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CGC RACISM EVENT

INTERVIEW WITH DARYL DAVIS AND RYAN LO'REE

MODERATOR: WENDI C. THOMAS

INTRODUCTION: BRUCE BOND

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* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: BACKGROUND NOISE FREQUENT, ONLY TRANSCRIBED WHEN PARTICULARLY INTRUSIVE.* * *

BRUCE BOND:

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(IN PROGRESS) --friend Wendi C. Thomas as moderator. Wendi is the founding editor and publisher of MLK50: Justice Through Journalism, an award winning, nonprofit newsroom focused on poverty, power, and public policy. She and her team of talented journalists are based in Memphis, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed 50 years ago.

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Their reporting centers on the people, especially workers, Dr. King died fighting for. Check out their site at MLK50.com. In 2018, Wendi moderated

our panel with Donna Brazile and Michael Steele. And tonight, she will be working with two more truly phenomenal panelists.

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We're so pleased to welcome Daryl Davis and Ryan Lo'Ree. Wendi will tell you more about them. But after Daryl did one of our first *Let's Find Common Ground* podcasts, we knew there was a lot more to learn. Thanks to all of you for being with us tonight. And with that, let me hand the floor over to Wendi.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Thank you so much, Bruce. I wanna welcome everybody to tonight's discussion, *Finding Common Ground: Turning Racism and Extremism Into Hope and Healing*. This is brought to you by the Common Ground Committee, the Bridge Alliance, and MLK50: Justice Through Journalism.

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This event is a kickoff to the National Week of Conversation known as NWOC. I'm Wendi C. Thomas, your presenter and founder of MLK50. Our hope

tonight is that our discussion will shed light on how each of us can do our part to help heal divisions in our society.

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Now, if you'd like to let others know about tonight's event, we're live streaming it on Common Ground Committee's Facebook page, and on YouTube. And we want you to tweet about this. We've got three hashtags for you. The first is #fromracismtohealing, #endracism, and #nwoc2021.

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So let's get started. We're joined by two extraordinary human beings tonight who have devoted much of their lives to confronting racism and extremism head on to help bring harmony and healing to our society. I think it's important to tell you a little bit about them, so here we go.

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First, let me introduce Daryl Davis. Daryl is an accomplished boogiewoogie and blues piano player who has shared the stage with legends such as Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, and B.B. King. He's

also spent over 35 years using the power of human connection to convince over 200 people to leave white supremacist groups and renounce racism.

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Daryl's work has even taken him to KKK rallies, this is a brave man, complete with chanting and burning crosses. And because of his efforts, over two dozen Klansmen have actually given them-- given him their robes, and some have even become close friends.

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Daryl was even invited by the KKK's Imperial Wizard of Maryland to be the godfather of his daughter. Now let me introduce Ryan Lo'Ree. Ryan is a former white supremacist who turned away from hate. He grew up in the very poor community of Flint, Michigan, where many children end up in gangs or prisons.

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And both of those actually happened to Ryan. He came home after serving in the military, found himself broke, and was drawn into a group called

the Rollingwood Skins. After counseling and self education, which he's gonna talk to us about, he is now with Light Upon Light as an interventionist. He's working to deradicalize others who have been lured into extremism and white supremacy. Welcome to you both, gentlemen.

DARYL DAVIS AND RYAN LO'REE:

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Thank you. It's a pleasure.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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So we only have an hour. We could talk all night, I'm sure, but an hour isn't a lot of time. So let me st-- set the stage with what we're up against today in terms of hate groups and racism. The Senate Appropriations Committee held a hearing on domestic extremism in May, and here's what Attorney General Merrick Garland told the Senate.

MERRICK GARLAND:

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Unfortunately, the horror of domestic violent extremism is still with us. Indeed, the FBI assessed that 2019 was the deadliest year for violent domestic extremism since 1995. In March of this year, the intelligence community in a

report drafted by DHS, the FBI, and the National Counterterrorism Center, under the auspices of the Director of National Intelligence, assessed that domestic violent extremists pose an elevated threat in 2021. And in the FBI's view, the top domestic violent extremist threat we face comes from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists, specifically those who advocate for the superiority of the white race.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Daryl, let's-- let's start with you. You've convinced hundreds of white supremacists to renounce racism over the course of decades. Are you surprised that these groups are on the rise? And also how do you think we got to this point?

DARYL DAVIS:

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Okay, well no, I'm not surprised. Yes, they're on the rise, but they're not on the rise as most people would perceive it. Because they've always been here. And so yes, you have some new ones, but they've always-- there's always been white supremacy in this country.

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And in recent years they've come out from under the carpet, out from the closet. You know, they-- they've felt emboldened. So that's why people are perceiving it's all of a sudden, you know, a big mass has just, you know, hit-- hit the planet or something.

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But-- I'm not surprised, because what you're-- what you're looking at is two decades from now, in 2020-- I'm sorry, in 2042, 21 years from now, two decades, this country's population will, for the first time in-- in our history, become 50/50, 50% white, 50% non-white.

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And when you have sat on the throne of power for 400 years, you don't wanna get off. And while there is a large segment of the white population of this country that welcomes that and says, "Hey, you know, I don't have a problem with that, no big deal, it's evolution, it's what happens," there is a certain segment of our population that

is becoming unhinged about it.

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They don't wanna see that happen. They feel that their identity is being erased. They call it the browning of America, or white genocide through miscegenation. So this is why you're seeing all these groups pop up. Now, you know, when I first started this kind of work about 37 years ago, there was, you know, the Ku Klux Klans and neo-Nazi groups and some white power skinheads.

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Now you got-- those same three, plus-- the Proud Boys, the Boogaloo Boys, the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters, on and on and on, the alt right. You have all these groups saying, "Come join us." You know, "We're gonna take our country back. We're gonna build that wall. We're gonna send those people back to where they belong and where they came from," and all that. So it's that fear, you know, that they're perpetuating in order to recruit, because they feel that their identity is being erased.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Right, right. So you're seeing this more as-- as--
- an awakening, and we're seeing it more
publicly, but not necessarily a rise in the
numbers.

DARYL DAVIS:

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Well, I mean, we are seeing a rise in the numbers
as they recruit, but it's not the rise that
people think it is. You know, people have always
had that mindset. You know, that-- that has
existed for a long time in this country. You
know, we-- we've never come to terms with it.

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Now we're having to face it and deal with it head
on, okay? In the past it was taboo to talk about
racism and all that kind of thing. But now w--
you know, we are confronting it head on. So
that's why people have the perception that it's a
lot bigger than it always has been. It's big,
don't get me wrong, it is big. But it's not
exacerbated to the extent that many people--
think it is. Especially those people who have not

been working in this field for a long time.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Right, right. Now-- now, Ryan, I wanna turn to you. You were actually on the inside of a white supremacy group and chose to-- to get out. And I understand that before joining you actually had some Black friends growing up? To help us understand what's going on in this country, can you explain how you became a part of a hate group?

RYAN LO'REE:

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Yeah, I actually had-- a family member that had just got outta prison. I was in a very tough economic-- position in my life at the time. It was hard to find a job-- living in the city of Flint. We-- we've always been stuck in-- since the '80s, in what you'd wanna call a recession.

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Once General Motors lays people off-- there's no jobs. Most restaurants are hurting terribly, and-- at the time, me just getting out of the military-- GM was just starting to actually--

give people, you know, buyouts, and to-- was laying people off.

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And my family-- going generations back, have always been General Motors workers-- and-- and many of my friends. But there was-- it was hard to find a job anywhere. General Motors in the city of Flint, they-- they basically helped all the other businesses survive.

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And so when General Motors struggles, so do they. So I was-- I was in a very tough economic situation. I had an uncle, like I said, that I just got outta prison. He was actually part of a hate group-- while he was inside. He came to me, knowing that I was hurting at the time, like many hate groups do-- to vulnerable people, and-- said he had some people he wanted to introduce me to.

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He introduced me to a group of-- neo-Nazi skinheads at the time. And-- because I had just got out of the military, I believe that I was

still looking for that, like, that brotherhood. And it-- you know, they lured me right in. Did I believe all the philosophy right away? No.

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I think a lot of what they were playing on was my anger, my anger with the U.S. government-- my anger with the fact that, you know, I was a veteran and couldn't get a job. And-- the situation and the place that I was in, I had a friend that had stolen some stuff from me.

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They played on that anger too, that, you know, "They're all that way"-- which is obviously not the case. But when you're-- when you're using these types of things to key in on points-- that somebody's dealing with, you know, psychologically-- a lot of these people that-- I say they're like cult leaders. That's exactly what they zero in on. And-- that's what they did with me, and that's what they do with, you know, hundreds and thousands of other people that join these groups.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Yeah. How did you get out? How-- how-- why were you m-- how did you manage to extricate yourself?

RYAN LO'REE:

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So with me, and like many, and it's usually the time that we will try to intervene with the work that we do, is that I was incarcerated. And through that incarceration, I was able to separate myself from the group. I had other people that had come to me, friends of mine from before I'd ever joined these groups, that said, "Hey, I still love you, I still care about you.

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"I know that you made these mistakes. I know that this isn't you." And that was very, very important for my transition and for my transformation. It's very important for us, too, when we do our interventions to be the same way. To, you know, we talk about this all the time, Daryl has said this many times, you can be empathetic without being sympathetic with the person.

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And having that empathy just allows them to actually sit down at the table with you so you can start a conversation, to even begin to-- to understand whether or not you can deradicalize this person or not. 'Cause not every case is s-- a success story.

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In mine, though, it was. I had the support of family. I had a support system of friends that were still there for me. And so-- and I had-- an inmate at the time that actually-- was very understanding of my past. He knew we grew up in the same city.

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And-- he turned me on to some different civil rights leaders that he had read books about, and-- one of them being Dr. Cornell West at the time. And so there was a lotta different things that I was turned towards by different people that were just very supportive that helped me to really make that major transformation. But there's a

lotta psychology that comes into it, and it doesn't just happen overnight. It's definitely a long process. And-- it's a process that's really underfunded in this country to-- to help with intervention work.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Yeah. So education it seems like was a big part of your-- your transformation.

RYAN LO'REE:

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Definitely.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Yeah. So Daryl and Ryan, I understand that you two have worked together on this-- this antiracism work. Tell us a little bit about that.

DARYL DAVIS:

00:12:52;01

Oh, Ryan is my brother. (LAUGH) You know, and yeah, absolutely. And, you know, we-- we each-- and-- our colleagues, we all see the need for this personal intervention. You know, there-- there are many facets to racism. You know, there is systemic racism, institutionalized racism, and there's individual racism.

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And we work a lot on the individuals, people who are-- were in these-- in these i-- ideologies, because eventually they end up in the system. And then that spreads to the-- systemic. You know, the-- the system doesn't operate by itself, man operates the system.

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And, you know, when I was a kid, I'm sure you've heard it too, a tiger does not change its stripes. A leopard does not change its spots. So when I first got involved in this, you know, I just thought, "Hey, you know, a Klansman, you know, is not gonna change his robe and hood. That's who he is. That's who she is."

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But I learned something. What can be learned can become unlearned. And yes, a tiger and leopard do not change their stripes and spots. But that's because they were born with those stripes and spots. A Klansman is not born with his robe and hood.

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It-- it is a learned behavior. And like I said, what can be learned can become unlearned. But we must put in the time. And as Ryan pointed out, it does not come overnight. It comes over time. And there's no set time. You know, white supremacists are as individual as anybody else, you know?

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They might change in a couple weeks, might be a few months, might be a couple years. It may be never. But a missed opportunity to dialogue is a missed opportunity for conflict resolution. Nothing gets solved without having that conversation.

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And also, as Ryan pointed out, education is key. You know, a lotta things are stemmed in ignorance. Ignorance is what breeds fear. We fear those things of which we're ignorant, those things we don't understand. And if we do not address that fear, that fear will escalate into hatred.

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And if we don't address the hatred, the hatred escalates into anger, which escalates into destruction. Like, for example, you take almost four years ago-- a month after next it'll be four years since the-- white supremacist rally in-- Charlottesville, Virginia, which occurred August 12th, 2017.

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On that day in Charlottesville, there was a lot of ignorance. There was a lot of fear. There was a lot of hatred. And what did it culminate in? It culminated in destruction when a white supremacist got inside his vehicle and drove full speed, full force into the crowd of counter-protesters, attempting to murder as many as he could.

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He succeeded in injuring 20 people and murdering one young lady named Heather Heyer. Now, you saw that-- that's the whole (UNINTEL). Ignorance, fear, hatred, destruction. We spend a lotta time

addressing this thing backwards. We-- we address the destruction.

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Forget about the destruction. Forget about the hatred. Forget about the fear. Those are all byproducts. Those are all symptoms of the nucleus. The nucleus is ignorance. And the good thing about it is this: ignorance can be cured. If you cure the ignorance, then there's nothing to fear.

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With nothing to fear, there's nothing to hate. With nothing to hate, there's nothing to get angry about and destroy. The good thing is ignorance can be cured. And the cure for ignorance is education, just as Ryan pointed out. You know, provide that education.

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Let's focus our efforts, our time, our energy, and our financial resources on providing education for people and exposing them to the things they don't know, and the people with whom

they-- they are aware of but never come in contact. You know, as I said, a missed opportunity for conflict-- I mean, for a conversation is a missed opportunity for-- for conflict resolution.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Right. Ryan, talk to me a little bit about the work that you and Daryl have done together. I understand you've actually been out there doing this work. Seminars, workshops? Tell me a little bit about that.

RYAN LO'REE:

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Yeah, we've done-- several different-- calls like this, especially with COVID this last year-- where we've spoke to, you know, different organizations on-- different tactics and ways that you can-- intervene, and you know, the different types of situations that they will face-- while doing this.

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I will tell you, and a lot of the work that we have done-- is very hard to do. It's a dangerous

job, because-- in America, especially, we've funded so much of what we call the-- violent side of-- combating extremism or terrorism. And we've gave less funding and effort to really helping the people that want to do the intervention work-- to realizing that formers can change their lives.

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That's something that Daryl has been doing for years. I actually watched, before I ever got to meet Daryl or-- talk to him and-- and-- and become his brother and feel, you know, have the love I do for him, I-- I fell in love with him watching his documentaries and seeing the work that he was already doing.

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And I told myself, "Someday I'm going to work with this man." And sure enough-- through a friend of ours and colleague, Jesse Morton, who-- helped us start Light Upon Light and Parallel Networks-- we-- were introduced. And since then it's-- it's been a tight bond.

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I love the work that Daryl does. I love the work that Jesse does, and not just with, you know, white-- right wing extremism, but also jihadism. You know, they're-- the intervention works the same way. And we failed the War on Terror in a lot of different ways, by thinking that we were gonna be able to combat it, you know, with-- with missiles and bombs and-- and destruction.

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And really a lot of it needed to be this right here, being able to sit down at-- a table and figure out why did this person ever take that step into doing what they did? And that's exactly what me and Daryl have done. And it's not just speaking to people, like I-- I talked to you about this earlier.

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It's not just speaking to people that have been in before. Sometimes it's even helping somebody to-- to get over somebody that maybe passed away that had something like this go on in their life,

or a family member that has questions because they just found out that their son joined a hate group and they wanna know what can they do to help them pull them out.

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You know, so our work doesn't always just have-- isn't just with-- people that are part of these groups. Our work goes out into the family members-- you know, brothers, cousins, sisters. I mean-- you name it, we've-- we've done work with those.

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And-- me and Daryl have worked specifically on a couple cases, and the one that I brought up earlier was the one that really-- touched my heart, partly because she still stays in touch with me. And-- her-- fiance at the time was a mountain climber. He was an adventurer.

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All she knew about him was love, that's all he gave the people that he was around in his community. And then after he passed away, he was

murdered-- and this case has went unsolved. And after his murder, she actually started digging more into his past and found out that he used to be part of a hate group in Canada.

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And she was saddened by this, because she-- this wasn't the person she knew. But-- the person that she fell in love with was very important, because that person had changed his life, he had deradicalized himself. He wasn't that many anymore.

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But we were able to sit down with her and explain to her where I had been in my life and why I had joined a hate group, and what I did to deradicalize myself, and why it was very important for her never to lose that love that she had for him, and-- and to remember him for the good times.

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And so it's, you know, long story short, Daryl has reached out to me plenty of times to do

events like this-- to speak to seminars, to speak with several different colleges that-- we've spoken with-- working with students-- through Boston University and Harvard.

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And-- I'll tell you, I-- I wouldn't be more happy and proud to be working with-- two awesome gentlemen. I know Jesse isn't here with us tonight, but-- he's definitely somebody that everybody should look into, Jesse Morton. And Daryl is-- like you said, we are brothers. I mean, they are probably closer to me in some ways-- working, you know, head on with these things, than my own brother himself. So-- I-- I'm just glad to be here tonight with him.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Great, great.

DARYL DAVIS:

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You know, if I might add in a couple things also, is that, you know, not only do we talk with these people, and try to help them understand, but also we give them support. Because coming out of

these-- of these types of groups, there is a stigma attached.

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And like I said, for example, you know, if-- if I'm your friend and-- and I come to you and I tell you, "Hey, you know, I got-- I got a DWI"-- you know, dr-- driving while intoxicated, "I got a ticket, they put me in jail overnight," or you know, whatever, chances are you're probably still gonna be my friend.

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You know, you'll-- you'll-- you'll recognize that I did wrong, whatever, but you're still gonna be my friend. But if I tell you that, you know, I joined a white supremacist group or, you know, I became a white supremacist and I hate these people and hate those people and so on and so on, you're gonna distance yourself from me.

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And even after I, you know, quit the group and pay my debt to society or whatever, you're still gonna be a little leery of me. People judge you

by the company you keep. And that's a stigma that-- that follows you around. It's kinda hard to shake.

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So when these people truly give it up, and-- and here's the irony, you know, we wanna stop white supremacy. The-- the people-- the people who-- who talk the loudest out here, who talk the talk but don't walk the walk, they wanna see the end of this domestic terrorism.

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But then when people come out and they're truly devoid of-- of this ideology, they get very little support from those who wanted them out in the first place-- because they're always leery and suspicious. "Oh, you know, I don't know if I can trust him. You know, he might, you know, be faking it or go back," or whatever.

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Well, when you don't provide that support, then where do they go? You know, well, they can't go back to the group they just left, because that

was their family. You know, they joined that group, sometimes under a blood oath or whatever, so now y-- they've betrayed that family.

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And so they cannot go back. But they'll find some other group that will accept them. And so this is why it's really important for people like Ryan, myself, Jesse Morton, and several of our other brothers and colleagues and sisters to provide that support so that they can stand on their feet and-- and, you know, accept this-- this criticism until they can work their way through it, and people accept them back into society again.

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And realize it's only been in the last-- couple of years that we have begun to call this type of thing domestic terrorists. You know, when we've thought about terrorists for-- up until a couple years ago, our-- our vision was always somebody from the Middle East, just like a long time ago when we were kids, all flashers wore trench coats, you know, or something like that. You

know, that typical stereotype. We've gotta break that stereotype. It is right here.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

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Great. Well, speaking of-- more recent events, I wanna pivot a little bit to-- to tr-- thinking about George Floyd and Black Lives Matter Movement. So after-- George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin, we saw protests unlike anything we've seen before in this country-- and actually across the-- the globe. One thing that stood out about these-- demonstrations is there were a lot more white people participating than there-- there used to be. Daryl, just really briefly, is that a positive sign to you--

DARYL DAVIS:

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Absolutely, absolutely it is. Okay, so you know, if we were to, let's say pinpoint-- the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, let's just say 1955 with-- Rosa Parks, and on through 1968 with Dr. King, until his assassination, all those marches, protests, sit ins, boycotts, demonstrations, et

cetera-- they all-- when people look-- when the powers that be, which is just a polite way of saying the white power structure, when they looked at those protests and marches-- they saw an ocean of Black people, with a few white people mixed in.

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There have always been some white people who believed in what we stood for and came out and supported us. But it was mostly Black people. Now, fast forward from yesteryear to last year, 2020, in the wake of the-- George Floyd lynching. What did the power structure see?

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They saw an ocean of Black people, and an ocean of white people, marching together for the same cause. We had never seen that before. And in the past, I'm not taking anything away from the past and the past civil rights leaders and things like that.

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But the pages of progress turned a lot slower in

yesteryear than they turned last year. Last year, because of that collective voice, the-- the-- the establishment was seeing more people who looked just like them participating in these-- marches. So therefore they pulled out their earplugs or put in their hearing aids and began listening.

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And as a result of that Black and white collective voice, the pages of our history turned a lot faster, progressively. While those marches were predominantly geared towards-- you know, reforming the police and things like that, we saw a larger ripple effect than we have ever seen in this country.

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In the past, if-- if, that's a big word-- a small word with big meaning, if a police officer were to be charged, it would take months and months and months. And then chances are he or she would not be convicted. Today it's happening (SNAPPING) like that, because of that collective voice.

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The ripple effect is this. Places like NASCAR banning the Confederate battle flag. NASCAR was ground zero for the Confederate battle flag. The sovereign state of Mississippi, of all places, removing the Confederate battle flag from their main flag body.

00:27:24;09

Food brands like Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben's changing their labels. Legislation being passed to remove Confederate statues, to change the names of buildings named after-- slave owners. We've never seen things (SNAPPING) happen that fast.

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That's all the-- the-- the residual effect, the ripple effect. As a result of that collective voice and what we need to do is focus more on bringing the collective together to support these causes, not trying to handle it all by ourselves or something like that.

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You mentioned Black Lives Matter. Black Lives

Matter is-- is more of a movement than and organization. They're trying to organize something right now, but you know, when-- when the founders first created it in the wake of the Trayvon Martin-- murder, it-- it was a great idea.

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It was co-opted from Dr. King. Dr. King said, "Hey, look, you know, we gotta put the national spotlight on the plight of-- of Black bus riders in Montgomery, Alabama." Rosa Parks was not the first woman to refuse to give up her seat, but it didn't make news outside of Montgomery.

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So he wanted to put the national spotlight on it, and that would maybe perhaps force Montgomery to change their laws. And sure enough, it worked. So the founders of Black Lives Matter took that same concept and said, "We gotta put the national spotlight on the plight of Black men who, for lack of a better term, were being murdered by-- by police officers for holding their cell phone

or holding their wallet."

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Where white-- men in the same-- situation either went home or went to jail, Black men went to-- went to their graves. So that's where the concept came. But they did not want to centralize. They did not want to trademark the name, unlike, say, the NAACP or the Red Cross or the Boy Scouts of America, where you have headquarters, one president, and policies created there and disseminated to all the chapters so the Red Cross in-- in New York is on the same page as the Red Cross in Los Angeles.

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Not the case with Black Lives Matter, unfortunately. I think at the time, the founders-- did not realize, in 2013, how big that thing was gonna mushroom. And now you've got, you know, 90 or so different-- and I don't call them chapters, because that belongs to an organization, but factions of Black Lives Matter all over the country.

00:29:49;02 Some consist of predominantly Black supremacists. Some consist of Blacks and whites working together. Some consist of-- more white people than Black people in-- in their own little faction. And some are very aggressive, very violent. And some wanna sit down with the city and state and county legislature and try to work out things to have bills drawn up. So you have too many chefs--

 WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:30:10;04 Can I-- can I jump--

 DARYL DAVIS:

00:30:11;02 --in the kitchen. It doesn't work.

 WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:30:13;17 Yeah, let me jump in there. Because I think that-- from my understanding of the Black Lives Matter Movement and-- and the founders, they wanted a leader-full movement, not--

 DARYL DAVIS:

00:30:21;12 They wanted a what?

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:30:23;02 Leader-full movement, right? So rather than having-- just a few people-- you know, at the head or at the helm-- for it to be-- deliberately-- distributed, right? And, you know, anybody could drop-- could-- could claim Black Lives Matter and do any manner of things. And--

DARYL DAVIS:

00:30:45;17 And that's what they do.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:30:45;24 No, I just gotta push back against the idea that maybe a centralized organization may have worked. I mean, of course, we had the SCLC, the N-- SCN-- S--

DARYL DAVIS:

00:30:56;24 SNCC?

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:30:57;18 SNCC. So history is littered of examples of where movements have been made, but there wasn't an organization leading-- leading the helm. I wanna pivot to Ryan, though. To you, I wanna know-- in white supremacist and extremist groups, what were

the reactions that you s-- you heard to the Black Lives Matter rallies-- last summer?

RYAN LO'REE:

00:31:19;12

Well, I mean, that's where you've seen the big uprising and-- with the Black Lives Matter Movement, you're always gonna have another movement on the hate side that has to try to counter that. And-- that's where you've seen groups-- like-- like Daryl had said earlier, hate groups have always been here.

00:31:35;05

But there was an uprising in different types of hate groups that started to come out-- with the Proud Boys and the Boogaloo Boys and-- and-- and like my state of Michigan, where we've-- seen the attacks happen on, you know, g-- Governor Gretchen Whitmer, the attempted attacks.

00:31:54;06

That's exactly what their reaction was to Black Lives Matter, was that we can't allow-- Black and white people to come together and take to the street to-- to bring, you know, unification.

These people fear that. And that's exactly what we've seen through a lot of our inch-- intervention work, the talks that I've set down with people one on one.

00:32:15;24

And-- it's-- it's probably one focus the things that's really-- in the last year or so-- I-- I'd say the last four or five years, actually, really gave them that feeling that they needed to rise up and do something-- more violent. Reasons why is we know that-- in Minnesota, people that were going in and destroying businesses weren't necessarily Black Lives Matter.

00:32:39;02

Martin Luther King at one point in time had said that, you know, riots were the voice of the people unheard. And I think that's a lot of what we've seen, is there are so many different people in society and in-- in-- in-- communities of color that felt like they didn't have a voice, that they were not being heard.

00:32:55;20

And so things like that happened. That didn't specifically mean that it was Black Lives Matter. But what it did do was it gave a lotta these-- white power groups, these white supremacists-- a way of trying to recruit. "Look, they're destroying their communities, they destroy your communities. They don't care."

00:33:11;01

And because of that, they were able to pull people in, and use the internet too as a way to facilitate those types of things. Now that everything is technology, our faces are stuck on a computer screen most of the time. They've got all these different social media networks that they can use for recruitment tools.

00:33:26;20

And just like Black Lives Matter does to recruit people and have people come help them joint I movement, the hate groups do the same things. And-- and so yeah, I've seen a huge, huge uptick of that since Black Lives Matter started. I myself have marched with-- Black Lives Matter

groups.

00:33:42;15

And I've-- seen very peaceful-- marches. It's-- it's never been anything violent. But like Daryl did say, there are certain factions-- it only takes one-- sour, you know, apple to ruin the bunch. And sometimes that's what you see happening.

00:33:59;24

I know myself in Genesee County-- the city of Flint, the Black Lives Matter group there-- has done a lot to change a lotta policy. We've had-- a sheriff that actually marched with us and-- and talked about unification. And-- because of that, we saw policy change in police departments all outside of-- those groups.

00:34:18;07

But I've also spoke with people in other areas that said that, you know, that that's not happening. You know, really honestly it's a lot of-- "We wanna meet violence with violence." You see that in Portland, Oregon right now. And

that's not going to heal.

00:34:31;14

It's not going to-- get rid of the polarization that we have going on in this country right now. It's just going to make things (UNINTEL). You know, violence just doesn't work-- with trying to-- to solve these issues. And Martin Luther King was huge on that as well. And so-- yeah, it's Black Lives Matter and it's not to say that it's their fault that these groups are uprising, because they've always been here. It's just that this is exactly what these groups will do to try to counter that.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:35:00;15

Yeah, Dr. King actually-- had a lot to say about-- with every perceived step forward that Negroes make, there's-- a predictable backlash from-- from white society, it sounds like that's what--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:35:11;18

Right.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:35:12;18

--you're describing. So has it become harder-- to

extract people from hate groups since George Floyd was killed--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:35:18;24

Yes-- honestly, it has. And the-- one of the reasons why, and I-- and I say this is, and I don't wanna say cancel culture-- is the reason why, but when we start to take away their ways of speaking to each other, other social media, so a lotta the work that groups like ours do and other groups across the country, or anybody that's doing any type of surveillance or intelligence work will tell you, is that when you're trying to keep an eye on these groups-- social media networks help us on really being able to keep an eye on the people that we think, you know, maybe may do something violent.

00:35:52;24

And it also gives them an outlet to speak and talk to some people. Are all of these people violent? No, 95% of them probably would never go out into the streets and do anything violent themselves at all. But when you don't give them

an outlet to speak, when we cut off anybody's voice in this country, now you've basically created what sometimes happens is the lone wolf-- terrorist and domestic terrorist.

00:36:15;02

And that's what we've seen a lot in this country, especially over the past five to ten years, are these lone wolves that nobody ever heard about 'em. It's the guy that keeps his mouth shut, doesn't say anything. But he may go onto-- a site like Telegram or some of these other ones, and he types in the stuff the he wants to say every day.

00:36:31;22

Well, now they don't have that, those sites are being closed down. Donald Trump doesn't have his Facebook anymore, different groups don't have their Facebooks. And while we might not think it's there because we're not seeing it on the main social media sites, they find ways to go encrypted with a group.

00:36:47;01

Apps like Signal and different things allow these

guys to really speak. And now they're really talking about doing start violent rather than before, where they were just spinning off their mouth of stuff they would probably never, ever do. So yeah, it's-- we're there.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:37:01;24

Wow--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:37:02;13

It's harder.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:37:03;12

Wow. So I-- I wanna--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:37:04;24

And-- and--

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:37:06;07

I-- wanna pivot a little bit and talk about-- the insurrection on-- on January 6th. Ryan, what was going through your head that day? I mean, because of the work you do, did you-- did you ever anticipate something like that happening?

RYAN LO'REE:

00:37:20;05

Oh, I saw it happening, and I-- and I think I s-- you know, ten, 20 years ago. And-- and we talk,

even when I was part of the group, this is something that was talked about. They had talked about the race war of 2020 for years-- before we ever started looking at 2040 as a date.

00:37:35;03

And 2020, they believed that we would be almost to this point of having a 50/50 with-- with race and white people losing their power. And so-- seeing these groups try to stir things up like this, and then having a politician, and I'm not gonna point fingers to, you know, who.

00:37:51;19

But, you know, when we have politicians that say it's okay, and they lift those types of voices up and they tell you to stand by, yes, you're going to have those groups that feel like, "Yes, I can go out and do this." So when that happened I was not surprised.

00:38:03;24

Do I think this is gonna be the last time that we see something like this in our country? No, I don't. I think that-- almost in a way if we don't

act now with policy change, with funding the type of groups that need to go out here and do the types of inter-- intervention work, you'll see the rise of more groups.

00:38:21;24

And the-- and the sad thing is, is now that we don't have a president, you don't see it on the news as much anymore, but those groups are still there. They're still recruiting. They're still using all those same tools. And so no, I wasn't surprised.

00:38:35;10

It was a very sad day for me, a very sad day for me and my wife and my children to sit there and watch. But I think it was something that had been boiling for-- for-- for many, many years. And then white supremacists and alt right groups felt like they finally had their person to lift them up, and it was okay for them to do because the president said so.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:38:55;08

Yeah, yeah. Daryl, I wanna turn to you. We, you

know, learned-- you know, it was lots of great investigative reporting and active citizen journalists, and-- it's common knowledge now that a lotta people that were taking in part in the insurrection were actually police officers. Now, you actually have a Klan robe that was given to you by a police officer-- with his-- police uniform. Did you ever talk to him about how prevalent it was for officers to be in white supremacist groups?

DARYL DAVIS:

00:39:27;24

Oh yes, it was very prevalent. And guess what? There are still some on that same force. In fact-- just-- about, what, three, four years ago, look up-- the-- Fruitland, Florida-- police chief and his deputy. They got fired from the police force by the mayor because they were members of the-- of the KKK.

00:39:48;22

You know, that-- that-- that's why, you know, you-- now, of course, that does not mean every police officer is a white supremacist, no, by no

means, okay? But yes, it is prevalent in law enforcement. And also in-- in the military. You know, a lotta people, you know, don't wanna see that.

00:40:03;16

But it is there. And usually these groups-- try to recruit police officers and try to recruit people, like, in the military. They-- when-- when they've been in the military for, say, about two years, that's-- that's an opportune time to-- to-- to-- to lure them in.

00:40:23;01

Because, you know, after two years, they become more and more dedicated to-- to the government who they're fighting for. But at the two year point, they're still, you know, not beholden to the movement, they're there because the government sent them there. And they've gotten the training. They know how to-- how to survive. They know how to use weapons, build bombs, et cetera, et cetera. So let's go get those guys at the two year point, bring them in with us, and

they can train us.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:40:49;24

Wow, wow, so--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:40:50;24

And-- and-- and veterans too, if I can add to that quick. I mean, in Michigan, we-- we had an issue too-- just recently where somebody went in to look at a house. And while viewing the house, they actually came across a framed picture on the wall of this police officer's membership to the KKK.

00:41:08;15

So yes, (UNINTEL) still are on those ranks. And most of these groups, like the group that I was with, when we look for recruiting, we specifically zero in on people that are veterans, people that they knew had the training that would be able to take them into a war time, or into, like, an end war or a race war that they looked at.

00:41:27;23

So yes, it's-- it's-- it's prevalent in the-- in

the United States military today, and the police officers. And like d-- Daryl said, it's not every one of them that is. But the-- the system definitely-- sets them up to be able to join these groups, and nothing's being done to hold them accountable.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:41:44;17

Wow--

DARYL DAVIS:

00:41:44;24

And another thing about that is this, you know, as-- as we are approaching that-- that 50/50 point-- we're gonna see more and more of these lone wolves. Because as I said, these groups are-- are bringing them in. And what happens is-- you know, the-- the group's (UNINTEL) is to take our country back, make America great again, all that kinda stuff.

00:42:06;11

And people join these groups. But then when the group fails to take it back or whatever, they say, "You know what? The Klan can't do it or the neo-Nazis can't do it. I'll do it myself." And

that's when someone like Dylann Roof walks into a Black church, and boom, boom, boom.

00:42:20;24

Or Robert Bowers goes into the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and murders 11 Jews, or the-- or the person who went to the Walmart in El Paso, Texas, and murdered what he thought were 23 Mexican people. These are lone wolves. Now, we have intelligence agencies in this country that have operatives who can fit the-- the profile of some of these people.

00:42:42;05

And they go and join these groups undercover, and they gather intelligence and they get out and report it. And then that plot is foiled. As Ryan pointed out, the group in-- Michigan that were gonna kidnap and murder the Michigan-- governor, we already had people in there.

00:42:57;24

That's how that plot was foiled. So while we can infiltrate groups, it is impossible to infiltrate a lone wolf. How do you get inside one person?

And-- as I said, as we get closer and closer to that-- 50/50 thing, we're gonna see a spike in lone wolves.

00:43:18;08

And this is why it's so important to address this issue now. You know, they're looking for what's called RaHoWa. RaHoWa, R-A-H-O-W-A, it stands for racial holy war, or for short, the race war. They've been looking for it. They've been predicting it.

00:43:34;02

And every time one of these lone wolves gets arrested or gets shot and killed by law enforcement, and they raid the person's home or property, what do they find? They find a cache of automatic weapons that they're stockpiling for RaHoWa.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:43:48;10

Wow. This is really pretty terrifying-- to think about infiltration in law enforcement and police and military. Particularly when we think about police, you know-- policing Black Lives Matter

protests, and might also be-- white supremacists, that's really-- really scary-- to think about.

00:44:12;03

So I want-- I wanna pivot and spend the rest of our time-- talking about solutions, takeaways for the-- for the audience. And both of you have emphasized the importance of listening and discussion. And so I wanna hear from you. Give us some things that we can emulate, some things that we can do, and-- and how you convince others to turn away from hate. So Ryan, I wanted to let you go first. Can you talk to us about the process, and-- and what it's gonna take to-- to end the notion of white supremacy?

RYAN LO'REE:

00:44:41;24

Yup. So (THROAT CLEAR) like I said before, it's-- it's that love factor. It's the empathy. I don't necessarily have to be sympathetic with what somebody is doing, but to be empathetic, to be able to sit down at the table with them, I have to have that-- that form of empathy.

00:44:59;09

The person doesn't see me as a comfortable person to talk to if they see me as-- an enemy or a target. They will quickly turn away. But if I can show them the empathy and saying that look, "I understand that you've made some mistakes. I understand that you've learned what you've learned here.

00:45:15;16

"But I think that maybe you've been taught the wrong way. And I'm not saying that to scare you away, but maybe we can sit down and just have a conversation." You don't always start the conversation with them about race and hate and anger and those types of things.

00:45:27;21

You start the conversation on some things that maybe we have in common. And then once you show them that we all have these different things in common, or what maybe one of my Black friends has in common with them, then they see that man, what am I really hating?

00:45:40;06

Like Daryl said, it's all about educating that person to-- to get them away from that ignorance. And really-- in this country, a lot of what that is is-- is a lack of education in our communities. If we could educate people, show them that their Black brothers and sisters have so much more in common with them-- it really does open their eyes.

00:45:59;17

But the intervention comes in many different ways. We have a hotline that's set up, it's 24/7, that people can call into. And each case is handled differently. Each person is different in their own different way, and some people will be more open to talk with you like this.

00:46:15;03

Some people are okay with talking to you on the phone. Some people didn't want any type of phone conversation at all. It takes a long-- it takes sometimes a year or two of just discussing stuff with them on the internet or on-- through email before you're able to actually get this type of

conversation with them.

00:46:28;10

So I think it's v-- the-- to me, the most important thing is-- is having empathy in this country. I think we've-- we've walked away from that. There's so much divisiveness because we forgot that-- that humanity is supposed to love. We're not supposed to hate and be angry all the time.

00:46:43;20

And if we can get more into that empathy, and just sitting down with someone and realizing that, I'm not saying you have to be sympathetic with them and what they're doing, but be empathetic enough to listen to them and try to get an understanding of why did they ever get to that-- that point in their life in the first place?

00:46:57;09

Was this person-- somebody that was brought into this because of their parents, their grandparents? Is this a generational thing? Was

this somebody that, just because of economic issues that were going on in their lives, maybe that led them to it?

00:47:09;05

Was it because-- you know, they were reading a book-- much like Timothy McVeigh with-- *The Turner Diaries* and things like that? Was it something like that that led them to this? There's so many different things that could've led those people to it.

00:47:23;05

But the only way we'll ever get that understanding of why they got to that point in the first place is if we're empathetic enough to understand and listen to them. We're all human beings. We all make mistakes. But we all can be redeemed.

00:47:35;24

There is redemption there. And we've said that for people even sitting in death row. (SNEEZE)
It's-- it's-- we have to take a look at the fact that we're all humans. And no matter what, not

one of us is a perfect human being. And-- I think that's the first step in really starting to heal and starting to make the transition and-- and transformation-- and to deradicalize people-- from, you know, what had radicalized them in the first place.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:48:01;24

Yeah, that's-- that's good stuff. That's good stuff. Daryl, Daryl you said, you know, "How can you hate me when you don't even know me?" So I wanna hear from you. How do you change the mind of a racist? I know you have a really specific process. So if you could walk us through that, that would be super helpful.

DARYL DAVIS:

00:48:18;20

Yeah. Well, a couple things. One, you know, as a child, I traveled a lot, because my parents were U.S. Foreign Service. So I lived in different countries during the formative years of my life. Every two years we're somewhere else, come back home for a few months here in the states, then get reassigned to another country.

00:48:35;08

And now as an adult musician, I tour all over the world. So when you combine those two sets of travels, my childhood and my adult, I've been in 57 countries on six continents. And all that is to say is that I've been exposed to a multitude of ethnicities, colors of skin, religions, persuasions, ideologies, beliefs, et cetera.

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And all of that has helped shape me. And what I've realized is this: that no matter how far I go from this country, whether it's next-door to Canada or to Mexico, or halfway around the planet in some other foreign land, and no matter how different the people may be who I encounter, I always end up concluding that we all are human beings.

00:49:21;09

And as such, we all want these basic five core values in our lives. We all want to be loved. We all want to be respected. We all want to be heard. We wanna be treated fairly. And we want

the same things for our family as anybody else wants for their family.

00:49:39;24

And that's where the empathy that Ryan is talking about comes in. And I can guarantee you if you-- employed those five values, or even some of them, when you find yourself in a society or a culture in which you are unfamiliar, even the culture of white supremacy, your navigation will be a lot more positive and a lot more smooth.

00:50:04;08

Not everybody's gonna change. There'll be people who go to their graves, on all sides, being hateful and violent and racist. But if those people are willing to sit down and talk with you, there is a chance to plant that seed. And that chance comes with those five values.

00:50:20;05

That's number one. Always know who you are. You know, put your emotions and your ego behind you, and-- and allow them to be heard. I-- I'm, you know, I'm not a racist. And when I say respect, I

may not respect what they have to say because I know they're wrong.

00:50:35;24

But I will respect their right to say it. I'm not gonna push back and say, "No, you're wrong. You know, this is-- you know, this is the right way to do it. You don't know." No, I'm listening because I'm trying to learn how they arrived at this.

00:50:47;24

And as Ryan pointed out, they get into it from-- from different-- angles. They've read the wrong book, their parents, their friends, you know, what-- how they were raised. It could be any number of things that led them there. That's why it's important to allow them to be heard, right?

00:51:02;21

Number two, you must realize that one's perception is one's reality. You cannot change somebody's reality. You know, even if it's not real, it's real to them. And I just give you a quick-- example. Let's say you have-- a seven or

eight year old son and he goes to a magic show with-- with his school or something.

00:51:28;07

And he comes back and tells you that the magician on stage-- asks for a female volunteer, and 50 women raise their hand, and he chose one. She comes up on stage. He tells this lady to get inside this long box and stick her feet out that hole and stick her head out this hole.

00:51:44;24

And then he closes the lid, he takes a chain saw, and saws that box in half. To-- to that seven or eight-year-old boy, that magician has just cut that woman in half. And to make it even more real, the magician takes the half from the box with the feet sticking out and moves it to stage right, and the other half to stage left.

00:52:06;05

And then he walks over there and talks to the head, and it talks back. And then he brings the two halves back together, opens the lid, and out pops the woman in full form. And you try and tell

the kid, "Well, it's an illusion." "No it's not, I was there, I saw it, he cut her in half. He se"-- you know, on and on and on.

00:52:23;20

The more you try to tell him he was wrong and you're attacking his reality, it does not work. So what you do is you offer a better perception. One's perception is one's reality. If that child resonates with the perception that you're offering him, he will then change his own reality.

00:52:41;24

So if you say something like, "Well, is it possible that the woman he chose, perhaps she works for him? He planted her in the audience? She knows the trick? She tours all around to all his shows, and maybe the legs that were sticking out are mannequin legs wearing the same stockings and same shoes that she had on?

00:53:01;24

"So she puts it out of those holes and brings her own feet up under her up under her chest, so when

he cuts the box in half, her whole body is in that half of the box." And so then the kid thinks, "Hmm, yeah, I guess that would be the only way it could work."

00:53:17;03

So you've offered him a better perception and he changes his own reality. And that's what we do. We offer people better alternatives, because it's always better when they come to the conclusion, "Hey, I've been wrong, I need to change this direction." Even though you say my name in the media, "Black musician converts ex-member of white supremacist," no, I never said that. I've never done that. I've never converted one. I have been the impetus for over 200 to convert themselves. I'm offering them these perceptions.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:53:49;17

Yeah. That's-- that's really good-- that's really good stuff. Thank you-- thank you both. I have left inspired, and will definitely have-- stronger listening ears-- to understand where people are coming from and I love the language of

offering people a different-- different reality.
It definitely feels compassionate-- and-- and
empathetic. So thank you both-- gentlemen.

DARYL DAVIS:

00:54:16;18

Thank you.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:54:18;02

All the time that we have today, so I wanna thank
Daryl, you again, and Ryan, for teaching us the
importance of listening, respect, and how it can
change lives. So if you wanna learn more about
the Common Ground Committee, we want you to go to
CommonGroundCommittee.org.

00:54:35;09

And then we-- we also want to lift up-- another
sponsor for tonight, that's the Bridge Alliance.
And you'll be able to find them at
BridgeAlliance.us. And if you wanna check out the
journalism that my amazing team is doing, you can
find our work for MLK50: Justice Through
Journalism, at MLK50.com.

00:54:55;01

Now, if you've registered for this webinar, as

soon as you end you're gonna get an email with a very short survey, and it will be really great if you fill that out and give us your feedback. So again, thanks to everyone, and before you go, I'm gonna send it back to the CEO of the Common Ground Committee, Bruce Bond, for some final thoughts. Bruce? (LONG PAUSE) We're bringing Bruce back in.

RYAN LO'REE:

00:55:30;24 These things happen, right? (LAUGH)

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:55:32;17 Technology, the beauty of it.

RYAN LO'REE:

00:55:34;12 Right.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:55:48;09 Ryan, do you wanna shout out-- it's Light of Light? Is there a website--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:55:52;18 No, light-- Light Upon Light--

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:55:53;24 Light Upon Light.

RYAN LO'REE:

00:55:54;12

--and they're-- and Parallel Networks-- both very good. I would say something-- if I could just say something really quick, is if you're at home and you're watching this-- is we really need to put pressure on any administration, but especially right now-- on changing policy and making-- the policy support-- the softer side, the CVE side, the countering violent extremists side-- of this type of work.

00:56:21;15

Right now the policy that's there doesn't specifically protect people that are doing work like ours. And in a lot of ways, we can get ourselves almost in-- into trouble-- or g-- you know, self-incrimination for something that we never intended to in the first place. And so it's very, very important that we work to get policy change in place-- that allows this type of intervention work-- to-- to-- to unfold and to work.

WENDI C. THOMAS:

00:56:47;05

Great. So you in the audience, you've got-- an action step there, as well as checking out these resources and sites. I don't know if we're gonna be able to get Bruce-- back with us, so I want to thank all of you for joining and participating. We've got a lot to work on. And-- and Daryl and Ryan, thank you for being the inspiration and role models for us all as we try to heal-- the racism and division in our country.

DARYL DAVIS:

00:57:15;13

Thank you--

RYAN LO'REE:

00:57:15;19

Thank you for all your work too. Thank you for all your work.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *