

Yvonne Lee: Radical empathy means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will, it is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it.

Jason Lee: We're Jason and...

Yvonne Lee: Yvonne Lee, wife...

Jason Lee: husband, father...

Yvonne Lee: Mother...

Jason Lee: Actors...

Yvonne Lee: Producers and seekers...

Jason Lee: Educators, explorers of identity.

Yvonne Lee: You're listening to Lagralane Spirits, a delicious podcast where we invite you into our living room for a family spirit symposium, a real talk meeting of the minds over revertant cocktails.

Jason Lee: Join us as we dive back in time to examine the legacy of our ancestors that have shaped the stories of our shared cultural history. You can find all of our cocktail recipes and show notes on [Lara lane spirits.com](http://Lara lane spirits.com), and as always, please enjoy.

Yvonne Lee: Responsibly. Welcome to episode three of Lagralane Spirits, where we talk identity, culture and cocktails. Tonight, we explore access. Back in 2021, I was deeply affected and inspired by Isabel Wilkerson's book, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*, where she says racism is an insufficient term for the systemic oppression of Black people in America.

Jason Lee: Caste is the granting or withholding of respect, status, honor, attention, privileges, resources, benefit of the doubt and human kindness to someone on the basis of their perceived rank or standing in the hierarchy. You must discover the origins of your discontent.

Yvonne Lee: In the way that my husband and cohost, Jason, deep dove into his historical past in season one, this episode is my [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) moment, if you will. We're inviting our entire Lagralane Spirits team to a round table to discuss caste, both the book and the system, in relation to access and barriers. Jason, you ready?

Jason Lee: Ooh, I was born ready. America wasn't, let's go. What, what! Yvonne, can you believe what is happening here?

Yvonne Lee: Look at all these gorgeous faces we have on our Lagralane Spirits team. Usually, it's just you and me on the recording with our team on standby in the

background with virtual cue cards and exclamations in the chat but today, we are all here. We like Oprah, babe, today.

Jason Lee: Caste oppression for everyone.

Yvonne Lee: By way of introduction, I'd like to do something that I learned from one of our season one guests, the fabulous EDI educator and artist, Fanshen Cox, called the name game. I love this game and use it with the students in my Kindness in Action program at our kids' school. So perspective is an important part of our conversation today. So Jason and I thought it would be valuable to talk a little bit about how our team identifies and the perspectives they bring to the table. So Spirits team, we are going to have you say your name, how you got it, if you like it, anything else you know about it, and then tell us how you identify ethnically, and your favorite color.

Jason Lee: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Name game, how you identify ethnically, and then your favorite cocktail. Y'all handle that but-

Yvonne Lee: Well, yes, course.

Jason Lee: I mixed up today's vibration. And to kick off the name game, on behalf of cocktails everywhere, the word libation derives from the Latin libation, an act of pouring, from the verb libare, to taste, to sip, pour out, make a libation.

Yvonne Lee: Libatio. Courtney, as the one who had the vision and brought this idea to Jason and I, I think it's best that you go first in the name game, if you don't mind.

Courtney Olipha...: Ugh, I hate going first and I've gone first my whole life because my name starts with a C, so it happens a lot. So my full name is Courtney Anne Oliphant and my pronouns are she, her, and I'm a white, petite, five-two woman with red hair. And for Courtney, my grandma, my mother's mother, chose that name for me, and it's French and means short nose, which basically is just a term for like a court dweller, someone from the King's court, so cool.

Jason Lee: Sorry about laughing but that is cute.

Courtney Olipha...: No, I don't resonate with the meaning, but I think my grandma just really liked it and I hated it growing up because I really wanted a gender-neutral name. I don't know where I got this idea, but I thought that if people saw my name on a resume or on a website or when I introduced myself or whatever, they would just assume I was a girl and I guess that was a bad thing. I didn't want them to know what I was, so I tried for years to get everyone to call me Corey and I spelled it C-O-R-I, super cool. It never caught on, so maybe I'll use it as a pentonym.

Jason Lee: Until now.

Courtney Olipha...: My maiden name is Bucken, which is also similar to my married name, is Scottish and Irish and everyone always pronounced it wrong my entire life. It was always Buchen, which I hated, I hated that mispronunciation so much. So I was called C-

buck, but my last name, current last name is Oliphant, which is my husband's name and it's Scottish and Irish, but it's derived from a Norwegian word for elephant, and elephants have always been my favorite animal, so I love that.

Yvonne Lee: Oh, so you knew when you met him? It's like, I knew-

Courtney Olipha...: Well, actually I didn't know the meaning until I started researching my own heritage over the past year, the podcast season one inspired me and like I said, my maiden name was Bucken, but because everyone constantly was pronouncing it wrong my whole life, I just decided to embrace Oliphant professionally because everyone pronounces it correctly for the most part.

Jason Lee: So both favorite color and favorite cocktail?

Courtney Olipha...: Well, my favorite cocktail, I don't know if there's an official name for it, but I just love a spicy mescal margarita, preferably with, pineapple or mango or something fruity and refreshing.

Jason Lee: I think that's the name.

Courtney Olipha...: I love on the Tajin rim. You think that's the name? That's the name, okay.

Jason Lee: That's the name.

Courtney Olipha...: And I actually don't have a favorite color, it changes by my mood or whatever season we're in and I just embrace that. There's no color that I hate, so our house is very colorful, my wardrobe's very colorful, I'm just a color gal.

Yvonne Lee: Well, thank you, Courtney. Thank you for sharing about your name, there are definitely some things in there that I did not know before. May I have a volunteer or shall we move on to the list here where it says AJ?

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah, no one's coming to save me, so I think it's going to be me. Okay, so yes. I'm AJ Dinsmore my pronouns are she, her and I am a Chinese American, five-two woman. So my last name, Dinsmore, I don't know the origins but it was my adopted father's name and so I believe it comes from German or Norwegian because that's where his lineage goes. My first name, AJ, there's a lot there and when you met me, my name was Amanda Joy Dinsmore, and I only just changed it... Wow, it's actually been half a year now, almost. So I guess to talk about AJ, I have to talk about Amanda. When I was adopted from China by a white family, they named me Amanda after my great-grandmother on my father's side, who I never met because she sadly passed away before they even adopted me. So I never met her and middle name, Joy, is because when my parents adopted me, I was their little joy, so that's why that was my middle name.

Yvonne Lee: Which is really cute.

Jason Lee: Yeah, it's very cute.

AJ Dinsmore: I didn't love it when I was in fifth grade. I tried to change it to Joyce, but yeah, it's cute. But yeah, I really obviously didn't like the name Amanda, since I

changed it because of that disconnect with the person I was named after and because a lot of reasons. One being, everything about the name, Amanda came from an identity that I feel like I didn't get to choose, it was forced upon me by all of the other people, mostly, white people who I grew up with in Wyoming and who were in my community and everything. To the point that, sadly, because my name is Amanda, it rhymes with panda, so people did that a lot. They also, when I was in high school, people in my speech and debate team and drama club came up with a nickname for me, Amandarin, which was really not great. I made it my Instagram name once just because if you accept it, you get to pretend that you're in on the joke, but I don't feel that way anymore.

AJ Dinsmore: And I changed my name from Amanda to AJ because I like AJ for being more gender neutral, which I know Courtney mentioned, but also because I felt like I was finally able to reclaim my own identity. So it's a huge step and yeah. And then my favorite color is turquoise, I really like the blue-green and my favorite cocktail, don't laugh at me Jason. Look, it's a mojito and that's...

Matthew Soraci: There is nothing wrong a mojito.

Jason Lee: There's wrong with that at all.

Yvonne Lee: A good mojito is vacation in a glass.

Jason Lee: Yeah, come on. Sunshine and dreams are what's-

Matthew Soraci: Absolutely.

AJ Dinsmore: It's just so drinkable and it's like, if you just pour a little bit more than you're really supposed to, it still tastes good.

Jason Lee: That's right.

AJ Dinsmore: And you can get drunk just a little bit quicker.

Jason Lee: One instead of three.

Yvonne Lee: AJ, thank you so...

Matthew Soraci: That's real good.

Yvonne Lee: AJ, thank you so much for sharing about your name and I'm sure there are people out there that can relate to how their names have been used against them in a way that did not make them feel good for whatever reason, based on how your difference or your other. And so I applaud you for saying, I'm going to tell you who I am, you're not going to tell me who I am. So thank you, I support you on your journey there.

Jason Lee: I do as well and I-

Matthew Soraci: We support you on that journey, yeah.

Jason Lee: I have a question for one thing our listeners may or may not know, but our Lagralane Spirits team represents some, I won't put ages on any of us, but we represent many decades and a couple generations here. And so Courtney and AJ, I have a question for you, you both mentioned about being of a certain age when you realized or thought that a gender neutral name would be advantageous, I'm just curious if you could name about when that awareness started happening for you both. Courtney, you-

AJ Dinsmore: Courtney, you want to go first?

Courtney Olipha...: I think for me, if I track it back to when I started trying to get people to call me Corey, it would've been high school, when I was applying for my first jobs. And I have no idea how or where I had an awareness that my name could impact the way that people see me, but I did and I didn't want to be determined as uber feminine or whatever I thought Courtney represented.

Jason Lee: AJ?

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah, that's a really good point. Actually, mine was really recently. It was last year because there aren't a lot of people who are non-binary in Wyoming, or at least have come out as such, but since I've moved here, I've met quite a few people who are. And my pronouns are she, her, I do not identify as non-binary, but I do identify as gender fluid. And I worked on a short that was about a non-binary character, I directed it and everything, and it forced me to see, forced. It encouraged me to see that perspective and see through those eyes and I realized that the balance between masculine and feminine energy, which all humans have in them, I think it's really important for all humans, but definitely for me. Because masculine and feminine have just been attributed to male and female in this binary sense, but that's not what it really is, that's not what masculinity is, that's not what femininity is, it doesn't have to be linked to sex or linked to gender.

Courtney Olipha...: That's a great way to put that.

Jason Lee: That is, I-

Courtney Olipha...: I like that definition.

Jason Lee: That touches me as a father. I've always heard that the best father understands the maternal side and the best mother understands paternal side and that spectrum of awareness and understanding and I think people really should lean more in on that truth that we all do contain multitudes. And so I thank you both for being here with us and opening up for us and-

Courtney Olipha...: Thank you so much.

Jason Lee: And now, Yvonne, who do we want to go-?

Yvonne Lee: Matthew.

Jason Lee: Matthew, there we go.

Matthew Soraci: Yes. Not, not the oldest, by the way. Not the oldest.

Jason Lee: Oh, oh.

Yvonne Lee: We're saving the beautiful people for last.

Matthew Soraci: Saving the best for last.

Yvonne Lee: That's right. And the wisest.

Jason Lee: Matthews Soraci, how are you doing, sir?

Matthew Soraci: I'm doing well, thank you. Actually, Jason, this is a good time to get into it a little bit, that my name is Matthew Daniel Soraci. So...

Peppur Chambers...: Yeah.

Matthew Soraci: Thanks, Pepper. So the Matthew Daniel is obviously a very biblical name, which is ironic because that is not what my family is even close to being. My older sister's name is Carrie Lorraine and my younger sister's name is Valerie Kay, so I'm pretty sure my parents just picked names that sounded good together. So Matthew Daniel, at the time, Soraci. And I like my name, yeah, I think it's always been appropriate to me. My middle name in particular, always, even though I wasn't necessarily read up on biblical stuff, I always knew Daniel was in a lion's den somewhere and he won, that always made me feel good. And so, oh, he, him, five-eight on a good day, 51 years old, no, no hair, glasses, beard, pandemic weight, all that crap.

Matthew Soraci: As far as my last name, so the heritage is, I'm basically mostly Hungarian. I'm half Hungarian because my mom is a hundred percent and then on my dad's side, it's mostly Italian with a little bit of German, but obviously took my dad's last name, surname. Both sets of grandparents, both the Hungarian and the Italians all came over at the turn of the 20th century. So I don't really have roots necessarily, they go back pretty far but they don't go back that far, they were all immigrants at that time. And I think as Jason can attest with his name and lots of other peoples, as you were processed through Ellis Island and you were of a Southern Italian nature or any other place that might not necessarily have been in the correct caste, as we'll get into or class, you would take steps to maybe soften or change the perception of how people saw you.

Matthew Soraci: So Soraci became Soraci and that was pretty much still, it's still how my mom says it. Both my sisters have changed to Soraci, which is the correct Italian pronunciation. When I was in high school, it was the first time I was introduced to the fact that my name was actually pronounced Soraci. Throughout grade school, all the teachers were always pronounced it wrong, well, and of course in high school, when somebody finds out that your last name is not what they think it is or you think it is, the nicknames come. So Soraci, most of my high

school friends know me as Sorach, Sorecrazy, Scorsese, even at times, in college, there was Sore-Crotch, which was-

Yvonne Lee: Oh my goodness.

Matthew Soraci: ...probably not one of my favorite ones and obviously I didn't-

Jason Lee: I can attest, I was there.

Matthew Soraci: I didn't-

Jason Lee: I heard it all too, man.

Matthew Soraci: I didn't date a lot with the sore crotch, but that's okay. So yeah, overall though, I like my name. Oh, and recently, and actually reading the book and throughout all the conversations, whether it's a podcast or just as groups or through the Lagralane group and whatever, it never really dawned on me that taking ownership of what my name used to be or should be, was something that that would be important to me and it really was a realization. Actually, was a couple weeks ago, was out with some friends and a guy who I don't really know that well and haven't seen in a long time, just asked me, so why don't you just say, Soraci? And I didn't have a good answer, and then I was like, you know what? Of course I had a couple cocktails, I'm going to go by Soraci from now on. There's no reason not to take that approach for me, even at 51. And again, I'm not the oldest, so...

Yvonne Lee: Oh, Matthew.

Matthew Soraci: My favorite color-

Yvonne Lee: You said a number.

Matthew Soraci: My favorite color, and I get in trouble for this all the time, but I relate to Corey, to Courtney, I really don't have a favorite color. I think I look good in blue, so I'm going to go with blue. As far as a favorite cocktail-

Courtney Olipha...: He does.

Matthew Soraci: My go to cocktail is a Rye Manhattan, but to get more specific, there's a cocktail called The Green Point, which is one of the many rifts on a Manhattan, that is probably my favorite cocktail. And in case at home, if you're wondering, it's two ounces of rye, a half ounce of yellow Chartreuse, a half ounce of sweet for vermouth, a dash of regular bitters, a dash of orange bitters and the lemon twist.

Yvonne Lee: Yes, that sounds good.

Matthew Soraci: It's delicious.

Yvonne Lee: And I think that I love that the Manhattan is one of your favorite cocktails, just linking back to what you talked about, the changing of your name, arriving at Ellis Island and all of it really actually starting in Manhattan.

Matthew Soraci: Wow, Yvonne.

Yvonne Lee: See, you didn't know that. You didn't know that, you're welcome.

Matthew Soraci: That's great.

Jason Lee: Let me also just say for our listeners too, some might recall this, we might have discussed this in season one, we might not have but I've known Matt since eighth grade. So since 1984, we're coming up on 40 years of friendship and thank you for sharing that.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah. Yay. And so last but not least-

Jason Lee: But certainly not least.

Yvonne Lee: Our writer, Peppur. The one who gives us all of this beautiful context for conversation. Peppur, your turn baby.

Peppur Chambers...: I'm Peppur, the hot one.

Yvonne Lee: Yes, you are.

Jason Lee: Yes.

Peppur Chambers...: In fact, I got that name from a friend, Eric in New York. He gave me what I think was probably my first laptop and he was a computer guy. Oh, we met in acting class, Eric McKay. And I was like, I don't have a laptop and so he gave me his and he's like, and when you name your laptop, he was like, we'll just call you Peppur, the hot one. So that came in, I don't know, '96, '97, or no, no later, 99, something like that. So that's where I got Peppur, the hot one and then it became great for branding.

Yvonne Lee: I never knew that.

Peppur Chambers...: So my name, Peppur. I know, it's so fun. My name, Peppur, comes from my mom. She says I'm born in 1970, which makes me the oldest and wisest person here.

Yvonne Lee: Yes.

Jason Lee: Yes.

Peppur Chambers...: Matthew, I'm 51. 51 in a few months.

Jason Lee: Happy early birthday.

Peppur Chambers...: And...



Jason Lee: Yes.

Peppur Chambers...: Thank you. Wait, no, I didn't say. Well, this is the story. My mom named me and she said she wanted a strong black woman and she wanted people to know who I was before they knew me, I guess. And my middle name is Rene, and it's R-E-N-E with an accent, which essentially, Courtney, with our French experience here, is the masculine version of Renee. So I appreciate that, I have this connecting groundedness with masculinity, but I do have this male version of a middle name and then Chambers, apparently a Scottish. But yeah, I do love my name, in the beginning, I really didn't because, as you can imagine, lots and lots of jokes. And even in college, there's a story I tell, this kid, we were late night, all drinking in some room somewhere at Marquette, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I grew up in Wisconsin, and this guy is like, and he didn't even go to the school, which really sucked.

Peppur Chambers...: But he's like, Peppur, what kind of a name is that? That's too black, I'm going to call you something else. And I can still see myself, and Matt, Denise was there, and Denise is my college roommate, she's in Boston and she's literally stood up for me and she's like, you, I forget what she said, but I just remember that she stood up for me and it makes me cry. She's like, "What? What are you talking about?" And it was just so rude and those are the kinds of moments I had a lot with my name. Like what? Who's? Where's salt? Where's the cayenne? And after people would say, where's salt, I'd be like, there's so many salts in the world, it's so original of you to say that, wow. And so that's where it comes from and I have lived into it, it did make me a strong black woman because I had to stand up for myself and either stand tall or defend myself in the face of people acting like assholes.

Peppur Chambers...: And now here I am, yes, 51, married to that guy, Matthew Soraci and now we are changing our name. I'm hyphenated on paper-

Matthew Soraci: Not officially-

Peppur Chambers...: I'm so used to being Peppur Chambers-

Matthew Soraci: Not yet.

Peppur Chambers...: Hey, man. My turn. On paper, I'm hyphenated but I've been Peppur Chambers for 50 years and so it's like, oh my God and my identity is wrapped up in being that. And I'm the only girl in our family but I love being married, I love having Matthew's name and all of that and so I'm working on it. And Courtney encouraged me to, in the credits put Chamber-Soraci, so I'm hyphenated with us. Oh my goodness, I'm a black woman, I'm five-seven, I don't know, I'm brown and I did grow up in Wisconsin around a lot of white people. And two things, not around cousins and we just did not have a lot of black influence, but my parents are strong identifying and so sometimes I bring this up because of the conversation we'll have today. Being married to a white person, when I was growing up, people would always, and even in LA, they'd be like, you're going to marry a white person and I'm like, what are you talking about? I'd be so offended and I'd be like, what does that mean? What are you saying about me?

Peppur Chambers...: And it would hurt my feelings, which I don't always know why. Well, I guess I felt like they were saying I wasn't black enough, and it took a while, Matt, for us to get together on that side because I kept questioning myself. But you know what? You know what we're going to say, you can't question, love-

Matthew Soraci: Question love.

Peppur Chambers...: But the only thing is that you can do, is you can question yourself and like AJ, what you brought up is when you start to look within and understand who you are, then you just have to keep getting stronger and stronger and stronger and not be so concerned about what everyone else is thinking. So, that's how I'm identifying these days, a 51 year old black woman, married to Matthew Soraci, living in Phoenix, no Chandler.

Jason Lee: She, her, right? She, her?

Peppur Chambers...: Oh, she, her, yes.

Yvonne Lee: Well, I think that that's something interesting about identity, as we talked about it in season one, and what I've realized too, is that you think that there's an end point, but there really isn't. There's really no end point to understanding identity and where you are in society and within your friends, in the community, in the broader understanding of community.

Jason Lee: Yeah, we are all becoming. We are all becoming and I respond strongly to what you all have mentioned too, with regards to names. My name is my adopted name, I know my biological, I know my story, as our listeners from season one will attest to. I've researched my story to the Nth degree and I've actually literally completed it and so I've always said, I've always known who I am, I never knew what I was as an adopted child. I didn't know my heritage, I knew I was black and white but I didn't know what that meant and so I've embraced my adopted side and I embraced the name that my adopted parents gave me because they were my parents and I love them. As I've gotten older, I'm 50 now, they're no longer here with us, all of them, my adopted parents, my birth parents, that story is complete and now we stand as those tent posts to our children and they will be telling our story.

Peppur Chambers...: Wait, but I forgot to say my cocktail.

Jason Lee: And your color, and your color.

Peppur Chambers...: I forgot it. It's the last, and my color, the last word, which Matthew introduced me to, so romantic, and then my favorite color tends to be in the yellow family, yellow or reds.

Jason Lee: Nice, nice.

Yvonne Lee: I think that now our listeners, now that we've shared and they understand the insight into each of us as we relate to each other and how we relate to our names and what that identity brings, the future part of this conversation is going

to be even that more deep because you'll understand where Yvonne, Matthew, Courtney, AJ, Peppur and Jason, where we all come from and how we approach this conversation of caste and what is this bigger notion of what's actually controlling the way we move through our lives.

Jason Lee: Yes. So I'm going to hand out some drinks now, so for this episode, dear listener-

Yvonne Lee: Yes, please.

Jason Lee: Listeners, we are drinking a concoction, we've renamed it the Comeuppins, inspired by the conversation that we're about to launch into. And it's built upon the specs of another drink that I'll go into in a little bit, but that other drink is called a Busy Izzy. And I'll go into the history and the specs of that but I'm going to hand out some drinks to my colleagues here right now and I'm just going to ask what you all think?

Peppur Chambers...: I like the color.

Yvonne Lee: It's [inaudible 00:29:28].

Jason Lee: It's-

Peppur Chambers...: Frosty glass-

Jason Lee: It starts very-

Yvonne Lee: It's a warm amber.

Matthew Soraci: It's delicious. Yeah, thank you.

Jason Lee: It starts amberish and it turns a little orange-ish but, hey guys, let's get into this book and after we've all gotten more into the drink, we can talk about it. Cool?

Peppur Chambers...: Sounds great.

Yvonne Lee: Yes, that sounds very good.

Matthew Soraci: Yep.

Yvonne Lee: Okay, so Caste by Isabel Wilkerson. This book has been called the missing puzzle piece of our country's history.

Jason Lee: And that Ms. Isabel humanizes history, giving it emotional and psychological depth

Yvonne Lee: From the website, it says, Caste explores the structure of an unspoken system of human ranking and reveals how our lives are still restricted by what divided us centuries ago. Now this book made Oprah's Book Club in summer 2020, she says it's the most necessary book for all humanity. And I have to admit that this book found its way into nearly every relevant conversation in 2020, at least the ones that I was having, I was like, whoa, there it is again. And I was strongly impacted

by the book because it actually gave me this sense of freedom, that I finally understood what was the larger action in place. I didn't understand, I thought when I was a kid, when I was 15, 16, 17 years old and I could see that there were things that were happening in the world and I could see that people were being divided based on the way that they look, I thought, oh, when I get older and when I have enough power, I'm going to be able to change all of this.

Yvonne Lee: And then 20 years passes and I go, oh my gosh, how come things feel the same? I don't know why, I've been doing all of these things, why am I seeing history repeat itself? And I thought it was because of race and then there was all these conversations about race and class and so this conversation about caste, just for me, opened up this idea like, oh, now I know that invisible hand that has been moving me from one side of the street to the other. And now I feel like I can actually make changes because it's not racism that I'm fighting, it's not racism that is telling me who I'm supposed to be, it's caste. And so that is that uncomfortable feeling, not just being black and a woman and Filipino, it is people constantly telling me, based on my social class, about where I'm supposed to be because of other people being empowered.

Yvonne Lee: And also just understanding how hard it is for United States to break out of this idea of racism, especially when we have been not just the emblem of freedom, but also the emblem of how to enslave in other countries, in Nazi Germany and that we took that from other cultures and implemented it here.

Jason Lee: And I think that's also, I remember every conversation we did have throughout the pandemic. You referenced Caste, this book, Caste, and just about all of them and almost all, if not all of them and then so I know firsthand how impactful this book has been for you and I'm thrilled that we have our whole team here to discuss this even more. And caste itself as a structure, is defined as the granting or withholding of respect, status, honor, attention, privileges, resources, benefit of the doubt and human kindness to someone on the basis of their perceived rank or standing in the hierarchy. And I'm just struck by the variations of what that hierarchy is globally. I always thought of, when I heard of a caste structure, history taught me, that was the untouchables, that's India, that's not the States, that's the Indian political reality.

Jason Lee: That's over there, that's not here, we have this stuff to deal with here and what this book has opened my eyes up to is in how race is our caste structure. And there's a quote, I want to read from it. Wilkerson has it in her chapter 16, "the last place, anxiety, packed in a flooding basement", it's on page 238. She quotes the anthropologist, Jay Laurend Mattori, who says, "The stigmatized stratify their own because no one wants to be in last place". And then a quick paragraph, if I may. "Over the generations, they learn to rank themselves by the proximity to the random traits associated with the dominant caste".

Yvonne Lee: Yeah. And so when you look at this concept of what society subscribes, what you're born into, talk about access and the lack thereof or immediate access, just because, when I hear the word caste, my gut response is, that's what they have in India. Like as you said, I think that too, but now and as you were saying, Jason, I realize that we have it right here in the US of A and specifically related to

black folks and where we are allowed to exist in this present society and more importantly-

Jason Lee: That caste is different from racism.

Yvonne Lee: Yes.

Courtney Olipha...: Wilkerson says racism suggests a personal prejudice and brings up things like guilt and shame and blame and I love that. Whereas caste is more about facts, it's about structure and something inherited. And this structure, folks, is something that was built and we, white folks, have to bear responsibility for it.

Peppur Chambers...: Well, I was shocked to learn that Nazism is based off of our structure of hierarchy. So Nazi Germany studied our methods to enslave black people and keep us in our place and I'm absolutely still blown away that something so, I guess evil was based upon the evil that was happening here. I guess this method really works and I don't know, I can't really wrap my head around that.

Jason Lee: People are so mad, they so mad.

AJ Dinsmore: They are so mad and honestly, I was really shocked to hear that Nazi Germany studied our methods at first. And then I was like, oh no, nope, that makes sense, that makes perfect sense. It seems like evil inspires evil, inspires evil sometimes. And I definitely learned in school, when I was in Wyoming, about how incredible of a country we are and how every other country, like Germany, they're the evil ones, they're the bad ones. Their structure was something we had to just take down without like looking at the invisible structure that we have in our own country. And I think sometimes we really like to point fingers and to be the quote, unquote heroes in something like world war II when we see a very blatantly bad structure that resembles our own. Because then we can be like, well, at least we're not that bad, we can pat ourselves on the back and move forward with the structure we have in place that's just as bad.

Matthew Soraci: Yeah. Ironically too, the Nazis, they modeled their brutality towards the Jews after our caste system here but the one thing that they didn't do that was followed, the one drop rule. They didn't go nearly as far as we did, like in other states where it was by percentage of blood and even the Germans were giving Jews the benefit of the doubt that just one drop of Jewish blood didn't actually caste you into that lowest caste and put you in the concentration camp.

Peppur Chambers...: I always think of this irony about this one drop and people don't know how many of that one drop they have, everyone has one drop and it's anyway. I don't understand why they can't just go off on their own corners and leave everyone else alone, I don't know if that sounds terrible, but I don't get it.

Courtney Olipha...: Well, that brings us back to power, doesn't it? Because once power is attained, then you need to create a structure for society that ensures you retain that power generation after generation and as Isabella talks about in this book, that this structure could be based on anything, it could be height, it could be eye color, it could be intelligence, but our dear sweet colonial ancestors decided it

was going to be skin color and so that's what we have. And that's what we've had in place since the country was founded, I don't think I realized that it traced all the way back to our founding, that first day.

Yvonne Lee: Oh yeah.

Courtney Olipha...: That blew my mind.

Yvonne Lee: And what they understood is that without power, you are denied access if you are at the bottom of this system. There's an illusion that you can attain it but you're at the bottom of the system.

Jason Lee: I'm feeling duped here, anyone else? The book talks about eight foundational pillars of the caste system, four of them are based in religion and purity, things you can't change because God said, and the remaining four are backups, like The Pips to Gladys on why Gladys is the shit.

Matthew Soraci: For those in the cheap seats, which would've been my ancestors, the Italians and the Hungarians, let me spell out the eight pillars. Number one, divine will and the laws of nature. Number two, heredibility, you belong to whatever caste your parents belong to. Endogamy, number three and the control of marriage and mating. Pep, my love, we already know the caste that we're busting here, snap, snap. Purity versus pollution, like the black folks not being allowed in the swimming pools. Those are the first four.

Peppur Chambers...: Yvonne, as the two black woman here, do you think we took control of our own narrative? Like AJ taking her name back by saying that black folks can't swim, do you think we took our power back or?

Yvonne Lee: What? I don't know, I don't even know if it's black folks who said that. I feel like there is something that people will say at first so that they can demean themselves first before you do, I do think that does happen. They actually take our power away, we're trying to figure out something so that we could assert ourselves, that is for sure.

Jason Lee: But I also want to add too, from the swimming conversation, you all. They dumped acid in the pools, it wasn't like we created this narrative, oh, black folk can't swim, all of the jokes that we've all heard throughout time if you've heard them, they're horrific jokes. But they exist and they exist for a reason. The separation was violent and in Florida, they dumped acid in the pools if we got in, as recent as the 1960s. I'm not saying I have an answer, I'm just saying it's a big conversation.

Courtney Olipha...: Yeah. And they also didn't teach black folks how to swim either, so it's like, you're defining what they can't do by also removing the resources and knowledge in order to attain that.

AJ Dinsmore: The remaining four pillars are occupational hierarchy, dehumanization and stigma, this is like the Tuskegee experiment and why there's so much fear today around vaccinations. Terror as enforcement and cruelty as means of control, this

is whippings, hangings, burnings, also seen in Nazi Germany, as we know. And the last one, inherent superiority versus inherent inferiority. This is unspoken rituals, rules and traditions to remind us all of who is superior and who isn't, from Columbus day to-

Jason Lee: To black mamas whipping black children at the bank when they step out of line, whose line? Who's line? To remind all the white folk that they are superior white folk. I need another drink.

Matthew Soraci: What are we drinking?

Courtney Olipha...: Yes, what are we drinking?

Jason Lee: We are drinking a drink that we have named The Comeuppance, and in the comeuppance, it's built on the specs of a Busy Izzy, which was a classic drink a hundred years ago. A bartender in St. Louis wrote a book called The Ideal Bartender and in his book is this cocktail, the Busy Izzy, that is a phenomenal cocktail and I have renamed it respectfully based on the conversations that we're having in this podcast, with the same specs. And those specs are for our comeuppance, it is one ounce of fresh pineapple juice, dull, if not fresh, one ounce of Sherry, I prefer Lustau, one ounce rye whiskey, Templeton rye, three quarters ounce fresh lemon juice, three quarters ounce simple syrup, a couple dashes of Agostura bitters, if you know me at all, I adore bitters and so I always say a couple, and you can be artistically creative with however many bitters you would like to add, bitters could never go wrong.

Jason Lee: And then an ounce of chilled club soda, if you prefer a garnish, this calls for a lemon wheel and you shake this because of the citrus and pour it into a highball glass and voila. We've chosen The Comeuppance as the name of this drink, we wanted something a little more radical.

Courtney Olipha...: Yeah. This is heavy lifting, oh my goodness.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah, I'll say.

Peppur Chambers...: Snaps, snaps snap.

Yvonne Lee: And I've got to say, thank goodness for cocktails like The Comeuppance. I haven't had a drink for almost two years for being pregnant and then nursing and so I'm so happy that I can partake for this conversation, so cheers to that.

Matthew Soraci: Cheers.

Peppur Chambers...: Cheers.

Matthew Soraci: So what I learned, yes, was that understanding caste is like buying new home, which is something that we've done and Matt and Pep have done recently in the past year. And it's that you're buying this house that someone else built, we don't really live in the days where you build your own house from scratch anymore and you aren't responsible for how it was built, but you are and can be

responsible for everything that comes once you assume ownership. Fixing leaks, repairing the foundation, patching the roof and that really drove this whole conversation home for me. And it lifts me to feel like I can do something now today, I can change what this house becomes and if there's something wrong with your foundation, you can rip it up. And that's what we need to do now here in 2022.

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah. Yeah, I am the youngest of everyone here, we talked about who was the oldest, even though it wasn't necessary, but here I am, the youngest and my generation, at least a lot of the people that I know and interact with actively now, we're much better about being open and aware and trying to educate ourselves and trying to take this responsibility but it does feel like there's a lot on her shoulders sometimes. One of the quotes that stood out the most to me from some kids in Germany, they talked about how hard it is to learn about their history and the Holocaust and everything, because they weren't there, they didn't do it, but they also felt as the younger generation, that they should acknowledge and accept that responsibility and for the generations that come after us. And they said something very specific, they said we should be the guardians of truth and I personally think that is the most telling quote for who my generation should be and should continue to grow to be and how we should pass the torch on to the next generation.

Matthew Soraci: It's interesting, it's a little bit more challenging here because in Germany, thankfully they teach about Nazism in school, they don't have monuments to the Nazi leaders anywhere in the country. They have made a conscious effort to educate their population about the terrible ills of what Nazism did for the country, whereas here, in our caste society, you look at the South and Robert E. Lee and all the other Confederate generals were given pretty much a pardon after the Civil War for treason. Up until very recently, multiple Confederate statues in several states in the South that commemorating the South's uprising, the worship of the Confederate flag and how it symbolizes the south, which obviously is a bunch of bullshit. Part of the ability for Germany to move on from Nazi Germany was their willingness to basically attack their ills head on, to admit and to educate and we haven't done that and maybe we're starting to do it a little bit, but it's difficult.

AJ Dinsmore: I definitely agree with you. Sometimes I feel like one of the reasons why we haven't done that is because they had a lot of external forces being like, this is wrong, you can't do this. This is horrific.

Jason Lee: I've been to the museum of the Murdered Jews of Europe in the downtown district of Berlin, Germany. They have an outdoor museum, it is powerful and impactful. And yes, we have African American museums, the Smithsonian here, the museum in Alabama, there's there are, we are making moves here to address it.

Matthew Soraci: And to your point, it also wasn't as inherent as it is here, it wasn't as historical, so to speak.

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah, that's true. Very good point.



Matthew Soraci: But it still is a good example.

Jason Lee: It's a great example and you both are making awesome points, and I just want to comment on the fact that the Confederates lost the war too, right?

Courtney Olipha...: Yes, the South lost the war, but they also were able to then create slavery in a new and more progressive way by creating these Jim Crow laws. In Germany, they didn't lose the war and then begin to subtly put laws in place that would block Jews from different positions in society or whatever, it was done, as far as I know, maybe that's not true, but-

Jason Lee: But the lost cause of the Confederate cause basically, hero-wise, if that's not a word, I'm making it up and that's okay because I can do that. Hero-wise, it created the myth of the heroes of the grandfathers who fought for the South, the lost cause and that's what the Jim Crow laws and then on created, that we're still grappling with today.

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah. The power of story.

Peppur Chambers...: And-

Jason Lee: Yeah. Yes, yes.

Peppur Chambers...: Yeah. And people don't even want to have this type of book taught in school, and like, oh we're not going to talk about this.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah, it's a threat.

Peppur Chambers...: We can't even talk about it.

Jason Lee: Yep.

Yvonne Lee: I have a question for of you, Matt, AJ, Pepper, Courtney. How have you seen class change in your own life?

Matthew Soraci: I'm a little confused by the question, only because we've been talking about caste, so how is that different?

Yvonne Lee: What I would say is that class is within the caste system. And so what we're talking about is intersectionality, that at the top are white, straight males and at the bottom are female, Black women, in terms of who is given more value in terms of race. So we're talking about strictly race, Matthew, you would be at the top and Courtney would be the top, but just below you because you're both white and then the rest of us would be at the bottom with AJ somewhere running in between white and black at the bottom-

Jason Lee: AJ and me.

Yvonne Lee: Trying to figure out-

Jason Lee: AJ and me, yeah.

Yvonne Lee: Trying to figure out where she belongs and Jason being fair, being able to decide where he wants to be.

Jason Lee: Brown, don't break it down.

Yvonne Lee: And what will that person give up in order to be in one place or the other? So what I understand is that within caste, those are the different classes, but class is within caste, is my understanding. And the caste system that we have is race. But maybe thinking about what Isabel is saying, does it make more sense to you, Matthew, have you seen caste change in your own life, your position in the caste system?

Matthew Soraci: It's still a difficult question for me to approach only because I feel like it's more of, am I aware of caste now? Do I understand what it means to live in a caste society is probably more appropriate of a question? Again, because at the top of the caste, I'm a white dude, this may be easier for everyone else to answer. I'm just encouraged, enthralled, you mentioned earlier in the podcast, you felt free after you read the book because you understood more about what you were living in and feel similar in that regard. What I feel like that I am awakened to at this point in my life is that I do live in a society that is caste driven and that it's based on maintaining power and maintaining the economic growth of a country, so how we move forward, you try to see people's individuals and not as groups, is it as simple as that? I don't know.

Jason Lee: I love everything you just said, Matthew, and I know we're exploring the question and I want to open this up to everyone as well. But one element that I do specifically want to comment for our listeners right now is, I'm remembering, Matt, when we went to, so for those of you who do not know out there, but Yvonne and I are the founders and CEOs of Lagralane Group and Matthew is our chief operating officer and we would go to festivals when we first launched and were blessed enough to get into festivals and we would show up, right, Matt? Yeah, I see you shaking your head, right?

Matthew Soraci: Yeah, yeah.

Jason Lee: We'd show up and Matt would be there-

Matthew Soraci: I know where you're going.

Jason Lee: ...first and he would be there right on time and so many times at many festivals, whoever we were taking meetings with would go straight to you, Matt, and we'd have to be-

Matthew Soraci: Not so many times, every time.

Jason Lee: It was at South by Southwest-

Matthew Soraci: If they didn't you-

Jason Lee: It was Sundance-

Matthew Soraci: ...they didn't know you.

Jason Lee: It was at Tribeca. Yes, if they didn't know and we were getting known, so that's caste for me, that's inherent bias, that's a blind spot, that's instantly going to the white man as the boss. I've seen it all in our short eight odd years of Lagralane's life of people changing their entire behavior when they figured out who I was with regards to what Lagralane group is. It's a fascinating journey and it's a fascinating exploration, I'm wondering what other experiences have we had in this space? Have you all had in this space, Courtney, what's been your experience?

Courtney Olipha...: Well, I don't know that I've experienced shifting in class, but I have experienced a almost frenetic need to maintain class. So you have family members that help you out to make sure that you can maintain your class and I have friends who have been in scary situations, but they had the means from family, extended family, friends, whoever to help them maintain and it's just unthinkable that you would drop below wherever you started, because our goal is always to continue to break into a class above. And I think it's more wealth based because we're already at the top of the structure with race but with wealth, it's limitless.

Yvonne Lee: I've been watching the Gilded Age. Anybody who's watched the Gilded Age, and it's interesting because in this particular thing, not the way that they've structured it, it actually just has nothing to do with race. It has to do with caste and that the people in power are only going to let you have enough to let you think that you have power because they're going to save the rest for themselves. And so it isn't necessarily that, and you're not going to get invited to certain circles and you have to make your way in but there's the powers that be that you could be a billionaire, but the people who have more than that, who have more than just a billion dollars, they have influence, won't let you in to that very small section of people who actually make things happen in the world.

Jason Lee: And I understand an inherent distrust of people, I've sat on the board of several companies and I've resigned from several companies, boards, because people didn't take the time to get to know me and maybe I didn't take the time to get to know them, but it didn't work out. And Pepper, I'm wondering your thoughts as we explore this conversation?

Peppur Chambers...: I'm sitting here thinking about this question and my personal self and so by being now a married woman that is a homeowner with two dogs, I feel like I rose up a bit and then that screws with my identity and how I feel about myself when I walk in the streets of Chandler, because I'm like I'm still just a black woman and anything can happen to me at any time. So, a lot of that it's wrapped up in identity, but it makes me think about my caste, I would love to move up, I would love my education and all these things to speak for me and move me up but it's defeat, I guess, I don't want to feel sad about it, but it just feels like it's anxiety of just being hurt because someone wants to pull me down to where they want me to be.

Yvonne Lee: Just relating to what Pep said, in a time where I feel like I should have arrived, where I still feel like I haven't and that's just part of having been in a lower caste

and trying to break out of that mindset and have that voice. There's just never that voice, the voice is always, I'm entitled to this, I have this, I should live this way, I get to have this, I deserve this and not even deserve, it just is. I don't have that voice in my head, I don't have that voice, that's where it got me in my brain, in my mind, in my-

Jason Lee: Yeah, it's a mind fuck. It's a mind fuck, yeah.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah. But AJ, you were going to share, dear.

AJ Dinsmore: I really want to talk a little bit about caste versus class, especially related to my background because I obviously I was adopted from China where I didn't have a family, I was the bottom, absolute bottom class you could possibly be, into United States where there's a caste system based on race, by a white family who is very working class, very poor family. So I was brought into a new caste system, I suppose and there hasn't really been any changes since then. But the way that I view it is that because I, like you said, Yvonne a while back, I'm somewhere in between trying to figure out where I belong because Asian Americans are put somewhere in the middle and with the whole model minority myth and all these other things within the caste system, we are higher up because even if we all started at the same class, I am more likely to get an opportunity over a black woman because of the caste system that's already set in place.

AJ Dinsmore: And the only other thing I want to say about it is that again, I grew up in a working class white family and I grew up around tons of people who were poor and white, who if we're talking about intersectionality, they're poor and they're white and they're Republican and a lot of reasons why they don't want to buy into the caste system is because they see themselves and they see other people of color, Black people, Asian people, Indigenous people and they think, well, sure, they're poor, I'm poor too, we're all equal, we're all at the same place. They just aren't really able to accept the fact that caste has been the thing that our country has been built on.

Peppur Chambers....: And is it because they don't see opportunity coming to them so they don't believe that this hierarchy exists?

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah. A lot of them still do believe in the American dream, they do believe that there should be opportunities coming to them. A lot of them believe the same thing, that they are hard working and they work really, really hard, why aren't they moving up? Because that's the way it's supposed to work in this country but when they see people of color who are fighting to be lifted up, they have even more of a fear because the only thing that they can cling to, which I think Wilkerson talks about, is their whiteness, because they're already poor, they're already so low in the caste system because of what their class is, they have nothing else. So if you're trying to say people of color have had it harder, we have not been given opportunities, we're not all equal, that takes something away from them, deeply. And it's terrifying, it's not right, but it is terrifying because of what they believe.

Courtney Olipha...: Yeah. And it's built into the structure of our country where at one point, very, very brief point, very poor white immigrants were at the same level as people of color in this country until white people realized, oh, wait a second, they can band against us if they all work together. So let's just give these white folks a little leg up and let them know that they can ascend and so it's indentured servitude, it's not slavery and things like that.

AJ Dinsmore: So yeah.

Courtney Olipha...: That's a mindset that has followed us from the founding of the country and if you're already poor, you're already at the bottom, I think it's a little harder to accept that you could also be an oppressor.

AJ Dinsmore: That's a really good way to put it.

Courtney Olipha...: Because what are you taking from someone else?

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah.

Courtney Olipha...: You know?

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah, I think that what Isabella was trying to point out is that racism is real and it's also a ruse, it's also created in order for a larger system to stay in place.

Jason Lee: And there are laws in place to keep structures in place, this goes into the Jim Crow laws, this goes into the black codes. There are laws to protect certain people from black folk, you go out there and work, poor farmer, and you can reap the benefits of your crop, but you're better than that black slave. And I think this gets into just the nasty history of what our history is and we compare and contrast often.

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah. Yeah. Because it's been sugar coated-

Courtney Olipha...: It's spun.

AJ Dinsmore: And erased for hundreds of years.

Jason Lee: Yeah, white washed.

Yvonne Lee: Jason. Jason, what has your experience been with changing a class?

Jason Lee: Yeah. Well, I think what's interesting in my personal experience is, and as I'm grappling with my understanding of what Wilkerson explores in her book, Caste, how caste is used in America, how class structure and race relations are also used in ways of placing people in positions of being put in your place within a caste. For me, what's always been just so fascinating for me exploring that, is an incident that happened to me when I was a kid. We were living in Southern Illinois, we were in Decatur, Illinois and I was adopted into a family of the upper class. Call that the caste, call that whatever you want to call that, I was adopted

into a family of means, they raised me with love and support, I always say because it's true beyond my wildest imagination. And we were raised with the same access within our family structure until this incident that happened, we were denied acceptance into a country club based on race and right around that same time is when I first, in the neighborhood, first heard the N word thrown my way.

Jason Lee: And so that was my welcoming in to American racism, because being of the same, well adopted into it, but being of the same class status did not afford me nor my family with the benefits thereof based on race, not the opposite. So I'm fascinated by just how any caste structure, how these, I'll call them arbitrary elements, racial, sexual orientation, religious faith based, whatever it is, no matter how hard you try to work out of it, you might not be allowed out of it.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah, it does feel like that sometimes. We all know we have miles to go before we get to the mountaintop and we have lots of learning that we all willingly want to do, people here on this podcast right now talking to each other and the people out there who are listening, however, in all of that and in all that we've talked about, I'm wondering, in what ways can we stand up to the caste system that seems like it's elusive in bringing down. For us, Jason, for Lagralane, one way is building companies exactly like us, multi-ethnic, multi-generational people of color in leadership positions-

Jason Lee: Yeah, using our resources to advance narratives of equality and unity and support of not just our communities, but all marginalized communities, that's at the embedded DNA of Lagralane, right?

Yvonne Lee: Right. And also, I think one way of doing it is educating ourselves, reading a book like Caste so at least you can be curious about it and trying to understand what she's saying. There's also another book called How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery across America and Around the World by Clint Smith. And then I also think about using our vote and voting certain people into positions, it's about changing the rules. Jim Crow laws, redlining and redistricting, no color people in the pool, it's changing the rules and the only way or most stringent way is to either change who is in power, like Ketanji Brown Jackson, or be there to affect how those in power think and act so that they can help change the rules. And some of that just takes just a gosh darn long time.

AJ Dinsmore: That takes us back to responsibility, doesn't it? My generation, your kids' generation, every generation has work to do. It's like people who did sit-ins at Woolworth's and the next generation had to fight to be allowed to work at Woolworth's and then the next had to fight to keep the convenient store in the neighborhood and now that the stores are closed, they're just empty shells in vacant buildings. And this new generation is fighting for old Woolworth's to not be torn down or turned into gentrifying Starbucks. Or think about this new movement of not drinking.

Yvonne Lee: What?

Jason Lee: Gas.

AJ Dinsmore: Okay, okay, okay. Think about it, to stop drinking, we'd have to not hang around each other potentially, not do this podcast potentially and get completely new friends and adopt a different way of thinking about what is fun and how we spend our time.

Jason Lee: Yeah. Yeah, noted, AJ, noted. No, no, hey, I dig, no, we got work to do and decisions to be made while doing it, right?

Yvonne Lee: Yes, absolutely.

AJ Dinsmore: Yeah, definitely.

Jason Lee: But right now, I'm so thirsty.

Yvonne Lee: Oh, me too.

Matthew Soraci: Yeah.

Yvonne Lee: Well, this is the part of this show where we normally bring on our guests for their cocktail confessions, but you all are already here and even going to warm up. Matt, Peppur, Courtney, AJ, are you guys ready? Okay, okay, okay, are you all ready for your cocktail confession? Yes.

Courtney Olipha...: Yes.

Peppur Chambers...: I sure hope so.

Yvonne Lee: Okay. In the book, there is a part about how we can only make change by changing someone's heart and that part really resonated with me and it's why I wanted to start this whole conversation off by playing the name game. Because you can't help but get a glimpse into someone's heart when they talk about their identity, so I ask each of you, can we move away from caste to create a more equitable society? And as we're all here together, all of us, we're regular people who are trying to do the right thing because we come together and we create this podcast and we tell stories together and so part of what we can show our listeners is how the everyday person who's trying to learn, tries to figure out what to do and how to actually answer the question. Can we move away from caste to create a more equitable society? What are the small things? What can you do on a daily basis?

Peppur Chambers...: Well... This is Peppur. I think that for one, that intrinsically the answer is yes. I think we can move away from it by simply saying that we can. So one of those, if you believe you can, you can do it, but in my head I'm like, oh my gosh, where's the big hammer to smash the whole thing and start from scratch, which I don't think is actually possible. But I will bring in that I've been working or listening to someone, his name is Ben McBride and he is of the camp called, there's this movement about belonging and how we all need to belong to each other in order to start healing and getting away from these type of things. And one thing that he asks us all is, who do we need to become in order to make change? So I

need to become a more compassionate person, I need to become like my neighbor or understand how my neighbor thinks, those kinds of things.

Peppur Chambers...: So in that way, what I'm breaking down is that, I think in the one small thing I can do or I'm doing for myself is things like this. Having these conversations, looking to see what other people and leaders and communities are doing to get us towards a place of healing and to also 100% believe that there can be change.

Yvonne Lee: Yeah, the simplicity just belonging and meditating on that, what that means for a person.

Jason Lee: And then you have created a whole new space, which you're doing Peppur, so vibrantly in your work, you're attracting people to your writing, to your explorations and so you become the there.

Peppur Chambers...: That's nice, thank you. Yes.

Courtney Olipha...: I like, Peppur, how specific and small that is, but that it can have such a ripple effect in other areas of your life. Because I look at, I hear this question and I just, my mind jumps to everything. Like all the legislation that can be changed. All of the things you know, that I could do if I was a Senator or I was a person in power, like I look at those positions of power as being the best place to make change. But I think as, as we know, and we have seen over the last eight to ten years of people in leadership, that's not-

Matthew Soraci: That's not case at all, yeah.

Courtney Olipha...: You can't necessarily get anything done when you're in those positions of power, so I think for me in my own life and coming from a white female perspective, that even just expanding your friend group in an authentic way is one way that you can help dismantle this. And I say, friend group, because it's not enough just to know people, it's not enough just to have coworkers, it's having deep, authentic relationships from people who look, sound and think completely different from you so that you can expand your empathy and that's one small way that we can help break the structure. Because so much of it is knowing who you know, I think in a lot of industries, especially in arts, I'm sure it's true all over the place.

Jason Lee: Networking is key, right? Yeah, for sure.

Yvonne Lee: You'd have to be aware, you'd have to be aware that it's happening in order to know. You'd have to be aware that the separation, that invisible hand is happening in order to know even to say that, oh, this is how I have privilege and my friends don't.

Courtney Olipha...: Exactly, yeah.

Jason Lee: Matt?



Matthew Soraci: It is, as we've discussed, certainly a large question and I'm probably a bit more pessimistic than anybody here. I do think it can be dismantled but it's generations away, but to Peppur's point, I do think it's the small things, as we've discussed, listening, trying to cut down on assumptions, for me in particular, trying not to judge people before speaking to them or just getting a better understanding of where they may be coming from and passing that learning along to other people who may be younger or in different positions, so to speak. And to Courtney's point too, certainly it's building other people up and exposing and allowing other people to experience the things that I'm able to experience, whether it's through work or just personal, but it's going to take a long time to dismantle. And then we have to be very careful not to create a different one in its place because throughout history, there's some variation of a caste system in place and when we break it down, what do we replace it with?

Jason Lee: You're spot on, it's going to be based on something else and I think at the core-

Yvonne Lee: Black people.

Jason Lee: For me is how we express our empathy and humanity as well in the face of these structures.

Peppur Chambers...: Yeah, it is useful and also, you mentioned mountaintop, Yvonne, and I think didn't Martin Luther King say it may not happen in our lifetime, we may not see it, but that doesn't mean we don't? And I know you weren't saying that, Matt, but it doesn't mean we don't try but yeah, we may not see it.

Jason Lee: He said I've been to the mountaintop, he said I've been there, I've seen it, I'm sorry, let's let AJ jump on in here because-

Peppur Chambers...: Oh AJ.

Jason Lee: Yeah, I want to hear what she has to say too, for sure.

AJ Dinsmore: I do agree with Matt to an extent and I don't think that it's something that will happen in any of our generations, but it doesn't matter. Change takes a long time, but it's worth it. I think for myself, as a person who has been living in two worlds for the past couple years, something that I do a lot is try to be a bridge between those two worlds. So sometimes there are small things I do, like my partner is mixed race like Jason and I send photos of us together all the time to my parents because they love seeing me anyways and they want to know how I'm doing, but also because they've never met anyone who was mixed race before. And my dad is a Trump supporter, he's not just someone who voted for Trump, he's a Trump supporter. I don't know, because the people who love me, I want them to love the people I love, who are people that they don't normally love and I also love all of you.

Jason Lee: Yeah.

Yvonne Lee: I love that.

Peppur Chambers...: We love you too, AJ.

AJ Dinsmore: Oh, I love you too.

Matthew Soraci: What's going on?

AJ Dinsmore: Oh, that's nice.

Courtney Olipha...: For those of you can't see us, there's hearts all around, there's emoji going around.

Yvonne Lee: I have an off the cuff question for Matthew.

Matthew Soraci: Oh, of course.

Yvonne Lee: I'm just wondering in terms of white male privilege, how do you see how you can help with your privilege to dismantle a caste system that has been created?

Matthew Soraci: It's definitely something I've considered even before I knew the difference between caste and race. I grew up in a Western suburb of Chicago that was very, very Caucasian and I just, by luck or happenstance, my best friend growing up was a little black kid who lived in an apartment building behind us and my parents never made mention of it. But even from that point, in second, third, fourth, fifth grade, I remember some people giving us looks or just saying, I don't know, off the cuff things. So it was ingrained in me early that it didn't feel right to me, this kid was just my friend and we were just having fun, we were just kids and so the looks I got were different than the looks I got when I was hanging out with my other friends.

Matthew Soraci: Or we'd go to the store together or something, there was always just an off feeling. So as I've gone through life subconsciously, I feel like I've made it somewhat of a priority too, when I'm in those privileged situations where I'm with a group of white men of a certain privilege and definitely straight and to call out as much as I can when conversations go towards negative discussions of race, of women, of anything. But for the most part, I feel like I've done a pretty good job of letting people know how I stand and trying to at least, I don't know if educate is the right word, or maybe enlighten their ignorance doesn't make them funny. So the things that I can do to both break down the caste society are the smaller things. So on a larger level, yeah, I don't know.

Jason Lee: Again, Matt, we've been friends for 40 years and I can attest to your strong stance of humanity and informing people if and when they cross a line that is ugly or inappropriate. And so, that's a small way to keep moving the needle, man, that's all I'm saying, just let people know it isn't funny when they make stupid jokes.

Yvonne Lee: There's another quote from Caste that I absolutely love, that as I was reading her book, I thought, oh my God, what do we do with all this? What do we do with all of this? And she says, radical empathy, which speaks to what you're talking about, Matthew, trying to have empathy for other people. Radical

empathy means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart, to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will, it is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it.

Jason Lee: Yeah, that's a wonderful quote. The one way that Yvonne and I personally work toward dismantling the caste system is by building a company that is multi-ethnic and multi-generational, with people of color in leadership positions and the absolute core tenant of our mission is to support artists of color and uncommon voices and we like to explore stories that aren't being told on a macro level, but that speaks to us as humans, even if it's outside of our experience. But that said, maybe starting your own company isn't your role to play in this fight, maybe just having conversations with your friend groups, with your core groups around you, maybe it's just challenging yourself to step out of your comfort zone, talk to other people and we hope this conversation has inspired you folks out there to examine ways in which you can practice radical empathy in your own life because if race is a social construct, then society can choose to deconstruct it.

Yvonne Lee: Race is a construct. People could be organized into a caste system by all means of physical characteristics, skin color is what our country chose. One way to dismantle this caste system is for us to understand where our privilege lies. According to caste, white is where your privilege lies but I think that there are other ways that we can spend our privilege, whether you are educated, whether you are wealthy, what your gender is, how old you are, how young you are, what your religious beliefs are, what your sexual orientation is and what your nationality is, what your physical ability is, what your family structure is, these are all things that have weight within the caste system and in order for us to actually break it, we need to use whatever privilege we have in order to help others. I am educated, I have access, I live in a city where many of my everyday needs are taken care of, these are all things that are privileges that I have access to, that I can spend in order to help other people.

Yvonne Lee: I've been able to live a life of being an artist and understand how that can help people. So thinking of all the different ways that we have privilege and spending it in a way that breaks down what the caste system tries to separate.

Jason Lee: This is a very challenging, difficult question we're posing, right? How do you break down a caste system? How you do it is up to you, you can make that choice, you can confront or not, that's up to you. But also, you can choose differently, you can choose not to choose, you can choose instead to challenge, you can fight that fight and to you, we raise a fist, my brother, my sister, you, in however you identify.

Yvonne Lee: Thank you for listening and please drink responsibly. This podcast is produced by the Lagralane Group. We would like to thank Lagralane Spirits' co-producers and writers, Courtney Oliphant and Peppur Chambers-Soraci, co-producer, Matthew

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Jason Lee:

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