, my entire career has been about, you know, trying to educate,

empower, provide services, and advocate for and alongside young men who I think are experiencing the same sorts of marginalization I did as a young person, or in many cases, far worse than anything I've ever seen. So that's what led to the book, which is, I thought it was an opportunity to tell the stories of young men who I think we, we, in American society, just as in Canadian society, have a hard time relating to, we have a hard time seeing them as people and as the product of a lot of complex circumstances in addition to decision making on their own. But I think there's a need to empathize more with the young male population. And I wanted to write a book that I hope would help people find that empathy, especially and very important for me, is across racial division, because I think a big part of why the criminal justice system in America has not been changed in a way that I think, I hope that I know, you hope that I know, a lot of the listeners to this podcast probably hope is because a lot of the young man affected by it, the average American voter, the average American consumer, has just not seen his or her own son, brother, friend, cousin, reflected in that person. And so I wanted to tell the stories of young men in a way that I hope we would encourage all people to see these young men who wind up in very difficult circumstances and often commit heinous acts as people who you know, we could be could be lost in our own family. And that's, that's one of the main tasks of the book,

That's a really interesting way to put it lost in our own families. I think one of the really powerful things about the book, from my perspective is that you really do draw a lot of commonalities between yourself and people that I think a lot of society would think of as extreme. When you start the book, you start from your own experiences as a kid and you highlight the family dynamic, and for lack of a better term, some of the alternative families that can come about as a result of not having a strong family unit, etc. Can you share more about why these thoughts, these parts of your story were so important?

Yes, well, you know, I grew up with, with a reminder of what happens to a young man who has no father figure around, because that was my father, you know, I had him in, in my life as a kid. And I saw the struggle he went through to be a dad and be 100 been, in large part, I think, because not having those things himself as a kid made him, I think, unsure of what that even looks like, like I as I write in the book, there just moments where I look back, and I could see the discomfort in his face when he was sitting on the couch next to my mother. And he just wasn't sure what to do with himself, he was just he was in over his head. And I, the lack of support from a family network for him, I think was a big part of why he eventually gave up on trying to be my dad, and he left my life and my mother and just kind of abandoned us. So I write about that, because I think it sets a tone for a lot of the struggle that a young men, mother, my father, myself, or the many others who do not have masculine role models in their home, I think it sets a tone for what a lot of us go through. I mean, a lot of the psychological research backs this up where you have almost this throne of masculinity in a household where you don't have a dad who's occupying that drone, who can show you what it looks like to be a man, not just for the flashy things that you see on TV or hear about music, but also the mundane everyday stuff, like, what does it look like for a man to pay taxes, hold his wife's hand, pick up his kid from school and take responsibility for his family. When you don't see that at home. I think you look for masculine role models that mirror what you do see, which is stuck in popular culture, what you might see on the internet these days, or you might see in your peer group, and you look for those to be the indicators of what masculinity looks like. And that's a really difficult starting point for for a boy, because what essentially, he's being asked to do is go out in the world and look for answers to a question he's not even really sure how to formulate. And you wind up with wide variability in that sometimes you get, you know, a great father figure who steps into your life as a mentor, maybe that's a pastor at a church or a youth worker at your community center, or a teacher or a good cop, like, you know, it could be a very positive experience. And there are certainly stories of really healthy, masculine role models from outside of the home,

who look after boys in their community and support that encourage them. But also you wind up with the opposite, you wind up with criminal networks, filling that void, extremist networks filling that void, people who want to take a boy and make him a soldier for their cause, whether that's an economic cause of trying to make money, or it's an ideological cause trying to undermine peace in our society. So that that's the experience that I think, you know, lacking fathers creates. And what's important to note there too, is that even if you don't, even if you have a dad at home, but members of your peer group are going through that experience, it bleeds into your life too. And so it's not even just a thing where you can point out the boys without dads and say, well, you're vulnerable to this, but I'm not. In fact, I think it leads to a broader cultural challenge of figuring out where these definitions of masculinity coming from even for boys without sorry, even for boys with dads, they may also be around a peer group who's who's searching for meaning in toxic places, and that will influence them as well.

So the title of the book started from an interview, is that correct? Someone asked you the question why young men and you didn't particularly like your own answer? Is that correct?

Yeah, that's exactly right. It was a Canadian journalist. And when she asked the question, I wasn't prepared. And I kind of defaulted to what I thought was a safe answer. It's an answer that I think a lot of people, a lot of politicians, for example, would give, but also a lot of people might kind of lean on by default, which is to focus solely on economics and explain young male disenfranchisement as strictly a result of, you know, kind of poverty or, or not having, you know, financial resources, which certainly is part of the puzzle. But I think there's a lot more to it. And I was I was kind of kicking myself, I didn't highlight that there was more to it.

And when but then when the book comes, when you actually get to the book, the question mark is removed. Was that intentional? In other words,

it's not why young men and why are they like this? It's just why young men, is that intentional?

Yeah, it is intentional, partly because I wanted to say like, this is an answer to the question rather than posing of the question, right. And I wanted to highlight where I think there are people who are making a positive difference, who I believe, have those and the answer there. But also to highlight that there's no one book that's going to be the conclusive kind of final answer to something so complex. And I wanted to remind myself that I was not writing a, like a how to manual, right? I wasn't trying to say, hey, there's this thing in the world. And here, the 10 steps you can take to fix it, but rather to say, Look, I'm one guy who's who's led a life that is, fortunately, and unfortunately put me in situations to learn a lot about what young male suffering looks like. And I wanted to share what I've learned. And that's going to be incomplete. And I'm sure I'll write a second book in 10 years that that adds a lot more to it. And there will be many, many books between now and then who also contribute to this. There are a lot of things I cite in the book that I think have different answers than I do, but very compelling and worthwhile answers to look at. So that's part of it. And I recognize it, you know, calling the book YN not everyone's going to kind of get that from the title itself. But my hope is, when they read it, they'll see that I'm coming into it, I believe, a requisite amount of humility. And it's a humility that only comes with doing work with young men and realizing that it's hard. And there's no easy answers to any of this stuff. So you just trying your best every day.

And, you know, I think you foreground a lot of this in the introduction with kind of the famous interaction. Well, actually, it's more of a juxtaposition, I guess, the now kind of famous interaction between Ben Affleck and Sam Harris from the real time program on HBO. But I feel like your argument is a lot. And I think I say juxtaposition because I think you're kind of saying that in a way that discussion wags the dog of what's really the problem here. Am I right about that?

Yes, yes. And also just kind of winds up making these things like ideological battles before you've done the work to know which ideologies might actually be responsive to the problem. So So yeah, yeah. So you think about it as like, for example, like in that disk, in that in that kind of HBO exchange, you wind up with Ben Affleck doing this very like, focusing on prejudice and discrimination, and almost saying, we shouldn't even talk about some of these things, because it can feed the nefarious and hateful elements of our society. So we should be so concerned about that, that we almost need to police our conversations from the beginning. We're on the other side, we have Sam Harris, who's emphasizing culture. And you know, really, in my view, placing the blame for terrorism, but but on a deeper level, the blame for violent movements and, and anti social organizing on the shoulders of cultural groups in a way that doesn't recognize how there are many other factors at play. And it's not just something for instance, a minority group can shoulder on its own to explain. So I think both of them represent very dominant views that you wind up seeing in society. And those of us It also, in a weird way, that what they both accomplish, at the end is the opposite of what I'm trying to do, which is that they, they wind up trying to tell the stories of these young men in a way that is so isolated, that the average viewer of that HBO show, wouldn't have been able to see I think, their own child and right they look at it and say, Well, you know, I'm not a Muslim. So this has nothing to do with me, or I'm not black, this has nothing to do with me, or they would hear someone like Sam Harris and thing. Well, that's their cultural problem. I mean, I as a person who's not part of that culture, or has not seen that problem up close in my life, I have not no way to help. I'm not part of this conversation. And that's a real mistake, I think, because the the situations that all of us wind up tend to be the result of a series of factors, both in and out of our control that create dynamics that we are responding to, and sometimes we respond to them very poorly. And, you know, we certainly deserve to be held responsible, accountable for our responses. But if the idea is to actually solve problems, and not just talk about them, and you know, divisive ways on TV, then we need to take a much different approach than that.

Yeah, I get pretty frustrated with that myself on a pretty daily basis, when I see people like, for instance, you know, picking a political side on this thing with the kids at the border, you know, you know, as if somehow who was first to blame for putting kids in cages is more important than getting the kids out of the cages. It's just a very weird way that we approach. It's almost like we have to check in on the right ideological side before we deal with kind of the ethics of the problem for some reason...

Yeah, that's incredibly well said. And and you're absolutely right. I mean, what I don't talk like, I actually go through a lot of effort to not talk about those sorts of stories on Twitter, anything, because I recognize that, you know, the context that we're in, no matter what you say, it winds up being, like you people are trying to position you on one side of that. And frankly, I think everyone with any sort of institutional power in America, regardless of your political affiliation, should be embarrassed by that problem. And should all feel responsible, you should also all be wondering, like, have we just turned these human beings into, you know, kind of political pawns on a chessboard? And that's something everyone should feel gross about. I don't know who's looking at that, and thinking that they're, so they should be proud of how their party handled it. I mean, it's like everyone should feel embarrassed. When when you don't see that humility. It's kind of scary, because you think to yourself, Well, this is exactly how we wind up with these problems in the first.

Yeah, it seems like the kind of the Arendt thing you know, the the banality of evil. You know, it's like we've, we were so we become so soaked into the wrong things that we don't even see the right things anymore. This is going to be a strange transition. But one of the big kind of, if there's such a thing as characters in a book that's nonfiction, one of the characters in a weird way is kind of hip hop, you seem to suggest that there are some potential pitfalls in certain circumstances to hip hop being, as you call it, the loudest voice in the room. For many young people, actually, you talked about a lot

of different other loudest voices in the room. Do you want to talk about that a little bit more?

Yeah, I always say like, I feel like I have a complicated relationship with hip hop, because, on one hand, there's nothing that makes me happier than hearing a Tupac song. Like, it just speaks to my soul in a way that very few things do. But on the other hand, I'm very aware of the the diversity of meanings that hip hop has in people's lives. So you think about hip hop, it's it's multi billion dollar industry, most of the people who consume it, you know, or streaming on Spotify, or, you know, looking it up on YouTube, going to concerts, and most of that consumer base is not affected by the, what I would call the philosophy expressed in a lot of the music, most of them see it as art and entertainment, they're having a good time dancing and rapping along. there's a there's a healthy disconnect, I think, between there real life, and the entertainment that they're consuming. Much like you would find in the typical movie or TV show, most of us don't watch TV and think, well, now I need to do what you know, is happening on Netflix, right? But the problem is that when you're a young man grows up like I did, where you're searching for those masculine role model, especially when you're conditioned to think and even as a young person don't know this is what's happening. But you're being conditioned to think that you're only supposed to look for role models who resemble you in some way. So I'm in the suburbs of Toronto looking for black male role models, in a community where there are no black men, older than me around on a regular basis. So what I'm finding is rappers, right, I'm finding them on TV, and finding them in music. They're being positioned as these powerful examples of a black man who is assertive and rich and successful, they've got girls and, and they're driving fancy cars. And the meaning that those rappers take is not the kind of art and entertainment that I think we hope people see, you know, music as, but instead, they're almost like clerics, they are philosopher, there are people who are articulating a worldview that I am then to adopt. And that's where it becomes dangerous. And that's the difference between, you know, the kids in a place like Southside Chicago,

where what happens in hip hop impacts, whether some of them live or die, because there are gang conflicts playing out in the music, there are guns being flash, in the videos, there is a, an echo chamber that they are creating through hip hop, that is affirming, anti social, dangerous, self destructive behaviors. And to them, that's what it's, that's what hip hop mean. And I was a kid who was being taught a lot of those same values through the music. So that's the difference. I think, like even a few months ago, when we saw someone like Nipsy Hussle, killed in Los Angeles, he was a rapper who people looked up and said, Well, a lot of his fans, I think, looked at him and said, He's an example of hip hop at best. He's an example of a rapper who's made money off music, and is now investing a lot of that money back into his community. And I love Nipsy Hussle, I really valued the example he was setting. But in a way, he also embodied the negatives of hip hop because he didn't leave the criminality behind. He still carried his blue bandana everywhere. He made gang signs. It's in his music videos. He consistently normalized death and violence in his music. And people would say, well, that's, you know, that's art. That's him talking about his reality. And I'm like, Yeah, I get it. I mean, but if we're not going to acknowledge the difference between Nipsee Hussle, and Robert De Niro appearing and gotten the Godfather, I think we're making a mistake, because Robert De Niro's alive if she hustle was killed, right. And I think that's a sign of what the difference hip hop means to different people, is that some of us lose our lives to that philosophy, because it means too much to us. And it means too much to people around us. And others get to just dance and turn the music off whenever they feel like. So. That's the thing about hip hop, I think a lot of people don't understand what you find is a lot of like, some people have responded to my book and said, You know, you're just kind of offering this same anti hip hop, you know, criticism that, you know, has been going on since the late 1980s. And, no, you're blaming this kind of subculture unfairly, blah, blah, blah. And I'm saying to them as, look, when we see a terror attack, the first thing we do is we look up the terrorist. This is what the journalists do. They look up the terrorist and they say, What was he reading on the internet? And they say, Well, he was

reading these articles about how we're how Muslims and Mexicans are the enemy. And he's hearing all this rhetoric from these bad politics Titian's and these bad, you know, people on the online and so that's why he went and attack the mosque. That's why he hates immigrants. But when a when a young black boy in Chicago, or St. Louis, or Detroit, or New Orleans, kills somebody in his community, we never look at what the philosophical kind of framework of that action. And I think that's, in my view, a bit of a legacy of us not treating black boys as having the same intellectual capacity. We don't see them as having a philosophy, we don't see the framework around the violence that takes a young black man's life. But that's happening too. And I bet you, if you look at a lot of those guys, and you look at, well, what are they reading on the internet? What are they consuming? Look at their Instagram, you're going to see a normalization of guns, a normalization of violence, you're going to see pop culture playing an outsized role in his life. And I want us to take that as seriously as we take the rhetoric that leads to any other kind of violence, especially when, despite the fact hip hop continues to brand itself as this underdog form of entertainment. It is big business, it is multi billion dollar business. So we look at a Jay Z and say, Well, he's a billionaire, that's the face of hip hop. He's one of the last billionaire to hip hop, his hat, there been many, many billionaires that hip hop, before Jay Z. And those guys do not shed a tear, when the lives are lost, in part because of the music they're sending out. So I wish we were more critical of hip hop, and instead of seeing it as a voice of the oppressor, or sorry, of the oppressed, which it can be at times, I think we should also see it as a, as a way for a lot of people to get rich, and not be held accountable for what's happening when those ideas are, are made actionable in the real world.

Well, I mean, I don't mean to push back too much here. But you know, you give you know, if you think about if the hustle, for instance, I mean, another part of your book, you talk about kind of people's lack of appreciation for trust of the of what we call the free press in this country. But at the same time, what has replaced and I know, you're saying in some cases, these

become extremist messages. But what has replaced the what used to be called, you know, mainstream media or whatever has been the stories of people through hip hop. And, you know, part of that story is that they are in a neighborhood surrounded by guns and violence and, and things like that. Is there? I mean, I guess, you know, like, you talked about Robert De Niro earlier, do you feel like you know, I mean, it's not like we're trying to get Robert De Niro to stop making Scorsese movies. You know, what, what? What is it you want from Hip Hop that you're not seeing? I guess, is the question that I have?

Yeah, that's a fantastic question. Because Because certainly, I think some people interpret what I'm saying and say, Why is he asking for, like, hip hop to be outlawed or something. And certainly, that's not the case at all. I mean, I'm a very big free speech guy. So that's not my intention whatsoever. What I would like from Hip Hop are a couple of things. One is, I mean, I'd like for adults, to better understand hip hop and to have critical conversations with young people about it. I think that's something that doesn't happen nearly enough. And that goes, again, back to kind of parenting and teaching and education. People were helping young men contextualize hip hop the right way, then I think MC hustle, and Robert De Niro might not look as different, you know, in terms of the cultural effects of their work, as they do today. But from Hip Hop itself. I think moral clarity is really important, like when you are a millionaire, who is making music about selling drugs, because that's the neighborhood you used to live in. And that's the circumstances you came from. I don't think it's crazy to say like, Hey, dude, you're a grown man now, like, maybe you should stop talking about that. And maybe you should end you might not sell as many records. But like, at what point do you take the responsibility of saying, now I'm a person who can start to talk about the world in a better way? Like, I don't think I just, I think if we were treating rappers with the same high expectations, we should have every other adult, then it would be weird for a guy like 50 cent, who at the time was in his 30s, to make a song with a guy named Chief Keef, who at the time was 17, about getting high smoking

drugs and drink. That would be weird, right to say, to see a 35 year old man, and a 17 year old boy, having that sort of an interaction, I think most adults would be like, hey, that's not, you know, healthy, or desirable. And yet, there's songs that are made like that, like, it's just, it's this weird idea that like you don't grow up in hip hop, your responsibilities don't change, the expectations of you don't change. And when you do have someone like Jay Z, who is role modeling, he's making music, that it's showing a different maturity attitude, his most recent album, not going to be honest, the one before that 444, where he's talking a lot about being a dad and raising his daughter and the trials and tribulations of marriage. That's great. And I love him for that. And I praise him for that. But then he also goes out of his way to make a song about being a drug deal, right? And it's like, maybe having some moral consistency is valuable. Maybe saying, look, this was my life, and I rapped about it, but I don't do that anymore. Because I'm trying to set a different example. I don't think it's crazy to have those expectations of a rapper. And, again, I recognize that's not good business, like, you're not gonna sell as many records. And it's not as exciting. But, you know, I think they're more important things in that. And if I'm, you know, if I'm, if I'm going to hold the young men in a neighborhood like that to a higher standard, and tell them, Hey, don't don't be a gang banger. Don't Don't skip school. You know, don't adopt misogynist worldviews. Try to do your best. And, and I know life sucks, and it's unfair. But don't let that change your moral expectations of yourself. Like, if that's my message to a 17 year old boy, then why can't I have the same message to the 40 year old, who's making music about doing any of that stuff? You know, so that's, that's kind of what I mean about hip hop. And that's something that like, President Obama has been that critical voice, I think, at times about hip hop, where he's tried to speak to young men and tell them, this is not where you're supposed to get your moral guidance from. But I think he, you know, I don't know if you would agree with me or not. But I think he would be an example of someone who wasn't always clear and consistent on that either. I mean, on one hand, he'd be saying that to a group of boys in Oakland, and then on the other hand, he's taking selfies with guys who are still offering what I

would say, are unhealthy messages. So that's what I'm asking for. And maybe that's unrealistic, but I'm okay with being unrealistic. If it comes to doing what I think is going to be helpful to people, so

I'm not sure I meant to go down that much of a rabbit hole. But I'm probably could ask you 1000 more questions about that I'm going to kind of I think part of the the larger point you're trying to get at is? Well, I think the best way to maybe explain this is to talk a little bit you talk about when you're growing up, you had a friend named rich, and you all both kind of are going through the same situation, but you ultimately follow different paths, can you do kind of have a feeling for why that happened?

Well, I mean, those are the things that that remind you of the kind of, I guess, like nexus between the choices you make, and the circumstances that you're putting, because someone like rich, know, when I look at his life, like he was someone who early on in our childhood was, you know, we all thought he was the coolest guy at our school, he was bigger than everyone else stronger, he was a great fighter. And, and fighting and basketball was kind of like how you proved how cool you were in my peer group. So because he was a good athlete, and a good fighter, he was, you know, he would he said, the tone for what everyone else thought was cool, we all want it to be like, and I, you know, when I looked back on that part of my life, and I thought a lot about rich, I reflected on how he was put in a very difficult situation that I think most adults couldn't handle, but but especially child couldn't handle, which is that you're being pushed in a certain direction, because people are encouraging you, cheering you on, the more you adopt, you know, this sort of Hollywood gangster persona that we were enamored with, but at the same time, you know, when he was over at my house, and we were just by ourselves, I mean, he was like, a very kind good, he was very respectful to my mother. And, and I, and I think that there was a very sweet part of him at the same time. So the most most people, regardless of our age, have a hard time managing how others perceive us, you know, we are all are looking for some sort of status, some

respect, some admiration, it's a very tempting part of human relationship. And especially when you're a kid, I mean, wherever that what the source of that is, matters a lot. So that, you know, when I talk about kind of the cultural factors that explain things like crime, that's like, part of what I'm getting at is that, you know, I think someone like him, was was, was in a context that would be very hard to change. And so what that what that kind of like means, I guess for like, where our lives wound up is that he, I think, we wind up dropping out of school and never lived up to his potential. And we we lost touch, because I wound up getting bused to another part of Toronto for high school. But, but we lost touch. But you know, I have them on Facebook, and I keep tabs on him. And I just think that, you know, he's, he's doing okay for himself now, which is good. But I think that he had the kind of like, social skills that you know, that, you know, CEOs because as a man, he was a powerful and magnetic personality who never learned, I think how to use those abilities, he had his best potential. So, whereas I was in a situation where I failed in many ways, that being the Hollywood gangster that he was successful at being right, like, I tried to drop out of school, and had a mom who kept fighting with me and made sure that I, I went, I went to school, and not that I wouldn't get kicked out, I tried to buy a gun, and chickened out, got really scared, because I had seen how that ruins lives. And I, and I didn't, and, you know, I went through these experiences where I was trying to walk a line similar to riches, and I failed. And the result of that, for me was that, you know, I kind of ran away from my peer group, because I thought they would think I was a, you know, chicken. And, you know, coward, or more vulgar words, in the end, um, you know, wound up, not even intentionally hot changing my peer group. And what that did was, it just created a different dynamic for me to be around. And I think that was a critical part of me finishing high school, and also going on to community college and learning how to read and write effectively in that environment. So in a weird way, by failing at the things that rich and I both were trying to do, when we were in middle school, I wound up get, you know, kind of focusing on other things, and he didn't. And I think that's a that's a big part of the randomness for how we wound

up in different places, like, part of, I reckon, like, I recognize that when when you talk about culture, and you talk about personal responsibility, I think people see those as buzzwords that are meant to draw attention away from circumstance, environment, structure, things like that. And in some cases, that that's true. But when I say these things, what I'm saying is that, like, I did learn how to exercise personal responsibility in my life. But I did that, you know, with support, right? I mean, a child doesn't just, I think, learn how to do those things well, on his own in most cases, and so I look at some, like, rich, and I say, like, you know, because I failed at being a gangster. And he was more successful. I learned personal responsibility had support from people to, you know, to take healthy responsibility for my circumstances in my learning, whereas I don't think he had, you know, a 10th of the support I had. And that's where, you know, your personal decision making as a young man, and the circumstances you find yourself and that's where they connect, which is, I do want every young man to make great decisions, and be careful about how he spends his time and where he puts himself and be mindful of the way he's going to be used by other people to to be a soldier for their cause. But I also know that, you know, my job as an adult now is to put as many kids in a position to succeed as possible. Both of those things have to happen together in order for us to have the changes that I want to see.

So I feel like I don't know if you've seen the movie Gladiator over before.

I have, yeah, I'm actually a big fan of Gladiator.

Okay, well, I think kind of one of the common themes in that movie is that this is a society that used to be very successful, that's falling apart. And they keep making reference to their having been a dream called Rome. And your book reminded me a lot of that a lot of times, because I feel a lot of like, what you're talking about, is kind of the difference of I think a lot of times when we see social failures in this country, we pointed the person and say, You're responsible, but we're missing is that there is a larger,

almost a failure for those people to believe in the dream called Rome, or in our case, the dream called the United States. What is.. Do you feel like the systemic actors have been you talk about personal responsibility? And how you want to treat individually, you want to teach individuals personal responsibility, but at what point do systemic actors have responsibility for what's going on?

Yeah, I mean, I think there's, there's I mean, these are overlapping circles, I would say entirely, right. So what I mean by that is, you know, when you're looking at a neighborhood, you know, like, I'm going to generalize for the sake of discussion, but you know, think about like a, you know, one of one of the 30 most dangerous cities in America, and you take one of those cities, you know, and you say, well, let's look at the neighborhoods where you're seeing high concentrations of violence, there's a neighborhoods where you're going to see a ton of systemic failings, you're going to see horrible relationship between cops and communities, you're going to see failing schools, that have not been sources of social mobility. And in many cases, are graduating young people who do not have, you know, skill set, whether it's reading, writing, or even social skills that are going to help them in the in the job market, you're seeing a visible economic opportunity, poor public transit, horrible health outcomes. I mean, these are all things that are systemic, and deserving of attention and things that I write about in the book, that the challenge, though, is, so even that imperfect world that, you know, people who are politicians, and business leaders and, you know, with people with institutional power academics, heads of foundations, I mean, these are the things that I that these folks should be held accountable to fixing. And I make no excuses for any of them. I have no desire to paint America's elites as anything but negligent at best, right? So I'm not making excuses for anyone, regardless of your political affiliation, or your party or any, but then then we come down to like, what do we do in that circumstance? Right? So what is the message to boys, young men, families, girls, women, everybody, what is the message to them in that circumstance is a message to them one that I think I see a lot, and that I

hear a lot, which is? Well, because of those things, our expectations of you are lower, we expect you to not be able to read well, or write well, we expect you to not be able to finish school, and go to college, or we or, or get a job, we expect you to have a hard time, you know, looking after children or or getting married or having a healthy family environment. You know, when we lower the expectations of people, I think that is that is another level of damage that happens. And it's a psychological damage the cultural damage to social damage. And it also leads to lot of excuses. And I think it also feeds into why the systemic changes don't happen. Because, well, if you think that these black boys are destined to fail in school, because they're poor, then how much do you blame the school system? Right? I mean, maybe then it's just the economy. And maybe then it's just globalization. And you keep zooming out to all these big problems, or it's or it's systemic racism, everything becomes a big problem. And then no one gets to be held accountable. And the school board, for example, or the police department, or the mayor, or the governor, right. And so, in my mind, like part of what I'm trying to do, as a lawyer, who, you know, is educated in understanding the systems and these policies and this legislation, I'm trying to acknowledge where I think that's important. But in the mind of a young man, that wants to me, the biggest tragedy of all is when all of that becomes a reason to tell him that he should be a worse person than he could be. And if you look at, you know, the, the roots of a lot of this, like, every Abrahamic faiths, for example, is premise to some degree on the idea that you can determine if you're a good person or not, regardless of your circumstance, that even if all these things happen to you, and are taken from, and life is unfair, and none of these things around you are working, you can still exercise some degree of agency that determines how you treat other people, you still have that dignity as a man, you still get to say, Well, I still get to say, if I, if I'm going to speak kindly to my girlfriend, or am I going to open hold the door open for an old lady behind me? Or am I going to commit myself to doing what I can to be there for my son? Am I going to go to a parent teacher meeting? Am I going to tend to church, right? I mean, these are all things that we have some power still. And I try

to remind people have that power. So when I say personal responsibility, that's what I'm trying to get at is, what can you do? Even if you can only influence 10% of your life? Like, what do you do with that? 10%? Because I think that that is the source of a lot of power, and inspiration that people need to overcome adversity. And hopefully, then they can be part of the conversations about improving health care and education and law enforce. And, and that's, that's, that's my kind of vision, I guess, for how all these things intersect with one another?

Well, let's take a specific example of that. Because I mean, I I certainly understand what you're saying. I mean, in my time when I was incarcerated, you know, I could have dealt with the guard the correctional officers in any particular way, how I decided to treat them. So as much about me as it does about them, I get what you're saying. But so for instance, you know, you talk about people's distrust of police in the book. You know, when you talk about, it's not always the big ticket items, the terrible examples that we see every day. It's also kind of the everyday embarrassments and harassment, and you talk specifically about an experience you had with your own father, when you were when he was dealing with the police. And so I'm wondering, so, you know, sure. On the one hand, we've got this, you know, we're trying to be the best people we can be. We're trying to live from an you know, ethos of personal responsibility, you come into conflict with someone who pulls you over and treats you like that. Where do we go from there?

Yeah, well, so you know, what happened to my father when I was eight years old is no, we, we, we were all in the car, me, my two sisters, my mom and him. And it was one of the rare times we were all together, he gets into a minor car accident. And police show up and turn it into this very dramatic thing. I didn't understand it well, because I was eight, but I just remember, you know, him, being asked to sit on the side of the road and being yelled at and demeaned. And it looked like as a kid, it looked like my father was being treated like a kid, it looked like he was being infantilized, and it was a

very powerful moment to see, you know, the man that you look up to as a kind of authority figure treated that way by cops. And and I don't know what happened between them. But I do remember cops, then walking over to me, I was sitting in the backseat of the car, you know, putting a flashlight in my face and yelling at me, and basically trying to get me to answer questions. And I was just so scared. I don't even think I said anything. But it was it was it was very traumatic for me. And I'm sure it was very traumatic for my father, I've never talked to him about it, because he, he wasn't around Dr. Much for much after that, but I suspect it was very painful for him to be treated that way. And also be treated that way in front of his children. You know, so so that experience set a certain tone in my life and, and a distrust and a resentment for cops that that I know, still to this, you know, to this day, when I see people in a uniform, that there's a feeling that comes up inside of me, right, I'm still, I'm not even even as like a lawyer who can defend himself and understands the legal system, and that there's still a residue from that way of growing up. And I think that that's how a lot of people in America feel where, you know, obviously, the history of race and policing has been anything but peaceful, and and helpful in many cases. So, um, so yeah, so I understand that as far as in terms of what we do next. So So here would be an example. Right? Because that happened to my father and me, does that make obeying the law? Less? worthwhile? Right? Does that mean that you know, because as a young man, that's what I felt, I felt angry. And I felt like, you know, I've talked to a lot of young men about this about their experience of police harassment, and many of them say, and I quote, one of them in the book where he says, if they're going to treat me like, I'm a criminal, like, why not just be like, you know, the society wants to paint me with this brush, like, Why shouldn't I just say, well screw you back and continue down that road? Because they don't understand me, they want to put me in a box, they want to hold me down. Well, then, then then, so what like, that's a real feeling that I think is created by this sort of policing. Which is why, you know, changing the way policing I think, is a big part of changing crime levels, right? I think you need better policing, because a lot of the research backs this up, you wind up creating

kind of a pockets of your society that see the law as corrupt, that see the justice system as as not working in their favor. It's stacked against them. And and that's, I mean, and you understand why because it is in many cases, right? So the point that I'm trying to make, though, is that I guess, I would say to that young man who says to me, Well, why don't I just, you know, I should, why don't I sell drugs already treating me like I sell them? And I would say like, you know, that's kind of the the point I'm trying to get at is, you know, should you change who you think you are? Because of how they see you? And do I think you should file a lawsuit against the cops? If they mistreat you? Yes. Should you file a complaint? Yes. Should you you know, get involved in holding them accountable and voting for better elected officials, and pressuring your mayor to have better people on the citizen Review Board all of that, yeah, I am not a person who would say to a young man, don't try to make the changes that you want to make. But I don't think you should take that as a as a sign that you are less deserving of the kind of dignity that every person is. And that's, that's, I think, how how my message plays out in that context is, don't let don't let that racist cop define you. Don't let how he treats you change how you treat yourself, continue to believe that you are a good person and are you are capable, and and look for your allies, because there are a lot of people out there who aren't treating you that way. And I think that it's very natural. And I was like this too. So I'm speaking from personal experience, to, to focus more on your enemies than on your friends to see the cops as your defining experience, but then not see that, you know, maybe you've got a teacher or a social worker, or guidance counselor, or pastor or a youth worker, somebody who is on your side, and maybe that person and how he sees you shouldn't matter just as much as the coffee cup. Right. And I know, that's hard. And I and I, I'm not trying to simplify that experience, because I know that it's difficult. And it's something that took me a long time to work through myself. But But I just, it breaks my heart. And it makes me very, it just the worst part of the work I do is seeing that sort of trauma, change how a young man feels about himself. I it just it's very disheartening, because, well, I think that's the opposite of what we want to be able to instill

in our young people is that they feel empowered, and they believe in themselves. And we wish the world nurtured that. But but we also don't want the world to be able to take that away from them. And and and again, so when I say things like personal responsibility, that's what I'm getting at is that you're not, you're not giving up all your power to somebody else. So you're you're holding on to as much of it as you can, because you deserve that.

So I think earlier in the conversation you discussed or you describe the feeling kind of as darkness. And I think in the book, I think I even maybe mentioned this earlier, I think one of the themes of the book, in a sense, is that there's that you're identified darkness and everything from yourself, to ISIS, to the alt right. To the Nation of Islam to the you know, every group you've come into contact with, or at least the potential for darkness. I think a lot of people would find the this commonality strange, I think that's part of the point, yes?

Yeah, yeah. So I mean, what I'm trying to do, as best I can, is to show that when we as, as people, and I think this is something that all people can connect with, when we are going through adversity, when we're going through inner turmoil experiencing chaos, when we don't feel positive and optimistic about our futures. When we don't see a light at the end of the tunnel, right, when we're when we're in that those dark places, there are there are groups that are designed very effectively, I think, to to speak to young people in those circumstances. And many cases, it's even the sort of simple, teenage angst that all of us experience. And most people if you asked him to look at a picture of themselves, when they were 16, shudder, to think of what that person was like, as we we changed a lot. I mean, we grow and yet, when we're when we're 16, when people going to weaponize that nx and that anger that we felt, I think it's very seductive and appealing. So when I say going to those dark places, what I mean, there are people want to meet you when you're there, right, who are promoting a worldview based on the dark, what you might call dark emotions, like

anger, resentment, sadness, depression, and they're speaking to those feelings, and in a way that might be very, very appealing to a lot of people. So that's what I think is a common thread between a lot of these groups. And, you know, I recognize their meaningful differences between, you know, a radical organization or gang or an extremist network or a, you know, kind of online, you know, terror cells, like, there's a lot of meaningful differences between them. And I, and I hope to not, you know, oversimplify those differences, but in terms of the similarities, and what they're offering young people and why a young man in various circumstances would find different versions of these movements appealing, I think that's what they're what they do very, very well. And unfortunately, they're reaching those young men in dark places much better than our schools are often much better than our police departments, our churches, our community organizations, you know, and and what I tried to do in the book is to show why they're reaching these young men. And maybe that's something that those of us who have good intentions, those of us who want to empower people, and save lives, and promote a more just society. Maybe we can learn something from why they're reaching these these isolated young men and do a better job of reaching them for you talk about the importance of universities, for instance, focusing on opportunities for social mobility.

I know in a world in which we spend billions I know, our state and Michigan here spends billions every year on corrections is part of the problem also, that we're not investing a lot of our resources in communities?

Absolutely. That is, I think, undeniably the case. I mean, a lot of the programs I write about, like there's this fatherhood support program in Newark, New Jersey that was designed to help offenders coming out of or ex offenders coming out of the justice system and help them with reintegration into their families and their communities. It was having incredible amount of evidence that it was effective, very, very high rates of success, lots of anecdotal support, as well, a lot of positive experiences that men who went into the program were having, and it ran out of money.

And I mean, that's like a great example of like, you know, we say things like, we want evidence based programming, we want to prove that that things are efficient and effective. And then you've got a community program that can do that. And it doesn't get funded. And no one can explain why. So I think that that's an example. But even in a place like New Haven, Connecticut, where I also spent some time you wind up with this, like very rich University, like you know, that Yale is, attracts billions of dollars of investment, their endowment is enormous. I think it might be the biggest in North America, at least. And, and you've got poverty all around it. And you say yourself, like, you know, if this university is supposed to be so smart, if people like me who go there are supposed to be so smart. And the people who teach there are the geniuses of our society, you think they'd be able to at least solve the problem of their neighbor? And yet they can't. So the the need for investment in communities is, I mean, incredibly important. And that goes for not just economic investment, but also investment in community services. So huge problem. Yeah. And I think that universities think, I think part of our expectation, as taxpayers should be that our universities are using their resources to actually make people's lives better. And for every academic article that sits on a shelf somewhere and never gets read. And, but but is it where, you know, the public is paying someone 200 grand a year? year? Two, right? I think we should say, Well, you know, if we're going to have things like that going on universities, like we should have some sort of quota, or ratio for, you know, useless research versus actionable, problem solving research. And and I think we should would have higher expectations of our universities to use our tax dollars in better way.

You also seem to have some concerns of how voices are heard. For instance, when you talk about social media and the movement for black lives, they seem to be asking the question of how we thread the needle between underrepresented voices and decentralizing experience. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Yeah, you know, probably the part of the book that I've had the most heated debate about, or one of the few parts has been

the hip hop chapter on.

Sorry, hip hop being the other part.

Yeah, hip hop's one of them to you know, it's funny, it's so it's hip hop. It's the chapter that includes white supremacist organizations as well, because I think a lot of people are very uncomfortable thinking about young white men in this conversation, like a lot of people want it to be about race experiences, and prejudice and bias. And then when I include young white man, I just get a lot of weird reactions with like, well, that I mean, that's not the same. And I'm like, well, but just because you think he's privileged. And But does that mean he sees himself as privileged? And does that mean that the group's reaching out to him might be delivering a similar message as they are to young Muslims are young black men? So is that the inclusion of white men is also been an interesting kind of source of debate. But yeah, going, going to your question, though, about Black Lives Matter, and representation. So I think my criticism, I guess, the Black Lives Matter, I think, is pretty narrow, but I'm not sure that always gets seen as a narrow one, which is, I think, a lot of the problems that they respond into their right in their diagnosis, as far as there being racial bias and police involved shootings, being an unacceptable reality of American law enforcement today. But my concern is when we do activism, around identities, the kind of responsibility that we think we're taking about that, right, so if you are going to come into the public square as the self proclaimed kind of experts on what valuing Black Lives looks like, and you want to talk about the police, it's like, Okay, I think a lot of people can not nod their head and say, Now, maybe we have different views. But this is a real concern. And then you take that kind of power that you've been given by, in many ways, frankly, by just news media, because you've been positioned as an expert on TV, and you're interviewed and all these articles, you know, and that's not Black Lives Matters fault at all, although I would say they invite that with

their name. But that, but then you go and you kind of wind into other territory, right? So you put out this 2016 policy platform that I would say makes, you know, like Bernie Sanders look like Ronald Reagan. Right. I mean, it's it's a lot of fringe kind of far left wing ideas that, you know, can be assessed on their merits, certainly, but I'm not sure would be fair to say that, you know, that those views where they're going and just to be specific, like I'm talking about, you know, opposing fossil fuels, or what, you know, opposing the Israeli government, you know, proposing private funding for education, which is manifest itself, often as charter school opposition. They're you talking about these sort of ideas? And you're saying, Well, what does that really have to do with black people? And is that a fair way to characterize believing black lives matter that, you know, if I, if I believe Black Lives Matter, that means I've got to be oppositional to Israel? I don't know about that. I mean, that's a stretch. And so what you wind up seeing, though, is that when you when you have this diversity of players, radical ideas, attached to someone's identity, it leads to, in my view, and my experience, a false sense of authenticity, right, that if you're a black person that you're supposed to kind of stand alongside certain political views. And when you don't, whether that's the news media, or politicians or activists who really want there to be some sort of like unified racial position on some things, then you get kind of criticized or you get kind of undermined or people don't think you're the authentic voice for your racial group as if that's ever possible in the first place. Right. So that's a lot of what my criticism comes from, because what I think that means for in real life, like in the practical application of it, is when you have a black person, and I document one in particular, who is the Deputy Chief of Police, in my hometown of Toronto, who is trying to fight for change from the inside. And he's not as radical as I'm sure a lot of people would like him to be. But he is, in his context. very progressive guy, trying to bring more human rights focus to policing.

But he's not seen as authentic, right, he doesn't get the attention that that the Black Lives Matter activists get he doesn't get treated as a voice of his community. He is seen as this kind of robotic boring guy who's not yelling

when he gets a microphone in his face. And and his work winds up being blunted, because you have this sort of false authenticity that black people are being held to. So that's that's kind of what I, what I try to do in the Black Lives Matter chapter just show how that plays out. And request, I hope that people who do activism, around identity, be more conscious of what they're actually doing when they step into the public square. because inevitably, when you are advocating as a black person, as a woman, as a young man, like I am doing, for example, there's always a risk of essentially realism. And you have to be very, very careful with that. So for example, and what I tried to do with my book is, you would, I think, would be hard pressed to find any sort of prescription in the book for what young men are supposed to think about virtually any subject, I mean, the main things that I try to say are, look, we need government to kind of not sabotage people and prevent them from living a healthy life. We need men to participate in their families and their communities in their country. We need men to feel like they're involved in our society and can bring their issues to the table, and people are going to take them seriously. But if you disagree with me on Israel, or health care, or, you know, funding for public schools, I have no intention to tell you that you're not doing what's right, as a young man, I mean, that's just not my, my job. And I think that we're black, the Black Lives Matter approach to activism leads to that experience where you're kind of decentralizing black people. And you're making hard for those of us who don't agree with you to to to be an equally authentic voices for our community. So I guess that's kind of maybe a concise, hopefully concise summary of what I'm trying to argue there.

I don't I mean, I can't, you know, I obviously, I'm not the person who should be the spokesperson for the movement for black lives. But, you know, I suspect that they might or members might say back that, you know, they really are a leaderless movement, and that they build a lot of their positions through consensus, is that not correct?

Yeah. So that, that that's, um, that's part of the response I've heard in terms of the leaderless is also, you know, they've said, you know, we're a series of different chapters and organs and groups like within, like, within the Black Lives Matter umbrella. So there's a diversity of views within black lives matter for sure. And I get that, but but here's the thing, right, you're at the end of the day, clarify, because I feel okay, you know, what, at a nominating convention, the political party puts out a platform, you know, and so that that document, you're talking about the 2016,

you know, I suspect that that was arrived through through consensus, and is actually a representative representation of a lot of diverse ideas that they are being inclusive of, I guess, how did how would you ever escape that essentialism, I guess, is what I'm saying?

Yeah. And so that's so that's kind of my point, right. Which is, like, that's exactly why you don't do activism in that way. Because it's unavoidable. Like, look, I understand that their movement would not get half the attention that it did, if they were called the Coalition for police, you know, police reform or something, right. Like, I mean, I get that, like, you know, asking them to brand themselves in these like, kind of boring, unmarketable ways, is not good for their ambitions as an activist group. But just like I criticize the Nation of Islam, for coming under the name of Islam, to promote a political agenda, that might have nothing to do with Muslims, I think it's fair to say the same thing to Black Lives Matter, you're taking an identity as part of your branding. And as a person who shares that identity, I think it's fair for me to say like, hey, like, why are you able to do that? And have you thought through the consequences of that, for those of us who don't share your politics? Because I use the example of little Wayne, for example, I mean, there you have a black young black man who goes on TV, he waves a red bandana and calls himself a gang banger? does all these things that I would say, as a person who cares about young men, I would wish little Wayne did not do those. Right? Doesn't get criticized for it? Because that's seen as not a problem. In modern America, we see rappers do that. And

we say, well, that's their reality. So who are we to tell them that they shouldn't be doing? Okay. But then he says, I don't identify Black Lives Matter. And he gets criticized in every direction for why should any black person go through that? Why should a black person be put in a position where you can go on TV, be asked about a group that says it's an expert for your people? So you don't identify with them? And then you get criticized for it? Is there a white person in America? Who goes through that? Is there a white person in America, who would be expected to be asked about a political movement you don't identify with, and then be criticized because you didn't stand by? I don't, I can't think of an example. So that's what I'm talking about. Don't if the problem is essentialism, and we say it's unavoidable, which I think would be fair to say that it is in this example, then maybe don't open the door in the first place. And if you do, which you have the right to I mean, I'm not saying Black Lives Matter should be outlawed. Of course, like they have no right to come under that name. But then they also have the right to be criticized for just the same.

Sure, I guess, to kind of sum everything up, in a sense, you've been kind of all well, not all over the world, but you've been around the world a little bit. And this is all of you kind of cover a lot of that we spent most of our time on the United States. But how were your experiences in for instance, Brussels? Well, how was your experience consistent from say, when you were in Brussels to when you were in Canada when you're in the United States, in terms of the kind of major themes you're covering in the book?

Yeah, so the the major themes, I would say that link these different countries or geographies is what I would call it maybe like a high concentration of dissatisfaction and frustration among young men. So if you're, you know, if you're talking about like, why was ISIS, for example, so successful in recruiting in Belgium, relative to let's say, Germany, right? It has a similar answer to why, you know, again, might be more successful to recruiting young men in Southside Chicago, then in Rockford, for example, right, because the, the concentration of struggle, the concentration of

disenchantment of frustration, of overburdened and in some cases, broken community institutions to kind of fill in the gaps in people's lives. That that is a big part of the commonality between these different countries is that where you find the high concentrations in male suffering, you often find high concentrations of violence and extremism of various sorts. The other the other thing I would say is that the internet has played a very similar role in the lives of young people in all these different countries. So when you see young men who maybe didn't grow up in that sort of neighborhood, where he didn't have gangs in his community, or he didn't have a high number of dissatisfied young men who are unemployed, or dropped out of school, but maybe you're talking about middle class, guys, maybe you're talking about guys a university degree to have two parents at home, fairly easy life, the internet is a gateway for them into tap into that frustration, right. And, and when I say the internet, I mean, you know, the use of Facebook, the use of Instagram, the use of Twitter, to spread propaganda, and but also to into, to recruit to encourage young men to participate in criminal activity. gangs are using it more in the United States, terrorist organizations, and white supremacist organizations, and online extremists are obviously using it. So that's another commonality that has been very effective. And that's partly what I think makes the challenges in front of young men today, different than it might have been for young men of the past, which is that we are peer group travels with us in our pockets in our phones. And no matter what we might want to do to change our lives or make some sort of difference in how we spend our time, it can be very hard to fully escape the influence of our peer group. So that that's a really, that's a really important kind of thing to recognize that I think is cross cultural. And then lastly, what I would say as a common experiences, I believe that perception matters a lot. And I think that that's a really important thing for people to, to take away, I hope from my book, and from our conversation today, which is that we met come up with theories about what adversity looks like, right? So we can say, Well, if you are middle class, if you go to university, if you are white, if you have two parents at home, like you know, we can come up with these ideas for what an easier life looks like. But a lot

of it comes down to the perception of a young man. So if he's a white guy with a good education, but has been convinced to see himself as part of a group of people who are losing their country to diversity, and he must enlist in some sort of clash of civilizations, to save his race of people, regardless of whether you think he's privileged or not, he needs to be helped to escape the way he thinks not to be convinced to think the way you want him to those are two different goals. The same goes for the young Muslim man in Europe, who joins group like ISIS, regardless of whether he has an easy life for safety and security at home, if he believes he is being attacked and persecuted against and there are there are people who hate him. And he's trying to figure out what to do about that. He needs to be helped to think about his place in society differently, and to be listened to, and not be kind of told that his life is easier than he thinks it is. And the same goes for, you know, young American boy who may be drawn to gang activity is, you know, whatever ways we might have to try to explain his life. And I think conservatives who overemphasize personal responsibility, they might say, Well, look, you know, in America, the research shows that if you, you know, get married before you have kids, and you finish high school, you can, you can get a good job, right. But the truth is, like how he feels about his life matters, and understanding the adversity that he perceives, and helping him work through that adversity is really important. So all of those things I'm talking about, that's kind of the common thread is understanding how young men see the world and see themselves and how they, what their identity is, that's, that matters a lot to solving these problems. And I think too often, the analyses that we see, whether that's in books, or podcasts or on TV or whatever, is more based on what what, you know, the the the dispassionate observer, the academic, the politician, the person watching from the sidelines, were more concerned with what that person says, than we are about what young men are seeing and feeling themselves. So that's partly why I focus so much on trying to empower people. And to see that, you know, regardless of how unfair The world is, you do have some expectations on you to be a good person and to do the right thing, because I need you to see yourself in the best light. I think

that's, that's so critical. And it's something that I devote a lot of my time to promoting.

So I usually, I mean, I don't usually say this, but there's probably at 40 more questions. But so I always have the same last question. I can guess what some of the answers would be. What did I mess up? What are some of the things I should have asked, but did not?

Oh, I don't I'm not sure you mess anything up? I mean, I think you're, you're very nice of you know, what I mean, is that I think your questions have all come from a place of genuine concern about these issues. And and I'm, you know, I honestly, I think that we underestimate the value of that, I really mean, like, when I interviewed by somebody, or have the chance to have a conversation with someone who I think really cares about the people that we're talking about, that's important to me, and whether we agree on anything or not, I mean, I'd be happy to disagree with someone literally every single thing. As long as we share that in common that we share that that heart for people. So I think that's the place you've come from this conversation, I hope you think you believe that's the place I've come from, as well. And, And to me, that's the starting point of solving these problems. If we if we have that, then I think we have a we have a lot we can build on so.

Well, I agree with you about a lot. That's for sure. So thanks so much for coming on. I really, really enjoyed the book and appreciate you take the take taking the time.

Yeah, thank you for the for the opportunity to speak with you and be part of the podcast. Also just thank you for the work you do. I mean, I know we didn't get to talk about that, because I assumed your your audience is familiar with who you are. But But you know, I think your your role in making this country a better place should not be overlooked. So thank you for the work you do.

That's very kind of you. And thanks again, I really appreciate it and hope to talk to you again soon.

Same here. All right,

bye, bye.

Now, my take was probably obvious that there were a few disagreements that jovial and I had on a couple of the things that his book, there are also a lot of things that we agreed about. I do think that is important, even the in the face of oppression, to take personal responsibility and to remain ethically consistent when you return from incarceration. I do think the absence of parents and young men's life can have huge impacts on young adulthood. One of the chapters I found most powerful was this discussion of the relationship between Yale and poverty in the surrounding neighborhoods. And this happens so often I was just reading a breakdown of Mayor Pete's time in Cambridge and about how he rarely talked about the poverty that surrounds the University at Harvard University in Cambridge. You know, I mean, this is pretty obviously the case that in a lot of places of privilege, privilege ignores what it surrounds. And I think that this is a pretty important thing to talk about. One of the things that Jamil talked about that really resonated a lot with me is his discussion of hip hop. And I don't know if you're going to take the time to read the book, but I hope you will. I grew up on hip hop. And while I fully agree that is deeply problematic when people who get on the mic and share information designed to lead to new crimes or to identify people that they want targeted, I think that's really problematic, and really something that, that it's troubling. But I also think it's really important for people to speak out about what life is really like from the place that they come from, from the places where they stand where their feet are, there's something potentially really important about someone who has, for instance, sold drugs on the corner, not just sharing that experience, but also using that experience to criticize

the truth of the futility, unfairness and failure of our current war on drugs. If you ever watch the wire, which we referenced in the discussion, and it's certainly mentioned in the book, you might now you might not want to be Snoop, or Mike, or agree with what Snoop or Mike or Marlo do. But at the end of the day, while a Stephen King once said Snoop was a terrifying villain, you still have deep empathy for Snoop. And when her story ends, I'm not even sure I entirely see her as a villain, especially knowing that the actress that played Snoop Felicia Pearson came from a similar life. And you certainly gain a healthy cynicism for drug enforcement by following her and Chris and the rest of the characters stories throughout, I certainly learned a great deal not just from TV, but from listening to music, about the problems with drug enforcement, about surveillance, about racism, about racism, and policing, all of those things come through, because people in when some people are sometimes defiant about the things that they did in those neighborhoods, but in ways that deeply implicate the way our society approaches these things, social problems. This is healthy for all of us, we need to understand the people and places and stories of why and how people chose crime, about why their neighborhoods are a mess, why racism is on the present. Sometimes we even need to know why people choose and even celebrate lives that we think in more privileged society, are should be shunned. It can change the way we look at law, it can change the way we look at truth, it can change the way we look at justice. And sometimes it can even change laws, because there is this idea that law for some reason, is inherently good. That's not always the case. There are thousands upon thousands of laws that have been passed in this country, not just slavery, a lot of other ones that were deeply unjust. And our idea that the that we should adhere to, to law at all costs, that the most important thing thing about our society is this notion that we are a nation of laws. A lot of times our laws get it wrong, they are lawless law, they do things that make situations worse, they don't make people safer. And we need to hear stories from people making that claim from the position in the place where those laws impact them the most. Now, on the other hand, there are dangers. I am, for instance, very open about my story, my hope is

that people learn the right lessons and learn to avoid the things that led me down the wrong path. But I also want people to truly understand what happened, how it happened. And the ways that real people can do make bad decisions. Even in my case, where I try to be very clear and say nobody should ever do what I do, and they should learn from my experience what not to do. There is always a risk, someone could take the exact wrong lessons from my story. But that is not a reason to stop telling the story. It is a reason to be careful about how you tell the story. And I think that's part of Jimmy's point to it can be a really thin line between glorifying criminality and undercutting the investigation of injustice. There's always a danger that people are influenced by or glorify the wrong lessons from art, I guess I think the discussion is a healthy one. And it takes a lot of guts to speak out against hip hop, and to ask people in hip hop to be more responsible with the messages that they construct. At the same time, I think it's really important that art continue to work against dominant narratives that continue to work to tear down lawless law and to continue to educate people about the truth of where people come from. These are complicated but important discussions to have and I thank Jamil again, for starting that discussion with me and for writing when I think in a lot of ways is a very courageous book. I don't agree with all of it, but I agree with the of it.

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