

Jacqueline O.: There is a balance, because Frederick Douglass and the abolitionists did the work that they did so that we don't have to. For me, I'm starting to learn balance is that there is a certain struggle that I can undertake. But there is also a certain way that I need to take care and care for myself because this is the gift from those folks. I'm constantly thinking about that balance.

Jason Lee: We are 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 are 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 reverent 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 [lagralanespirits.com](http://lagralanespirits.com). And as always, please enjoy.

Yvonne Lee: Responsibly. Armed with American flags and their father's pistols, with coats of armor made from faux bear skins and wearing warrior viking helmets of plastic, they stormed the White House with mouths open, screaming of revenge and reclamation. They considered themselves righteous.

Jason Lee: No-no. Those motherfuckers were salty that the president didn't win and they wanted to do something about it. So they did. They took their whiteness and their defiance of the word no and tried to repeat history, 1814 to be exact. Back then, the British stormed the White House, stole ledgers from President James Madison's office. And then like Angela Bassett, lit a match and watched the whole White House burn. Burn motherfucker, burn.

Yvonne Lee: This is...

Jason Lee: How we author history.

Yvonne Lee: Lit a match like Angela Bassett.

Jason Lee: I was feeling some kind of way about that historical day.

Yvonne Lee: I feel you, babe. Okay. Hello, everyone. And welcome to tonight's episode of Lagralane Spirits podcast.

Jason Lee: What's up friends? This season, Yvonne and I are exploring all things identity. We'll revisit moments in American history through the lens of our own family's roots and the legacy of the generations that have come before us. Tonight, we are asking ourselves how do we author history?

Yvonne Lee: In episode four, we questioned if we are the authors of history, and explored our responsibility as artists and creators to contributing to the narrative that is woven into history.

Jason Lee: In this episode, we are taking action and talking about how. Assuming we are the new authors of history, this episode explores how we do that. Meaning with what tools, which voice, which methods do we work to change, expand and highlight a new narrative that is based upon the old? How do we empower ourselves and others to get it right finally? Further, how do we identify within that journey? Do we speak for ourselves and our own experiences? Do we speak for a community, a family, a generation? In what ways do we lead by example to author history?

Yvonne Lee: Dear, there's so many questions. I'm so parched. So in need of elevation. With what spirit will you wet my whistle this evening?

Jason Lee: My love, I am glad and grateful that you asked. Tonight, we enjoy the Manhattan. The Manhattan is one of David Embury's six essential cocktails. Throughout the pandemic, I have done a deep dive over the past about 18 months into texts and recipe books, bartending literature from throughout the years. Books like Jerry Thomas' Bartenders Guide from 1862. Tom Bullock was a bartender in St. Louis in the 1920s and '30s. He has a book of recipes called The Ideal Bartender. More recently, Death and Company has released a bar in New York and in Denver, and here in LA. They have released their recipe books. They have two books out. But David Embury was a at home bartender much like myself, who released a book in the 1940s called The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks. In it, he lists what he considers to be the six essential cocktails for any at home bartender to pour. And they are the Manhattan, the Martini, the Old Fashioned, the Daiquiri, the Sidecar, and the Jack Rose. And this recipe that we are drinking tonight is his recipe from the Manhattan.

Jason Lee: For our first season, I thought it important to include both the historical examinations and the personal examinations that were going on. Along with the craft cocktails that we are exploring, I wanted to get really kind of grounded in a timeless understanding of the pour of these cocktails. Now, part of that history is nobody really knows who invented the Manhattan. It's just a damn good drink. There is lots of stories, lots of theories.

Yvonne Lee: Well, how do you make it? I never get a chance to watch you make it. How do you make it? And maybe next season, I get to make one.

Jason Lee: Next season, season two, episode one, you are going to make your world famous Yvonne margarita.

Yvonne Lee: Famous in the world of Yvonne.

Jason Lee: Listeners, she makes an amazing margarita. But that's for next season. It's a teaser for next season. The Manhattan is two ounces of rye whiskey, one ounce sweet vermouth, dashes of Angostura and orange bitters. And by now, our faithful listeners will understand that I say dashes, a lot of recipes call for one or two or three dashes. I am a bitters fan. You can't under bitter a cocktail in my estimation. The garnish is a brandy cherry. This cocktail should be stirred in a mixing tin. What do you think, babe?

Yvonne Lee: My goodness. Delicious. De-double-licious. And I cannot wait to finish this drink. The Manhattan has no history. If we want it to be like our children's history books, we could just say...

Jason Lee: Hey, you, I created this and this is how it went down. Boom.

Yvonne Lee: Exactly. Right. We'd write that down.

Jason Lee: We could make it up in any way that we want to make it. We could say it was created at a bar in New York.

Yvonne Lee: We could tell them that you did it, that you made it when you went to go do Romeo and Juliet in Harlem.

Jason Lee: But a good lie always has a sense of history in it. Right? Somebody who says, "This is the way the Founding Fathers really believed." Right? Like the Daughters of the Confederacy in the 1910s with their whole Lost Cause myth of their uncles and fathers and grandfathers of the Civil War generation in the South who lost the war, but they still went around creating statues all around the South. They really kind of recreated the story. I think we really should be examining whose story it is, and who is telling it. Everyone should tell their own story. We should listen to other people as they tell their story if we are not of that community. If they tell their story wrong, we should hold them to the fires and get them to tell their story correctly. But we should also give them the chance to speak it. And that's what's so frustrating to me as a historian.

Yvonne Lee: I also think that when it comes to people telling their own story, or even if, let's say, that you wanted a platform for it, but that you at least have to understand that there is a gap between what you know and what they know. And that you don't take complete ownership of someone else's history. We have to give space so that the listener, the person that is reading the story understands that it's from your perspective and it's in support of another. I think we can really share in each other's culture and history. Just being super clear that if you are an English person telling an American story, that you are doing it from your English perspective.

Jason Lee: The preface of every history book should really have to be written in the preface, the caveat being this is their point of view. They've done their research. It reminds me, Yvonne, of coming up in Chicago Theater. Dennis Zacek, the artistic director of Victory Gardens when we were coming up in the late '90s. A Polish gentleman from the Southside of Chicago would tell stories from the black perspective, from the Jewish perspective. As an intern at his theater, I would ask

the question how do you get your authenticity? And he would say, "I surround myself with the most vocal, quick-witted individuals, artists, storytellers, actors, crew, playwrights from that community. And I'd let them tell their story. And I'll come in with a little bit of directorial notes here and there just to kind of help shape it, but I'm not getting in the way of getting their story correct." Right?

Yvonne Lee: Couldn't we argue that the people who were telling the history of the Confederacy were telling their history? I mean, if we are going to go in that direction.

Jason Lee: I hear what you are saying, Yvonne, but I think the brutal truth that we are revisiting I think with the big lie now of Biden not winning the election is a story retold from literally the creation of the Lost Cause. That it was a war of Northern aggression, not of slavery, not against slavery, not of the other reasons why the Civil War was fought. I think they are telling it from their perspective, certainly, but their perspective is mired in a lie. It's kind of like South Africa going through their Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in the '90s. It's traveling around Berlin, going downtown Berlin, you see the museum for the murdered Jews of Europe, in downtown Berlin, Germany. Right? There is no denying their history. I think that's really what I'm hoping to gain. I hope that we move forward in a way, as storytellers, really kind of just accepting other people's groups that we are not in, accepting their stories and their points of view, as they except ours. And this?

Yvonne Lee: I think the thing to add to that too, I just asked that question just to see what would happen. Do you know what I mean? Because there are people who are going to be saying it is their perspective. But I think the thing that is the difference is that that history, the Confederacy point of view, is the one that has mostly infiltrated our educational system. Right? There is not an equal platform for all different points of view about what went down. What the Daughters of the Confederacy were able to do is get their version of the story out the quickest and the furthest.

Jason Lee: And we've been talking all throughout this season about how we are living kind of through the third Reconstruction period in United States history. The first, of course, being the civil rights movement after the Civil War until 1877. The second, mid 20th century. This era we are living in right now is reminiscent of all of those various actions. This post George Floyd world that we are living in is reminiscent of all of that. And that makes me think of the anti-racist program that you launched at our kids school last year. Yvonne, do you want to kind of talk about that a little bit?

Yvonne Lee: People out in the streets protesting. And just I didn't feel like that was my way of expressing. I was listening all these podcasts, and I was trying to figure out how can I do something about this? And I was thinking about our daughter going into middle school and the sophisticated questions that they were already having and the things that they could handle. And I was like, "I want to try to do something." And even before that, I wanted to try to figure out, okay, where do I stand within the community that we are in right now, where our children spend 40-50 hours a week. They have, by far, the most influence on our family than any

other one person outside of our family. I really wanted to know where do I stand with you?

Yvonne Lee: This is what I want to talk about. Would you like your children to be a part of a conversation about social justice and explore what anti-racism is and understand what it is to be an activist and figure out how to question all the social ills and problems that are happening in our world? Because I know that you are already talking about it in class. These kids are talking about it in class. And where does my family stand with yours? Where does my Filipino, black, Russian, Nigerian-

Jason Lee: German.

Yvonne Lee: ... multiethnic family stands with many of these families that are here? And their response is really beautiful once I put it out there. Everybody was really trying to do the right thing. And it was very inspirational to see that when I asked the question would you like your child to be a leader at our school in terms of making change and have them be the ones that are figuring out? Because in the end, we need innovation. Unless we are teaching this to children earlier and unless we are having them not just take the history that we are telling them, but also see it from that perspective, we are just going to get the same old, same old, same old. I created the Kindness in Action initiatives because I definitely felt stuck in a moment. I had all this emotion and no way to express it in a positive way.

Yvonne Lee: And what I found through the process of creating by talking to different parents and talking to kids and talking to administrators and asking questions, reading books. And really, well, I'm asking people who I might see as the oppressors to educate themselves. I also had to go through a lot of education from a lot of different perspectives and figure out what history I didn't understand, that I didn't know about and what was left out. Even this far into life with three kids, I was like, "There is so much that I don't know." I wanted to know how do we create community right now? And I realized it was through conversation, it was through collaboration, it was through connecting with people and it was about understanding how they feel and where they are right now. And them understanding me. And man, you know what? That takes a lot of energy. It really does. I don't think people actually understand how much emotion and vulnerability that it takes to actually shift the paradigm. And we just don't grow up in a community that allows us to be that all the time.

Jason Lee: You've reclaimed the narrative and you've started the conversation. And in doing so, you are attempting to reclaim a narrative that is lost. A lot of people don't want to do that work. It challenges people on a core belief level. And I applaud you for insisting upon that. It's similar in a way reclaiming the narrative. Right? Telling the story, getting the truth told. It reminds me of our short film that I wrote and directed that's hitting the festival circuit now called Lifeline. It's very similar. And in the attempt to, A, have the conversation in order to use it as a tool to get to the truth to the best of our ability.

Yvonne Lee: I think I also realized too throughout the process of learning, because this was a huge past year of learning and growth, is that because I'm a woman of color, I

am not without bias. I come against things just because of my age or social class or any of those things. There things that I don't see. But I'm so grateful to really recognize myself and have the space to kind of learn about all of that in the way that being able to look at history, personal history and universal history.

Jason Lee: Micro, macro.

Yvonne Lee: And see it from many different perspectives. There is just so much that I never question when I was a kid and I didn't really realize. I'm just supposed to read this, write a paper and get a good grade. As we grow up, how can I author history without actually looking at things from multiple perspectives? Well, one thing I did want to bring up, Jason, is as I'm thinking about, you mentioned it a little bit earlier about you being the author of history. In episode three, we did a whole reveal about some information your mom had kept from you about your birth dad. I'm talking about personal history, universal history. She was the author of your history in some ways. What do you think about that?

Jason Lee: To remind audiences, I uncovered that my birth mother, the man she told me who was my birth father, it turned out that he was not the father, according to DNA tests that were taken later. The problem was the man who I thought was my birth father, he also thought he was the birth dad. A lie that I believed for 20 years, he had believed for 50. I had no reason to question it until the DNA tests revealed that. In line of what we are talking about today, Yvonne, what I think really is that she is allowed her story. Right? There is certain parts of her own story that aren't my story. What is part of my story, I feel I have the birthright to learn the truth about it. But I'm not here to judge her for a lie.

Jason Lee: She told a story that it's kind of the same type of examination of history. People tell their stories to promote a belief in something. We can get to the root cause of what that something is. But with regards to this part of my personal story, I feel like my story starts on August 20th, 1971. And I'm open to whatever information that comes from that point. What happened before that is her story. And gaining the truth out of all of that, after all of these years, several decades later, has given me a calm and a centering that I truly don't think I had before. I needed to get that story told, which is why I searched for you. You've known me for 25 years. I've been on the search since we first started. It was actually you, Yvonne, that let me on the search, because I was like, "She is really cool and pretty. And maybe she will marry me and we can start a family together."

Yvonne Lee: You are so silly.

Jason Lee: I want to be able to tell our future children what the story was. And that is the segue into bringing in our guest. Right? Documentary filmmaker, Jacqueline Olive.

Yvonne Lee: Jacqueline.

Jason Lee: Jacqueline. Jacque is out there in those streets, knocking down history walls in her documentary filmmaking and going up against the powers that be with knowledge and a camera.

Jacqueline O.: Well, I love that you are asking the question. I think it's really important to look at it. And I'm always thinking about my work is very much centered around the American story and what is the American story. What's the accuracy around it? Are there elements that's missing? Who is telling the story? And does that compromise or does it enhance the veracity of what's being said? And my work is really very much about not rewriting history. And I'm currently working on projects that have to do with the Lost Cause. That was a very blatant effort to rewrite history around falsehoods. Right? But my work is really about filling in the gaps and helping people to understand the entire story. And those gaps are large in a lot of cases. What we come up with is fragments of understanding what's going on in this country, what's going on historically, and what's going on currently. My films are really about rounding out those narratives so that you hear the voices of people who are often overlooked or mischaracterized, or erased altogether.

Yvonne Lee: I want to make sure that our listeners... I want to give just a little introduction. That was Jacqueline Olive that you all were listening to. She lets us call her Jacque. We feel so honored to be able to do that. And she is a tremendous filmmaker and friend. And we met Jacqueline through a documentary she directed, produced and wrote called Always in Season. Amazing film.

Jason Lee: A wonderful film.

Yvonne Lee: It was Sundance several years ago. And we all just hit it off right off the bat. And I remember you held a conversation after the premiere that someone hosted at their house, where you brought in people who spoke about Always in Season. And it was one of the most amazing things I've been to. And there was such truth going on. I had no idea what to expect. It was not this normal after premiere Sundance conversation. It was really how do we process that lynchings today are still happening and that there are people who are studying this? It was just so wonderful.

Yvonne Lee: Always in Season, everyone, was awarded the 2019 Sundance Film Festival Special Jury Prize for Moral Urgency. That's why that conversation was so important. And was featured twice on Democracy Now. She was the director and producer of Death Is Our Business, which was broadcast on Frontline PBS and PBS World with Digital Launch on March 23rd, 2021. And will be screening at BlackStar Film Festival. August 2021. Jacqueline's current project is They Tried to Bury Us, of which she is a co-director with Bree Newsome. They Tried to Bury Us is a first person documentary film that picks up where news coverage left off when activist and filmmaker Bree Newsome made headlines with the historic direct action protest. She scaled a 30 foot flagpole at the South Carolina State House to remove the Confederate flag following the racially motivated shooting of nine African Americans at Mother Emanuel AME Church in 2015. I want to know more about your journey about this, Jacque. These first person stories are such insight into the worlds of many. Do you have anything you would like to add about that project?

Jacqueline O.: Absolutely. And thank you, Yvonne. It's an honor to be here with you and Jason, because I remember when you all were conceiving the podcast. So exciting. It's a

great concept. To be among the conversation is really a gift for me. Thank you. They Tried to Bury Us. By the way, the title comes from the saying they tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds. And it's really about this resilience of folks like Bree Newsome, who is just an incredibly courageous woman and incredibly courageous activist. And we are looking at that action certainly that happened in 2015, which was really the pivotal moment in the Black Lives Matters movement and other resistance movements with direct action. There hadn't really been very much direct action since the '60s and since you see the protests at the lunch counters.

Jacqueline O.: I remember that moment and was just really moved really beyond words to see Bree, a black woman, up there doing the thing that everybody wanted to do, which was take the flag down at the time. To see and to get to know her and understand the bravery and the risk that she took is really exciting in telling the story. And we also follow forward to today and look at how her activism and her organizing in North Carolina has evolved. She is married and she has a newborn child. To understand how she has evolved as a woman I think is a really inspiring story.

Jason Lee: That's incredible.

Yvonne Lee: Wow. I remember when I became a mom, it all changed.

Jacqueline O.: Right?

Yvonne Lee: Right, Jacqueline. When you become a mom, all of a sudden, even the work that you thought was so important before, it all of a sudden has a completely new meaning.

Jacqueline O.: It has all kinds of shades. And it's really interesting to hear from Bree. One of the questions we ask is would she do that again? Would she give it more thought? Because she actually prepared to die that day. She had prepared to give her life for that cause, for that action. The question is, as a mom, what risk do you take? I just think it's really interesting to see the evolution of her work and just her presence as a black woman on the planet.

Yvonne Lee: That is a perfect intro into the part of our story, of our podcast where we say are you ready for your cocktail confession, Jacque Olive?

Jacqueline O.: I think so.

Yvonne Lee: Okay. Fantastic.

Jason Lee: I'm going to ask it. But before I do, I'm going to say cheers. If we can raise our glasses. And then we'll dive on into it.

Jacqueline O.: Cheers.

Jason Lee: Jacque, we are all authors of history. Right? I often say, because I was a history major, I was trained as a historian before I was trained as an actor. Everything I

do or at least I attempt to do professionally comes through a lens of history. I'm deeply influenced by history, which was why I was so excited to meet you at Sundance when you were premiering *Always in Season*. The first cocktail confession question we have for you is how do you personally author history? And you could process that question in any way that you would like. One thing that I would just like to hear from you about is, educationally, historically, your own personal history. What brought you to this place in your life where you explore these important historical aspects of our zeitgeist?

Jacqueline O.: Such a good question. I'll start with where my mind went first, which is, as a mother, having a child and raising a child means that you are authoring history. It's a way of bringing forward all the things that I know about the beauty and the abilities and the presence and the complexity of black folks. It's to bring another black person onto this planet and help to raise them. That's one of the more profound ways. I grew up in Mississippi. And I'm turning 55, actually, in a week or two.

Jason Lee: Happy early birthday.

Jacqueline O.: Thank you.

Yvonne Lee: Gorgeous.

Jacqueline O.: Thank you. I grew up in a time in which my family was one of the first to integrate our neighborhood, and the first to integrate my school. And I went to the same school, because it wasn't exactly rural area, it was more suburban. And as much as in Mississippi, it can be suburban. But it's the school that I went to from fourth grade until 12th grade. You are in the same place and you are getting to know people over many years. And by the time I graduated, it was still less than 10% black that graduate class.

Yvonne Lee: Oh my God. In eight years.

Jacqueline O.: For a long time, I... And prior to that, I lived in... Because the segregation lasted in Mississippi and particularly in my hometown of Hattiesburg into the '80s. Well, definitely the late '70s, early '80s. I had also had the experience of living in a neighborhood that was all black, certainly mostly black if not all black, segregated. But the benefit of that, which I tell my son who has grown up in international environments. Right? The benefit to that is that I knew what black people look like and all of their variety and how they lived. It was different socioeconomic levels. Certainly, there were different class if you think about class in terms of the things that inform class, art and culture, that kind of thing. There was a variation there. And certainly economically and politically.

Jacqueline O.: It was segregation. And at the same time, it was the opportunity to really understand the fullness of what it means to be black. And to not have that said to me, I didn't have all the stereotypes internalized, because I could see what black meant all around me. As opposed to how my son grew up, which is he grew up in very diverse neighborhoods. And certainly, inside the home, he had a

good understanding and sense of his blackness. But outside of the home, there weren't as many reflections of it. I had these two worlds.

Jacqueline O.: And the other thing that I will say is that at the time, even people who weren't white or black, folks who were Hispanic, other ethnicities, they would anglicize their names and identify as white. It was very much this striation. And I knew both worlds. And I had many friends in both those worlds. What was interesting to me was what was not said about race. That there was very little conversation about race, about the racial terrorism that was so intrinsic in Mississippi in particular. Right? We were living all around. And you could literally feel it in the atmosphere, in the trees, in the woods. I had woods behind my house that I grew up in Clayton. I knew that there was a conversation missing, that was really never had growing up there all the way until I turned 18 and left for college.

Jacqueline O.: My work has really been about bringing to the forefront and to the mainstream those things that I know and those things that will really help us as Americans to be able to see each other more clearly. I think that in that sense, that's really I use film as a way to author history. And actually, I came to film late. I went to graduate school to study documentary film at 39. I never thought about being a filmmaker. I never really thought about storytelling in this way. But I had little kernels of inspiration that people dropped to me along the way. I remember seeing Toni Morrison at one point in an auditorium. And she talked about if you don't tell your story, who will? And if you have the ability to, then you have the obligation to do that. Those were little seeds that were planted in my head.

Jason Lee: That's awesome. I had a similar moment with Ruby Dee. She came to my college and spoke. I went as an actor and hoping to hear her talk about her acting. And she talked a little bit about her acting, but she talked more about her activism. And that was a really extraordinary thing for me to experience as a young man. And that's extraordinary. Thank you for sharing that.

Jacqueline O.: Sure. And history is such a great background for drama. It gives you those layers and complexity that you can bring to the world.

Yvonne Lee: The part that struck me the most is the silence about race. For me, when last summer happened with George Floyd and all the subsequent actions that happened after that, I was like, "What do I do?" I don't know. I'm not going to go out walking in the streets. That's not my form. That's not how I'm going to protest. But I kept just sitting on what am I going to do? How am I going to talk about this? I feel like we've been investing in films and trying to tell stories and have a theater company and all this, and it just comes to that point where you go, "Well, have I done enough? Have I already been speaking this, walking this, talking this?"

Yvonne Lee: And then it came down to, okay, I'm a mom. I am not going to send my daughter who is about to go into middle school unarmed, without knowing how to have these conversations. Not just in our home, but to have them with her classmates. Right? Because that's a different dynamic, in the safety of our home versus how you have it with a group of people who you may not know where they stand.

Yvonne Lee: Praise independent filmmakers who understood when I said, "Could you please come and do this Q&A for us about your film?" And I would bring it to the school and have these fifth and sixth graders conduct Q&As with the filmmakers about the subject matter and conducting workshops, trying to figure out how to connect personally. Not just about how do we author history? You go into school with questions, not answers. Right? Those answers should only lead you to more questions. And you just need a breadth of knowledge and someone to ask you to be a leader. And then you step up with your knees shaking. You just go head on and you do it.

Jacqueline O.: I think that goes back to your point that you were making earlier, Jason, about when someone is telling a story about a community that they are not from. The other problem that I have with that is that it is not about asking questions, is not acknowledging that there are certain things that you don't know and that you are interested in seeking out. It's that vulnerable place that I think is really important. I know you all in theater know this, and certainly in filmmaking, is that you have to come from a vulnerable place in order to really move past what you know. And what you know is always limited. You can't know everything. And I look at a lot of review applications for different funders. And I look at a lot of applications. And when I see folks who aren't from that community, and there is no place in which they acknowledge that, it tells me that they are not asking the questions and they are not being vulnerable in a way that's really needed to really understand folks with complexity.

Yvonne Lee: I think that I'm struggling to remember the name of this book right now. But one of the themes that they talked about is a Korean woman who is a poet and a writer. And she talks about how you don't speak about something, you speak adjacent to it, you speak near it, because when you speak near it, you acknowledge the gap between you and the person that you are talking about. And in that gap, that's where the conversation happens, because then we can share culture. Right? There is no just I'm always the authority on something. Because even as artists and as storytellers and authors of history, if you have an interest in another culture, if you frame it through this idea of speaking near where you admit the gap, you see the gap, here are the questions, then people have room to enter into an actual conversation.

Jacqueline O.: I love that. It's being in step with the community as opposed to looking in on them and being the authority on their story, but really wanting to understand. And I do that. I mean, it's a natural process of the way that I approach films anyway, whether it's my community or another, because I understand that there are limitations to what I know.

Jason Lee: That makes you the artist that you are. Right? It's we ask questions. Right? And we share unabashedly our point of view. We respectfully silence ourselves when others are sharing their points of view from their perspectives. And that is, in my opinion, America. Right? If we were a functioning, healthy, vibrant ecosystem, we would be pulling from the best of us all. And when we are, we do. When we aren't, we don't. And we are kind of living through it. You mentioned the Lost Cause. Jacques, we are living through another attempted whitewash of another major moment that happened in our history, just back on January 6th.

Jacqueline O.: Yes.

Yvonne Lee: While we were speaking, I looked it up. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* by Cathy Park Hong. That's the name of the book, which is interesting. And in its own way, does exactly what Frederick Douglass speech does, which is at once, lift up, and at the same time, tell the truth about yourself.

Jacqueline O.: Well, I think it goes hand in hand, because if you don't see the motivation for really taking the country and other people to task is because you have this optimism that it can be better. And when it's all negative, then you are empathetic and you are not engaging. They go hand in hand.

Jason Lee: If you lean in on any subject with love, not just subject, but any, call it ecosystem, any identity, any peoples, if you lean in on the themes and issues that are facing these peoples with love and understanding or at least the attempted love and understanding, you might be able to move the needle. If you come in from a dissonant tonal place, you are only adding to that kind of cacophony of horrible news from social media that I'm going to block you or I'm going to defend you or I'm not going to listen to your point of view. Right? I just think these themes need to be dealt with a nicely poured craft cocktail and with truth and honesty.

Yvonne Lee: I'm curious, Jacque, do you ever find... Because sometimes I think when we talk about social justice, sometimes black people could be kind of become this monolith. But do you ever find that in the storytelling like when you are talking about lynchings, when you are talking about the Confederate flag coming down, do you ever find that other black people kind of wonder why you are telling that story?

Jacqueline O.: I do. When I was filming for *Always in Season*, I filmed in a community, a city called Laurens, South Carolina. And I filmed in eight cities across the country. And they didn't all make it into the final cut. And this story didn't, but it was a really great story of a shop called a Redneck Shop that was erected in the middle of downtown. And there was a black minister, Reverend David Kennedy, who fought for 16 years to close it down. The Redneck Shop sold Klan robes, neo-Nazi memorabilia and had white supremacist meeting there in that space for 16 years. And Reverend Kennedy fought to get it closed down and ultimately became the owner of that shop. It's a really triumphant story.

Jacqueline O.: But it is the community in which I'm really good at getting access and getting people to talk and do interviews. And it was really the first time that I got nos, and I got a lot of nos. And a lot of those nos were from black folks. And there are a variety of reasons why. But I think that when you are of oppressed group and the pressure is on you to blend in and not to make waves, and certainly the consequences of making waves are far greater than if you are not. If you are white, for example, in a white community. Then people will ask why are you doing this? Why are you stirring up trouble in the same way that someone who is white and racist might not want that story to be told. I have encountered that.

Jacqueline O.: And then there are people with, I'm sure, just a different point of view, a totally different point of view. If you dug all the way down past the fear and past the pain and the natural desire not to bring that up again, if you dig bit below that, there are some people who may simply believe that a Confederate flag, for example, is fine. Black folks, there is such a diversity as a people and we have a multitude of views. And just because it may be different from mine doesn't mean that I'm even interested in judging. And I'm actually more interested in understanding it.

Yvonne Lee: Sure.

Jason Lee: I want to lean in on that a little bit too. That's amazing, because one of the most extraordinary elements of your extraordinary Always in Season, for me, was the reenactments. I'm curious if you could speak to those reenactments and the individuals involved in these lynching moments. They are so very generationally such a... Well, it's complicated. Right? I'm just wondering if you could speak to that.

Jacqueline O.: It's very complicated. It's very intense. And I filmed in Atlanta and Monroe, Georgia, which is where in 19... Sorry. I'm thinking about the Lincoln. I almost said 18. But in 1956, there were two couples who were lynched, murdered on the Moore's Ford Bridge in Monroe, Georgia, outside of Atlanta. There is a group of people, they are a diverse group of people who come together to reenact that lynching, because they want to make sure that the victims are never forgotten. And they believe that some of the perpetrators might still be living there. I filmed there for four years, all the way through 2014 with them. And talk to date to Cassandra Green, who is the director of the reenactment.

Jacqueline O.: But I thought what was really important, you talk about authoring history and your own story, is really the reason. There is a lot of controversy around the reenactment. Should it happen? Is it too graphic? Is it pulling apart the community? Have they gone on long enough? Because they started in 2005. Is it time to stop? But for me, it was really important to include that story in the film, because it was an organic expression of the community's need to tell the story as they had seen it, and because things like journalists. Historically, journalists would write in the newspaper for people not to talk about a lynching. There has been this cover up historically. There is certainly this denial that even goes on today in communities about lynchings. I can go into communities where it's heavily documented, and people will say, "No lynching happened here. You are just trying to stir up trouble."

Jacqueline O.: In Monroe, they are bringing the stories to life in connection with the founder, Bobby Howard, who just recently passed away. He spent at least 20 years, at least two decades, collecting oral histories from the family members of the victims and from other people in that area to accumulate the information that then is used in this dramatization. I think it's a really important expression of what people are doing, and doing creatively. One is that they are not waiting any longer to ask for permission. And they are thinking how can we fill in the gaps of this narrative that is certainly African American, but it's certainly American and it's certainly about what's going on in this community so that people can know,

first of all. And so that if people are moved to do something about it, that they do. By the way, family members of some of the suspected perpetrators have reached out to them to say that my relative was involved. There has been some success around those efforts as well.

Yvonne Lee: Right. The beginning of some kind of healing.

Jason Lee: Almost South African Truth and Reconciliation, almost. That's the goal. Right?

Jacqueline O.: It is.

Jason Lee: Some type of societal understanding of and non-denial of what this history is.

Jacqueline O.: I mean, imagine the reverberations that, first of all, if you watch a murder, how traumatic that is. What if your entire community came out to watch a murder? And that murder is of your people. And that person is generally criminalized, whether it is accurate or not. There is a stigma that then black folks and communities have to live with, because of connection to that person. There is a fear, there is a terror. People are living with the residuals of that even now. And it's evident in the fact that people have, since 2005, come together to hold this event, despite the controversy, despite not having any funding, any financial support to do it.

Yvonne Lee: That is such a great example of how would a person empower themselves to get history? Can we get history right? Let's say you can empower yourself by doing the reenactments, are we getting it right or can we get it right?

Jason Lee: I'm going to pour another cocktail on that. I'm going to listen, Jacque. It's a great question. And I'm just going to listen and pour another cocktail.

Jacqueline O.: If you have the answers, please type in. It's one of the things I was exploring with Always in Season and I kind of explore in other projects is whose truth is valid? Right? There is this collective shared memory in communities that is not documented. And then there is this documentation that is often inadequate. There would be no reason. One of the things that the reenactors portray is that there was a pregnant woman who was lynched. And that the baby was taken from her stomach, cut from her stomach. And there is no documentation of that. Her family members say that that, in fact, was true. She was in fact pregnant. But there would have been no motivation for journalists to come and talk about and parse out the level of violence, particularly at a time when there is cover up. Right? Whose truth is valid is a question I explore.

Jacqueline O.: The other question which I think really gets to what you were saying, Yvonne, is what is the truth? Is there an absolute truth? And I think that we all bring our perspectives to moments. And I just want to bring as many of those perspectives together in that moment so that we can see it. And then people can decide, the audience can decide. For me, it's necessary. Part of the work, and I talked about this lack of this conversation, which is what I've lived with. What I've learned is that you can't move past something unless you move through it. And it's all the emotions that we are equipped to survive. For me, there is no reason to be timid

about it. Certainly to be thoughtful, but not necessarily timid about exploring them all and being present with other people really authentically and fully, I think is really important.

Jason Lee: How do you personally make that choice with your work? I mean, you were talking about Bree earlier and, of course, Always in Season. What is it that resonates in you when you say, because I know you have a journalism background, when you say this is a story that I need to explore? What are the boxes that you are looking to check?

Yvonne Lee: Right. And then how do you choose your battles? And how do you choose what you think your obligations are in that?

Jacqueline O.: Such a good question. Because people are all the time saying, "I have this great idea for a documentary." Not knowing that I already have 10 ideas.

Jason Lee: Right? Back-order.

Jacqueline O.: I can't choose them all. And they could be very good ideas. Right? I think, for me, one is that just having the skills and the knowledge of a filmmaker, I can tell if there is enough information for an arc over a feature film. That's one thing. Right? Is the character dynamic enough and will they sustain an arc is really the biggest thing for me. But before that, it's this gut reaction to the story. It's not just is it interesting intellectually? But is it something that I would be passionate enough to stick with for at least two years? Documentaries take a minimum of two years. It took me 10 years to make Always in Season.

Jason Lee: 10 years. Yes.

Jacqueline O.: Is it something that's going to drive me enough to stay with as long as I need to stay with it? And for me, that generally, again, it's about filling in the story of black folks, people of color, people who are marginalized, whose stories aren't told in the fullness of who they are and how they show up in the world are my criterias. Those are the kind of things I think about.

Jacqueline O.: And also, the other thing is to what end? I'm always thinking early on who my audience is and to what end am I telling the story? What will they get from it? And the same thing for the people that I feature on the screen. Like Claudia Lacy, Lennon's mom, in Always in Season, who is her son. Lennon was found hanging in 2014. Well, if I don't find out the answer in the form of who done it, whether or not he was lynched, what is it that I can offer Claudia in telling the story? To what end? Do I just take up someone's time? I filmed with her for four years. I'm always thinking about what's the benefit of the work that I do?

Jason Lee: Can I ask what is the end for her in this exploration, if you don't mind that question?

Jacqueline O.: Well, Claudia believes, she said this early on in probably the first interview I did with her and certainly in the last conversations that we have is she believes that she is going to find out what happened to her child. She pushed for an FBI

investigation to be opened. And that took a while. And then they held it open for 16 months before they came back and very perfunctory told her that there wasn't enough evidence of a murder to move forward. And yet she still is convinced that she is going to find out what happened to her son. And as she was then, and I'm sure she is still. I haven't spoken with her in a few months. But we talked for the longest. And when I moved out here, I have been in California for a year. And I moved to North Carolina to be closer to filming. I was very close. I was an hour away from Claudia. And I saw her frequently.

Jacqueline O.:

She has from the very beginning, which is the thing that I'm interested in and I don't see often enough in film and in these kinds of stories is how do you move forward? And she, from the very beginning, in the midst of what could be crippling grief. I think if that were my child, I don't know that you'd still be able to get me up off the floor. But Claudia was busy working, and out of her ethic about how she moves in the world, working and raising her older son's children. And she is still doing those kinds of things now. And there is this optimism in the human spirit. There is this openness that she had from the very beginning, which I thought was really remarkable in the midst of anger and dealing with the loss of her baby. Lennon was her youngest child.

Yvonne Lee:

I have a question for you, because Jason and I decided to get into this. We are actors. And we were there is lots of stories we want to tell, people that we want to work with. We decided to be a part of the answer. And then you find that you are doing all this stuff, trying to talk to the right people. But I feel like there is a power structure that denies access as you were trying to rewrite and become a part of the history. There is a power structure that exists out there that either is denying it so that you can only get so far. And then there is another part of it that empowers you. I mean, what do you think about that? There is something, there is this invisible hand that we are not acknowledging. Right? That's saying you can only get so far, and you've spent four years telling this story, but I'm going to make sure only 100,000 people see it, because if it gets to half a million, things might change.

Jacqueline O.:

You are so in my head, Yvonne. And I see that we think about the same things, because I am often, from what I know of you and I feel like I'm pretty spot on this, is I'm very much about getting things done and doing them well and finding support around that. Like you said, there are people in the power structure who are facilitating your work and your storytelling and your art. And you know how to do that. Or I certainly know how to do that. I won't speak for you, but I'm thinking we have this in common. I forget sometimes that there are these obstacles because I've had so many successes and done so much despite it that I forget that, of course, there are obstacles. That's the issue is that there is this power structure that is keeping you, that is very much set up, and often overtly trying to erase you and erase your story. In the process of knowing what urgency I have, I sometimes forget. I'll get frustrated and then I'll remember, right, that is the work that I'm doing.

Jacqueline O.:

You were mentioning earlier about the murder of George Floyd. And that was a time in which I had made Always in Season. We screened the film in at least 100 festivals between 2020 when it released theatrically until the pandemic, until

things shut down. And then George Floyd is murdered. And proceeded that by Amod Arbory and Brianna Taylor and all those cases. And I was devastated. I, for the first time, thought do I need to do this work? Because I'm doing everything, I'm having these conversations, people are getting it, light bulbs are going off, I can see in the middle of discussions that I have after the film. What does it take? I think it comes out of this sense that you do have urgency and you can get things done, and you know that you can affect people. But then I forget that, right, this is the thing. I need to be prepared to deal with the thing if I'm going to do this work. I just have a little pep talk with myself sometimes.

Jason Lee: I had some work in a documentary called Blood is at the Doorstep about Dontre Hamilton's murder in Milwaukee back in 2014. And we brought out Maria, his mom, and a couple of other family members, his brothers to share their experience. And we kind of connected this documentary film work into a stage play that we are producing through our theater company to amplify voices and amplify experiences, whether it's to five people or 50,000, whoever it is. And to experience all of this is what we should be doing with our time. I'm emotional talking about this. It's important. But I'm also inspired talking about this, because this is what we should be doing.

Jacqueline O.: And I'm sure it's the same for you, it's an art form for me, filmmaking. As an artist, it is integral in every aspect of my life. It's something that I love doing. And I'm not stopping because it's challenging. Speaking of Frederick Douglass, one of the projects I'm working on, I'm directing a few episodes of a series for a streamer, part of the conversations about Frederick Douglass. And there are all these ways in the process of that work that I have to push to make the production, which is integrated when I show up, when I'm the only woman often in meetings. Right? I have to push the production to understand issues around race and gender in ways that can be frustrating at times. Right? And then I think, but Frederick Douglass and the abolitionists, they dealt with this all the time. I need to just buckle down and do the same. I'm capable of doing that.

Jacqueline O.: But one of the realizations that I came to recently, in evolution of that thought. Right? Is because always I work hard and I work to get things done. It occurred to me that there is a balance, because Frederick Douglass and the abolitionists did the work that they did so that we don't have to. For me, I'm starting to learn balance. Is that there is a certain struggle that I can undertake. But there is also a certain way that I need to take care and care for myself, because this is the gift from those folks. I'm constantly thinking about that balance.

Yvonne Lee: I think that the work that we are all doing... And we are coming to the end of our time with you. We can keep talking with you forever and ever, Jacqueline. But the thing-

Jacqueline O.: Same here.

Yvonne Lee: ... that I remark upon the most as we are talking about trauma of what's happened to us as Americans, it's the love that this all comes from. If we didn't love being black, being Americans, love this country, believe in the love and the

hope that people have to offer, all of those kinds of things. I think that otherwise we wouldn't continue to work.

Jason Lee: Well, it's for our children too. Right? It's for our children too. I mean, it's for their children. It's for the next generation and the next generation.

Yvonne Lee: It's all love. But Jackie, I'm wondering, how else can we find you? Would you like to share with our audience if they get done with this podcast, they are done driving and now they are going to go sit in their living room and they are going to find you?

Jacqueline O.: Yes. Well, I would be thrilled to be back anytime.

Jason Lee: Awesome.

Jacqueline O.: To find me, my production company is called Tell It Media. If you want to find me online-

Jason Lee: Tell it.

Jacqueline O.: Right. Tellitmedia.org. T-E-L-L I-T media.org. And then you can learn about Always in Season at [alwaysinseason.net](http://alwaysinseason.net). My production company is just a really good way to get updated on projects that I'm in process on. And then that will take you to other websites where you can learn more.

Yvonne Lee: Perfect.

Jason Lee: Awesome.

Yvonne Lee: Thank you so much for being here, Jacque. This has been so good.

Jason Lee: Jacque, thank you.

Jacqueline O.: But you guys are so instrumental in the industry. I appreciate you. Cheers to you guys.

Jason Lee: Cheers.

Yvonne Lee: Yes, cheers. We must seize the bike, the pen, the camera. We must push back against the powers that be and make sure our voices are heard and included. The past is the past, but we are the future. And that's where we should be.

Jason Lee: 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 Soraci, podcast coordinator Amanda Dinsmore, sound designer David B. Marling, The Launch Guild and Toby Gad for his original piano improvisation. We'd also like to thank Podcast Haven and our guest Jacque Olive. Remember to grab our Manhattan recipe and show notes by going to [lagralanespirits.com](http://lagralanespirits.com). And we'll see you next time. And if you love the cocktail or the episode, make sure you rate, review and subscribe on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen.

Yvonne Lee:

Cheers. Cheers, baby.