

Episode 47: Who is the City Livable For?



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[Clarification of two statistics shared in the podcast--
97% of school shooters are male, 79% are white; the Las Vegas shooter killed 58, injured 869.]

*****Brady legal music*****

JJ

Hey everybody, this is the legal disclaimer where I tell you that the views, thoughts and opinions shared on this podcast belong solely to our guests and our hosts, and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please note this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay, we find it disturbing too.

*****Brady musical introduction*****

JJ

Welcome back to “Red, Blue and Brady” the podcast where we talk about gun violence and gun violence prevention. Thank you so much for joining us today. Now, today I'm with Kelly, who still has a little cold. And, no, it's not the coronavirus, calm down and is still in Hawaii. We're also joined by Farooq Al-Said, Director of Operations at One Hood Media. Farooq is a mentor, artist, MC and a fantastic advocate for racial justice. We're all here together, you know, in your ears to talk about racial justice in Pittsburgh, (Whoa! Go 412!) gun violence and the importance of the media.

Then in our "unbelievable, but" segment we're talking about lawmakers that can't help but threaten their constituents. Finally we're wrapping up with a new segment that covers everything from politicians elected to lives lost. We've got a lot to cover and not a lot of time, so let's just jump in.

*****music plays*****

JJ

So I've talked a lot about Pittsburgh, and sadly, Pittsburgh's been on the podcast a bunch due largely to the Tree of Life Massacre. But I need to note that exposure to gun violence is a lasting reality for many of Pittsburgh's poor black communities, not just tied to the mass shootings that make the national news. From the beginning of 2005 to August of 2019 over 1400 people were murdered in Allegheny County, the majority of those within Pittsburgh City limits. Of that total, 77.5% of the victims were black, and 89% of those victims were killed by a gun.

Now, that's shocking because the county is only 13% black. So in Pittsburgh, we're seeing more and more people of color killed by gun violence. But the media isn't really talking about it. So to tackle how we know how gun violence prevention organizations and just the U. S. in general talk about gun violence, victimhood and race, I am joined by the great Kelly and the wonderful Farooq. So Kelly, you've met before. But Farooq can you introduce yourself?

Farooq Al-Said

My name is Farooq Al-Said, I'm the Director of Operations for 1Hood Media in Pittsburgh, PA.

JJ

Thank you. And I guess the first question then is obviously you know, what is 1Hood?

Farooq Al-Said

So 1Hood is a, you know, it's so funny because I have to give this, like, five times a week, it feels. 1Hood is a group, we are a group of socially conscious artists and activists, and we, our organization, literally rests at the intersection of arts, education and activism. And as far as we know, we're the only nonprofit of our kind in the entire world. We are heavily involved in, you know, activism as it comes to social social issues that affect the people of the global majority in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And then we choose, our choice of activism is our, most of us are MCs or singers, or you know, visual artists of some sort, and we express ourselves and we use our activism to speak through our art.

Kelly

I'm always interested in, you know, terms that people use because words have so much power, so could you just share why IHood uses the term people of the global majority for our listeners?

Farooq Al-Said

Oh, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So I can't take credit for that actually. It was one of ah, the brothers that's with us, that handles our political consulting, his name is Kahari Mosley, his sister actually coined this term. I think everybody in our organization has said it at one point another. She just the one where it kind of came from. If you go anywhere in the world, people of color dominate the world, and this is just plain and simple. Whether it's Asia. Whether it's Africa. Whether it's, you know, the so called Middle East, whether it's, you know, people of indigenous descent in North America and Australia, the indigenous people there. Color dominates the world.

So in order for us to be relegated as minorities, that tends to leave us with some type of connotation of inferiority that we're minor or lesser when in actuality we are the people of the global majority. More people look like us, if you get on a plane, you go anywhere in the world outside of a domestic flight in the United States of America, you might be the only white face on the plane. So that's why we choose to use global majority, because that's what we are. People of color makeup, you know, the large portion of the world. So that's really what it is.

Kelly

Why does IHood focus on art in media as a vehicle for social justice activists?

Farooq Al-Said

Well, I think so, kind of going back to you to know your question beforehand. We've kind of coined the term "artivist", which is a combination of artists and activists. I think that it's a lot easier to get a message across with art. Advertisement companies have been doing it since you know, the fifties is really since, you know, media was able to be consumed in a household manner with subliminal messaging for you know, whether it's a cure-all whether it's, you know, the Flintstones smoking cigarettes, anything like that.

Messages are easier to be digested when it comes through an easier digestible format such as media. Some people might not necessarily want to listen to a politician or an activist going through some diatribe about an issue that might mean something to them. However, when they get it in a medium, such as like music, or, you know, a visual arts piece where they could go to a play and kind of see it acted out artistically. It resonates more. Art is, I'm actually on a panel tonight. I'm moderating a panel tonight about black art and how it's transformed from, you know, the diaspora today to the future. Art is, you know, is transcendent, and I think that art specifically as it relates to black people. You know, we stick to art damn more than anything else outside of like God. So that's been ours from day dot is how we express ourselves.

JJ

And with that expression, maybe even to reference again Kelly's question about language and the work that you put out that there's a lot of references on, you know, being a liberated community or creating a liberated community. And I was wondering if you could tell our listeners like what is a liberated community, or like, what does that look like?

Farooq Al-Said

A liberated community to me is one that's free of white supremacy and what I mean by that not free of white people but white supremacy. I think that you look at communities in Pittsburgh. Since you're from Pittsburgh, you know who are in these communities you know about these communities, like Homewood, like Hazelwood, like Wilksburg, like East Hills, that are just so under resourced and under attended. There's no way you can, you can add that to the greater Pittsburgh idea that they sell people.

So I think the community needs to have a fair opportunity. Fair schools, fair taxes, fair property wages, affordable housing, access to clean water, access to, you know, grocery stores, access to fresh produce, access to, you know, just safe playgrounds, safe neighborhoods, access to policing on a fair and balanced scale that we don't have to be in fear. I think that, you know, especially with this map that Carnegie Mellon University put out. I'm not sure if you have, you know this. But the CMU, which is one of the largest universities in Pittsburgh and one of the most known in the United States of America, put out this map for their students. It was an intuitive map that showed all of the neighborhoods that you would like to frequent in Pittsburgh or that are adjacent to Carnegie Mellon. They put it out. They deliberately whited out all the black neighborhoods. So the response in the city was, you know, not great and our sister ended up putting out a rebuttal to it. After there was an uprising, they took the map down, but she started putting these shirts out that said "hood lives matter" and started listing all the black communities where they were whited out. So, you know, it was like a political map. You get me with, um, the neighborhood the neighborhood borders placed in around it.

And I think that's not an indication that's not indicative of a liberated community. I think that's indicative of a press community of segregation in a fine state of Pittsburgh and many other, many other cities and counties in the United States of America employ. So I think, you know, to kind of like tie this up, because I could go on about this all day. I just really want a liberated community. Is one that is free from like the anchor and like the luggage of oppression.

JJ

Yeah, and I will say that is something that I've struggled with as someone who likes Pittsburgh. I love that city. But I feel like the city has never reckoned with the fact that it in many ways, is a deeply racially divided city. I think we have to be as I'll speak as Pittsburghers or just as people in the world particularly, you know, because I'm white as a white person, like you have to be transparent and honest about what you've done and what you're doing.

Farooq Al-Said

Yeah, 100% I think. You know, I was just telling somebody today we had an issue at Mount Lebanon High School with a white student making some disgusting racial comments against the black student in school. When the black students stood up for himself, he received detention and a suspension, like calling him the N word in school, saying, all black people are rapists and murderers, though when he defended himself, he was suspended while the white student received

no, um, no punishment whatsoever. We're actually on this case right now, but I think that large part...

Pittsburgh has a nickname of the Mississippi of the North, all of Western Pennsylvania but Pittsburgh, specifically for just reason. You know, one of the things we do at IHood is we quantify and teach media literacy and collect data amongst or throughout media channels, and we break that down to our students. Right? And one of the things that we've kind of deduced in our studies is that Pittsburgh is more segregated than any city post-Jim Crow. We have Jim Crow levels of segregation in 2020 in Pittsburgh, the schools, the jobs, the working wages education system and the prisons. It's basically Jim Crow in 2020.

And these stats like, you know, they just put out an equity report that we've been talking about for about 10 years in the existence of IHood. The mayor's office just put out an equity report that showcased Pittsburgh is the worst city for any black woman to live in. It is, is the statistics for for quality of life, for wages, for childbirth. And I forget. I forget another stat, but yes, so it's just like, you know Pittsburgh is this is, you know, a lot of people like the fancy things, that melting pot. Pittsburgh is like this melting pot of all of America's ills, kind of dumped into a city of like 300,000 people.

Kelly

Yeah, and speaking of life outcomes and life experiences, gun violence is a big part of that. And we've seen, you know, there's so many studies out. There is so much research showing the ways that community violence not only harms the person who is shot and experiences the physical and mental and emotional injuries that come with that, but also entire communities both economically and socially. And a lot of times when we talk about gun violence and race, to the extent that we do, we'll talk about it. Almost is a male phenomenon for good reason, because, especially with the black community, black men are much more likely to suffer homicide. But black women are also very much vulnerable to gun violence, not only directly, but also the kind of community impacts. And you see the mothers of the movement as an example of what that looks like. So I think that's a really good thing to think about in terms of overall life experiences and outcomes and how gun violence can play into that.

Farooq Al-Said

It's interesting. I think that, you know, we could talk about this later, but one thing that is interesting is how Pittsburgh has been named within the past five years or however long it was the most livable city America. Within the past two years of Pittsburgh it's become this national talking point because you've had such public displays of just egregious quality of life stories. You've had the largest mass shooting and murder of Jewish people in American history, Tree of Life. You had a police shooting, a high profile police shooting of an unarmed black boy Antwon Rose. You had the non conviction of that murderer that killed Antwon Rose. You had a public infrastructure crisis where, you know, a hole appeared in the busiest intersection of downtown Pittsburgh and swallowed a bus. You have quality air issues. You have the housing issues. You have this wage gap. So in the past two years, Pittsburgh has kind of hit this lottery of national tragedies of a city of like 300,000 people, that was just a couple years ago called the most livable

city in America, and that always begged us to ask the question: Who's the city livable for? Because it's definitely not us.

Kelly

You mentioned on the high profile you know of the killing of Antwon Rose. I was wondering if you could tell our listeners about the work that 1Hood did, in that particular case.

Farooq Al-Said

I didn't have the pleasure of knowing Antwon. I was a teacher for seven years at a Charter school system in Pittsburgh, and I had students who had known Antwon. But I didn't have the pleasure myself. I do, however, can say I'm beginning to know his mom very well. Miss Michelle is an extremely strong person and kind of given, given the circumstances. Right now, you know, she just her strength is really inspiring, just everything she's going through in the past year. But Antwon was, and, you know, just a regular kid man, like a 17 year old kid who was just a teenager out here in an area that didn't that's not conducive to success rate for people that looked like him, you know, the mortality rate for black men across United States of America is 25. So, you know, Antwon, unfortunately, was par for the course.

But he was, you know, an honor roll student. Someone who volunteered at the free store. He had two jobs. He was just, like, kind of a community icon in terms of like a support system for the younger children in the communities and Hawkinsville is where he's from. One thing that Miss Michelle always liked to say was how many basketballs he would just give away. And like, you know, how many of his personal possessions he would just give away to the children around, you know, the community. And he had a career path on becoming a, I believe a chemical engineer. And you know I might be incorrect on that, but yeah, so I mean, Antwon really is just like every 17 year old kid in America. You know? He was just a regular kid and he was murdered and he was criminalized for his own death. Much in the same vein as Trayvon Martin was.

So what we did..And the one thing is like, 1Hood was kind of at the center of a lot and we don't want to take any credit for it, we always like to preface it with this is like all we did was what needed to happen like we just did what we felt we should do is and bring attention to the cause and support the family. There were youth protests after the verdict was read. We incubate youth organizations and some of the youth that had wanted to galvanize and kind of show support with a student walkout. We just kind of gave them a blueprint and let them color in the lines, you know, to be the largest protest Pittsburgh ever seen.

There were 5,000 youths on the streets protesting. Um, and one thing we did, we are one of the very few black run and black lead and, you know, black owned nonprofits in the city of Pittsburgh. And we're also one of the very few that has its own office. So all of the community organizers that were kind of involved in bringing attention to the situation--our office kind of acted as like a home base, so we can come in and hold meetings. Supplies were dropped off there that we can in turn, give out to the community and we ended up doing a couple shows we call kickbacks. We kickback all the proceeds to Antwon's family.

Kelly

That's amazing.

Farooq Al-Said

You know, it is, but like at the same time, it was just it was just like something we felt needed to happen. So again, it's not something we take credit for, but it just needed to happen.

JJ

So obviously, this is our podcast series, just the beginning, really of us talking about racial justice as a gun violence issue.

Farooq Al-Said

Right.

JJ

And I think that we can't talk, though, about gun violence and gun violence issues without talking about the acquittal of the man who shot Antwon. And then, like how the media portrayals and how the conversations around Antwon's death played out. While at the same time there was Jamal Knox, a Pittsburgh artist who was arrested for just rapping really about guns. And so, can we talk about that a little bit? That, like uncomfortable reality?

Farooq Al-Said

I mean, yeah. I mean, when bottom line, when it comes down to it, white supremacy is weaved into the fabric of the Constitution in the fabric of these policies, right? The idea has become policies for the lawmakers, and it's not an equal scale. I always say Lady Justice is blindfolded for a reason. You know, the scales are just like tipped unfairly from the very beginning. And I believe even [unintelligible] had talked about it and stem from the beginning that just like you know, these racist ideologies become policies. It doesn't necessarily have to be a racist mind state. You can not be racist and vote for racist policy.

And I believe that's what gun violence is. You know, gun violence. That's how I'm addressed first with gun violence. Gun laws have been racist since, you know, pro slavery. Since you know the 18 hundreds or sooner. Slavery was abolished, quote unquote, black people weren't allowed to own guns. And you, fast forward all the way up, Ronald Reagan was pro-gun control when the Black Panthers had guns.

You know, there were so many situations where the NRA was about gun control when it came time for people of the global majority to own weapons. But now the tables are completely turned. You look at like a Mayhem Mal, you know, Jamal Knox's name, I actually don't know him well. I know Jesiree knows him. I've never met him. Actually, you know what, I did meet him. At one of the Antwon Rose shows we threw. Um it was really brief. But when you have a situation like that, there have been documented cases where the courts have gone after rappers for their lyrics. While police officers are murdering us and getting off for free. And that travesty of justice has existed.

And since the very beginning of, you know, African Americans so called coming into the spaces in defending themselves and having this freedom of speech. You look at 2 Live Crew. You look at NWA. People get Aaron Harvey in San Diego, who was, you know, charged for something he didn't have any connection with, for rap lyrics. He was just in Las Vegas, and they were trying to charge him with crimes that happened in San Diego, and he was a student. And then you look at Jamal Knox, who would just rap lyrics. And then on the flip you have the clan. You have your David Duke's. You have these. Alt-right, you have these tea partiers? Remember when they existed they were calling for open, you know, sanctions to violence with the president when Barack Obama was president will refute like they didn't receive any type of reprimand, let alone jail time.

So when it comes down to Michael Rosfeld killing an Antwon Rose, unfortunately, we learn that this is business as usual. It's because the system--systems aren't designed to fail. Systems are designed to work well, and this system is working extremely well and is doing what we are supposed to do, which is protect the people that it looks like. And with Michael Rosfeld getting off on three counts of murder, we seen the video. There was a bit, you know, he shot a Black boy in the back three times. If you can't convict off of that off of video evidence of it, it makes me wonder who are the laws designed to protect.

That's kind of like I get... I get real passionate about this because this is a situation that's still that's still messing with me just because it's still very fresh, like we're approaching the one year anniversary of the verdict. So it's a little you know, it's a little triggering to talk about it. It's just sad at the end of the day because you have the look of it and say like, you know, above, above everything else that has happened. A 17 year old boy was criminalized for his own death and that that is the most egregious miscarriage of justice. It is what happened, is that you had grown adults saying, well, that's what he gets. Well, you know, if that's the case, I hope that we keep the same energy if that's every your son or daughter.

Kelly

I think what you said about keeping the same energy, whether it's your own child, is really, really important when we're talking about gun violence prevention, and that's a big part of what we want to do here at Brady...really unite the movement because there are so many people in so many different communities who all have the same interest. You know, there are white suburban moms and black moms in the middle of the city and rural dads and whatever, who all the end of the day, they want their loved ones and themselves to be safe, and they don't want people getting shot and killed.

But the issue is a lot of times because of the way our country has this deep legacy and precedent of discrimination and bias is we don't necessarily see you know young black children as victims in the same way or as worthy of protection the same way as white suburban kids. So you have someone like Tamir Rice, who was 12 and playing with a toy gun but perceived as a threat and summarily executed. And that's the sort of thing that I think we really can move our movement along. And we could just get to the point that people find it just as egregious and see the

innocents and the loss and the tragedy of any person being shot and killed and taken away when they don't have to be.

And I know that a lot of what IHood does through your kind of theory of change is really showing humanity. Um, so I think that's really cool. I hear you talking about kind of the distinction between what one particular person may feel in their hearts and then the system that whatever you think, whatever you feel is going to tend to elevate and protect white Americans and hurt black Americans and then thinking about gun violence through that lens of kind of a systematic outcome of the lack of blink it's it's It's not just an isolated issue, but it's in this broader context where there's all these systematic failure. And I'm wondering if you could talk about Pittsburgh's systematic failure in solving homicides that involved people of color and how that also intersects with gun violence as the whole.

Farooq Al-Said

Well, I would like to say first that like police violence is gun violence right? And that makes up a large part of it. I believe in 2019 there were 1004 police murders in 2018 I think there was like 994 and that's across the United States. And I believe there were 14 police killings in Pennsylvania in 2019 so police violence is gun violence, and that's something that's a conversation we have to have.

I think in Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh is a unique case because the officers don't live in the city. From what I believe now, I might be wrong on this. I will, you know, apply that to it. I don't believe that the officers have to live in the city of Pittsburgh, and that is an issue because they don't know anything about the city. They're coming in from you know Washington County. They're coming in from 20 miles outside the city. You know, they have. They don't know anything about the city that, you know. They live in nice suburban areas, you know? So they're coming to work with a chip on the shoulder. And I know we're like, in Wilkesburg where I live, which is a municipality just a few stoplights outside of the city limits. I think the officers make below minimum wage.

And they just killed somebody, I think four weeks ago, right down the street from my house and the federal prosecutors are in there, because there's a, looks like there was tampering with evidence. So I mean, I think within Pittsburgh the systemic issues that exist are largely because this city was based on the principles of white people pulling themselves up from their boot straps, right? And as it was mentioned earlier, when black people came, there was such a segregation here, black people settled in very specific areas. And then now the gentrification of Pittsburgh was, I believe, the eighth most gentrified city in the States.

These issues kind of affect us because we are made to feel more unwelcome than we ever have before. And with the Trump protests where 200%, hate crimes are up 200% in any city that Trump has had a rally that has to be discussed. That's that I only that's not a stat I'm giving you, I believe in New York Times put that out or The Washington Post. Somebody put that out where that is a legitimate issue in Pittsburgh, where it's just like you walk down the street. You know, it's almost like stop and frisk in certain neighborhoods, you know, especially in the gentrified ones. So I think that, like, you know, the policing here has proven time and time again to be violent, inept, also inadequate. And it is not even about offering the more resources for training.

Pittsburgh Police is one of the Pittsburgh Police Department, one of the most well funded police departments United States of America, our SWAT team.

You know they're militarized. When G20 happened in Pittsburgh, the first time sound cannons were ever used in the history of the world, we're in Pittsburgh. The police have access to that. So it's not so. The thing is, Pittsburgh police have, it has, a pathology of violence, and they have a pathology of a low intelligence quotient when it comes to community relations. That's the biggest thing.

Kelly

I think it's interesting that you, on one hand, mentioned that the police are becoming more and more militarized at the same time that black residents are feeling more unwelcome than ever, because for a lot of Americans they might associate increase technology and quote unquote better equipped police as making them feel more welcome and more safe. And so I think that just gets at and just goes to show how gun violence and police violence are complex issues. And we have to actually talk about and address how the different phenomena look different, depending on race and location, and then create solutions that are also going to take into account race and location. If we're really going to solve the problem and make sure that you know black residents of Pittsburgh are safe from gun violence, police are safe from gun violence and we can have a more equitable society.

JJ

And I guess that leads into the question of like, how do we do if we can't like, how do we do policing better. How do we do, you know, gun violence prevention, like, how do we do that better? And also, how do we institute gun laws that will keep people safe, will save lives but are also like equality, that don't have this, I don't have an almost racist root?

Farooq Al-Said

I think you know, there has to be in abolishment of certain systems and certain laws. And when I was in grade seven, I had a teacher. A history teacher told me that the Constitution and laws are meant to be changed. That's why amendments are added and for better or for worse. That just has to happen. You know that none of them are, none of them are definitive and they should change with the times. I think this is indicative of today's circumstances. Now the thing is, is that you have these mass shooters, right?

Which is the most bewildering thing to me is that I believe 97% of all mass shooters are Caucasian males between 17 and 35. I believe that's from the FBI. That's from the Department of Justice. Why are these gun laws then enforced so heavily on Black and Brown people in these communities? We're not, you know, our gun violence rates are way down and when people mention community violence, as we like to call it because black on black violence is is bullshit, you know, people commit crimes in the proximity of where they live. White people kill white people. Asian people kill Asian people. Latinx people kill Latinx people. Black people kill black people. That's just how that works, right? Unless there's like, you know, you're invading a foreign country, that tends to be what it looks like.

So these gun laws, it goes back to who are you making laws for and against? Because if you have the statistics that well, you know, a man could walk into the tree life and kill 13 people for a shoot for and the thing that doesn't even get discussed is four of the people he shot were police officers. I mean, that doesn't even get discussed. He shot four police officers and he and he lived. Then I forget. And there's so many mass shooters I can't even name all of them. The man who killed those people in Vegas killed 51 people, and shot 200. You know where's the conversation about gun control then you know, within the white communities why, you know, I'm personally myself, I don't see an issue with owning a gun.

But when you're throwing this racist legislation and you're throwing these verbiage at us that it's one sided that all the crime is coming out of the quote unquote inner city, the inner city doesn't exist anymore, it's gentrified. Why do people have the, you know, I mean the inner cities, Whole Foods is a Trader Joe's, you know, with high-end boutiques, they got macaroon bars, they got bike lanes. That's what the inner city looks like in virtually every city in the U.S. right now in the Western Hemisphere. That's what it all looks like. You know, I'm from Toronto. You know we have. That's the, that's the fastest growing city in the world. And you know, every time I go back home, it looks different.

But in Pittsburgh and and all these other cities, you know, your New York's, your Boston's, your D.C.s, your Chicago, your Detroit. They talk about on the floors of Congress and you know the state capitals are where the crimes are being committed in the city. You know, done in the city by who? Is it the women walking dogs? That's what I want to know because like, the numbers are down, actually. So when these, when these conversations happen about gun control, is like, Who are you trying to protect? What do the rules look like? And for whom, you know, like it's such a rabbit hole that you can go into, it's just like it makes no sense how it's voted on how it passed when it's clearly done in the reverse it's just madness to me.

Kelly

Some of what I hear you saying in terms of, you know, how can we prevent gun violence in a way that's gonna be equitable and effective, is to be specific and be measured and actually considered particular situations on the ground and not only pass laws, but also I think, some of what 1Hood is doing but also think about entire communities and non-legal solutions and possibilities for making cohesive communities.

Farooq Al-Said

Yes, absolutely. What I was going to say, I think like cohesive communities, there are, you know, There are things that we do in terms of, like our media academy that we run with the use. Like, you know, we tend to reach out to younger people specifically for a lot of our programming. And they come from so many different communities. We have, you know, black kids that grew up with money come to some of our hands, you know, and some of the stuff we talk about is eye opening to them because they can't relate to it. And then we have, you know, people from different areas coming, and that kind of starts to create this dialogue around cohesive communities.

I love that word. I love that phrase because Pittsburgh is a city of 90 neighborhoods, right, and they're so segregated. But you have to drive through them to get to places right, because Pittsburgh it sits on a triangle, you know, with literally three rivers, break the city up and it's 410 bridges here, so you have to drive through neighborhoods to get places, and the places that are the most overlooked are the places that received the most traffic, and no one ever stops to think why? No one ever stops to ask why? Why does this neighborhood look like this when you know not even a square mile later, there's mansions. Why is that? So like these, this context of cohesive communities, it all and it all begins and ends with communication and discussion. But if you're unwilling to have these real conversations, Pittsburgh has a lot of conversations about race. But it's never about is never with people of an integrated sort. It's white people talking with white people, black people talking with black people. It's never whites and blacks having a conversation with race like in the same table.

JJ

It seems to me too that there's a media or wider US problem, too, with this sort of discussion because, as you mentioned, it does seem that the conversation after mass shootings generally tends to be a call for, we've seen and Brady's talked about why we don't like this, a call for mental health screening when there's a white shooter as opposed to the media will tend to focus on, like the criminality of black and brown bodies when there's a shooting.

Farooq Al-Said

Oh, no, I agree with you because that's racist right there. I mean, it is a separatist. If I was a kid, here's something anecdotally a little funny. Remember when the Pasadena shooting happened? It was a Muslim man and his wife who did it. His name was Said Al Farooq. My name is Farooq Al-Said. You know how many hate messages I got on Facebook because of that shit? Like people like, like our names weren't even, only they were spelled the same. But, you know, if a random white American does a mass shooting, how many people were like facebooking that name and messaging that person, right?

It doesn't happen, but that gives the context of it. You're humanizing one aspect of this person when that person was in Dallas sending bombs to people, you know, the sheriff of the town was crying during the pressure office and I know it. I know the family. He was a god loving kid, you know, where's that empathy for us? You know, it is just it's whack at the end of the day, like it's a waste because you're just essentially you're throwing this victim's sympathy. You're sympathizing with the murderer, and you're just like, "hey, well, you know, he got fired from his job." Was like, you know, when the same going postal was a thing in the nineties, it was like, you know oh, well, the post officer got fired, so he goes and kills everybody. So what's that like? You broke up with your wife or someone picked on you in high school and you developed a complex. Well that was wrong that they picked on you but you're gonna go out and shoot 30 people because of it?

But, you know, so we can make all the excuses for that mental health discussion. And while mental health is an important discussion, absolutely, but we're just going to cast away the fact that you did murder 30 people? Conversely, Trayvon Martin, he gets killed. He doesn't kill anybody. And he's public enemy number one. Antwon Rose, the same thing, the news actually

put out false information that 1Hood had to attack KDK on Twitter and kind of get this retweet hashtag movement to get them to remove falsified evidence after the police, the Pittsburgh police had even said that they had posted up erroneous evidence. So you lead, so clearly the media is complicit, and it's pushing its agenda when things like that happening.

Kelly

You talked a little bit about your name. And you know, we've seen you talk about being at an intersection of a number of identities from immigrant, you're Muslim, black, Arabic and an artist, and I was wondering if you'd be willing to share a little bit of what it's like living at that intersection.

Farooq Al-Said

Oh, man. Um, this is kind of like my bread and butter cause I get to talk about my favorite subject, which is me. I mean, I'll tell you what is interesting, because, like, I have, I never was really cognizant of it until I joined 1Hood and, you know, just Jasiri and I have known each other for so long, but he was always saying that like, he wanted me within 1Hood because I have such a unique, kind of like character profile. I can walk in all these different spaces.

Growing up is interesting because I never really put much thought into it like I spoke Arabic for a couple of years, and then I'm going to English, you know? And when I moved to, we moved to, just outside of Miami, Florida and my primary school was Spanish emergent. I learned Spanish and English simultaneously, so I'm multilingual. And I'm multicultural, pretty much ethnically ambiguous. You know, you really don't know how to ethnically abuse me until you hear me talk. So it's just like it allows me to kind of operate in certain circles. But it was interesting enough as I did a performance a couple weeks ago and someone in the audience had tracked my cell phone number down to my mobile number and texted me. It was like I need to ask why you felt so comfortable using the n-word in a room full of white people and are you even black? I was like, yeah I'm black like how you gonna ask me that question?

But like since I started growing my beard out, I get more antsy, I guess I get more unwelcome feelings from black people. My whole life I was pretty much viewed as light skinned or like Puerto Rican or something, right? But since I grew my beard because it makes me look more Arab. So that's a conversation that we have to have within the black community. You know blackness is universal, the experience isn't. You know a lot of people, you know, you've got a Tony Parker, let's say from the NBA, right from the Spurs. French but he black, right? We got a whole bunch of black people in Montreal. We got a whole bunch of black people in France. We've got a whole bunch of black people in Spain in Europe, in, you know, places outside of North America and Africa. But that's not a conversation that gets touched on often.

So for me, it's very interesting navigating the spaces because I have to be, I'm aware of a few things. One, I'm aware that I have male privilege. I'm aware that I have light skin black male privilege, right? I'm also aware that I have I'm a Muslim and I am present in a lot of spaces where sometimes now, with activism, I'm around a lot of Jewish people right, that can create contention sometimes. It hasn't yet, not really, but we've had conversations where I grew up with

a specific, specific way not to say it's right or wrong as you did so this conversation might be awkward the first couple times we meet just because this is two totally different things.

And I think within the art world, you know, just just being an artist and everything. It's very interesting because, like, I remember when I was still actively in, actively in hip hop, in recording and rap and everything like that I had got asked to be a part of this launch campaign for MTV Arabia, and I didn't speak Arabic enough to do it. But that's why they wanted me, they kind of wanted, like someone who would, they wanted me like an outsider, almost, and I felt like it was too token for me. But it you know, it's just it's so interesting, though, because, like again, I'm aware that I can walk in these different spaces, and I think it's really a blessing more than anything else, because if we have something in cities like oh, well, we need a representative from the immigrant community that's dealt with you know, this this and this. Let's call Farooq. Well, we need someone who has been, you know, from the community, a community of black educated, let's phone Farooq. We need someone who represents people who have been formerly incarcerated, but are doing positive things in the community. Let's phone Farooq.

So I hit all these checklists, which is dope. But it also stretched me thin sometimes. But you know, I mean, you know, at the end of the day, this is who God made me so I just walked with pride every day and thanks and humility that, like, you know, I'm able to do this for people who are in the same situation as I am right, because I still got two brothers. You get me. And so I feel like a lot of the work I do is reflective of people like my brothers and other people who might be, let's say, Dominican and Haitian or Puerto Rican and Dominican or like, you know, your classic mixed story of American like black and white. You know, I've walked and kind of keep them in mind.

Kelly

Yeah, and I think what that speaks to is how gun violence is something that affects all Americans of all identities, which is why it sounds like you know so often people will select one part of your identity to come speak about. But at the same time, when we frame it in the dominant media, we often, you know, talk about gun violence for the issue that affects white Americans more than anyone, which is mass shootings.

And we kind of like a lot of things in our society that use the white experience with gun violence as a starting point, and then we have to figure out how to shoehorn everyone else's experience with it into that framework. It's interesting to hear you share about all these different ways that you can walk in and how it can sometimes prompt awkward conversations, because I think it kind of gets to something that JJ mentioned earlier with what we're doing at Brady, which is trying to at least provide a forum for conversation about something so complex and with the understanding that it is complex and that there isn't a one size fits all, you know, black experience period or, you know, Arab experience period or immigrant experience period. But well, we're only gonna know that if we actually talk about it rather than avoiding it. And it sounds like your very life kind of reflects that.

Farooq Al-Said

You know it is interesting because we had to be thrown into these conversations. This time last year, I was in Australia, teaching at the University of Sydney, and we had this conversation what blackness means in Australia? With the indigenous community and the Aboriginals and how they call themselves black. But they don't have a connection to the diaspora. They don't have a connection to Africa. So it's like we had this conversation. Well, what is black mean to you? To be honest with you, the colonizers gave us this word is black. We didn't pick it up. And and so blackness has a whole different meaning in Australia. You know, that kind of goes back to that goes back to blackness is universal but the experience isn't.

Kelly

Yeah, I'm nodding because you can't see me but I'm black and I was coming up to get a fellowship. Yeah, I was like my voice gives me away, but I was lucky enough to get a fellowship when I was in law school and I was in Darwin, Australia, for a summer, working with Indigenous Australians over there, and I was calling, I I've only ever been black. That's how I call myself. And I got funny looks from people until I kind of realized the nuance in that context. Where I was like yeah I'm black and people were like, uh, no, you're not, but yeah, it was like, this interesting thing where I was like, I don't I guess I don't really know who I am in this society, because it is there's a different context there for what blackness means.

JJ

And to circle back a little bit. I think another thing that we have to talk about, to sort of focus on, like, conversations that we haven't had that we need to have. Um, I think we've got to talk about things like the school to prison pipeline. We've got to talk about the mass incarceration of predominantly black males in the U.S., and I think we've got to also talk about how, like that intersects with gun violence.

Farooq Al-Said

Yeah, sure. Um, the most painful thing I think was when I was an educator was telling my children like, yo, listen, these state issued tests that you have to take really and truly they're banking on you failing, so they know how much money to put into the prison system. And a lot of, um, it didn't make sense to a number of them. I got in trouble for saying that, but I'm like that's what it is like the you know, if a child is not functionally literate by grade three, you start taking money away from that school or the child's schooling and place it into the prison system to build prisons, you're banking on them going to jail.

That's the stats that they put out when we get them every year for the state testing. It's like your kids can't read by nine they're going to jail. That's 100% truth. So it's just like, you know, what's that make a kid think then? You know, and we don't talk about how culturally biased tests are. You know, we don't talk about those things. We don't talk about the classroom structure not being geared to success, teachers being underpaid. So it's like, you know, yeah, the school-prison pipeline is something that I you know, that's the reason I quit teaching because I felt like I was just setting kids up to go in there.

And I spent most of my senior year incarcerated, so I know it on both sides, right? I know it on both sides. The schools. Why? I went to quite a few different schools, some good ones, quote

unquote and some bad ones. Quote unquote. But to see it from the educated standpoint. Where you hear teachers in the teachers lounge blaming the children and the parents for their conditions where they live in, would say, oh, I know so and so definitely gonna be in jail by this year, over and over is disgusting. But I mean, that's a conversation that needs to happen because you have teachers coming in from areas, same thing as police they don't live in to educate. So they come in with a chip on their shoulder white savior complex or just this complete bewilderment because they don't know what's happening, they don't know what they signed up for.

One thing I'd like to say with the young brother's insistence that I mentor is like I learned this very, very young the education system was created I believe in 1901, the modern education system was created, you know, by a warden, and this system has been in use for 119 years. There's gonna be some trickle. There's gonna be some overflow and from one set up because it was designed that way. It was designed that way and then specifically under resource communities. When you have 2.5 million black people incarcerated and we have notoriously the most underfunded who's in the United States of America, that's not that's not a coincidence. That's the purposely done thing, so that you definitely need to have a conversation that should happen more often but it doesn't.

Kelly

It's like the continuing or recurring theme in so many of the things that you talked about, which is, you know, systems. And then the people impacted by those systems. So you know, policing. And then how that impacts people, our education, how that impacts people, you know, criminal justice and how that impacts people in, you know, even our system of gun laws but then how that's actually impacting people at an individual level and then, obviously, how those individuals form a community. So, it's just something for us to be thinking about with gun violence, and you know, the system that we're trying to create with gun violence prevention. And then how that system's gonna impact people and making sure it's gonna impact all people not just some people.

Farooq Al-Said

Yeah, Absolutely. Absolutely. I've been having this conversation a lot in my circles because I've been pushing the issue and something we've been dealing with a lot. You know, um so 1Hood will be for the past, a little bit of time. We've pretty much been an all Muslim staff and all black at that. It's just now changing. We have a sister from Afghanistan who's a fellow with us. Um, and then we have a brother who doesn't identify with any religion, but we're starting to get more people in. Um, but, you know, for a long time it was, you know, mostly Muslims.

We all grew up with a different portion of Islam, but being black and in Islam and the anti-blackness of Islam and something that was big in Pittsburgh is like I've had an issue with is the Islamic Community of Pittsburgh and Islamic Center of Pittsburgh being extremely silent on black issued. But when Tree of Life happened, they were the first. I think they donated \$250,000 for the richest community in Pittsburgh. That's great. That's dollar. That's beautiful. That's what's supposed to happen in the center. But when police violence happens in our communities, where the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, where is, you know? And then the most lot at what? When the Nation of Islam is around, they think all that's enough. They got Anna, why they don't need us. Not like that's the thing is not everybody? Not everybody identifies with the Nation of Islam.

Some of us identified like you know more quote unquote Orthodox Islam. We would love to see our brother and sisters from Morocco, from Egypt, from Syria, from Lebanon, in solidarity with us. But we don't and why is that?

So that's a, that's an issue. I think right there, because within the Islamic community there's so much anti blackness and that's globally, that's globally. But you know, it's very, it's very present. Pittsburgh was actually where most of the largest percentage of Muslims in Pittsburgh are black, so it's it's very interesting and I'd say that's a question I've been talking about a lot. It irritates me every time because, like I'm black and Arab. So I see certain brothers. Well, I'm not a junior right now, but like, I see brothers in the message. And don't give me this alarm, but they see me outside on the road, and I won't say anything to me. So every lie, okay, that's how you're moving there, next to you. But it is just something that, you know, I feel like directly in Pittsburgh that's something we should address. And, um, I'm taking very great strides to have some type of these conversations.

JJ

No, but I think it goes back to this idea that there are these deep seated structures in place and folks don't realize that they're operating within them. Or maybe that they're giving power to them by something that they think is maybe just a little innocuous but in fact is really hurtful and perpetual.

Farooq Al-Said

Yeah, that's exactly it. I think that, like there was one time I walked into a messa shop in Monroeville, which is east of the city, just about like, you know, 15 minutes easy to the city. And that's that. That is the community of mostly brown people, you know, in Pakistan, India. And I remember I walked in that mess yet for Juma one day, and I felt so unwelcome. It was I was oh, okay. I would like some of you to be Dr to me, but Okay, that's fine. But it was very interesting. Um, but, you know, like you said, it is hurtful. Especially when you know you want to identify you want to have that conversation with that part of your ancestry or a part of your identity. But you can't, because there is, you know, ah, stigma attached to you.

JJ

So, just how can our listeners get involved? Or at the very least, like elevate one hood and what they're all doing?

Farooq Al-Said

Um, you said yes. That's funny. But so to answer your question, though, if you just go to 1Hood.org. We're extremely active on social media at 1Hood media on instagram. You know, that's pretty much we're pretty ubiquitous. You know, I think I think that's just, you know, just just you know, if you could donate, you know, if you're in the city of Pittsburgh and you're listening to this, you know, we're very accessible, we're very approachable. We're actually working on establishing satellite locations in a couple of places that I want to talk about it. I'm keeping it close to the chest, but yeah, you know, just the website and online is the best way to reach us.

Kelly

Thanks for coming on for real. We really appreciate it. Your time and the experiences that you share with us and our listeners.

Farooq Al-Said

Yeah, thank you.

*****music plays*****

JJ

Now in today's "unbelievable, but" I just have to talk about Congressman Ken Buck. Representative Buck of Colorado's fourth Congressional District tweeted a video on Friday of him saying, I have just one message for Joe Biden and Beto O'Rourke. If you want to take everyone's AR-15s, why don't you swing by my office in Washington, D. C. and start with this one. And quote come and get it end quote. As he takes an American flag decorated Air-15 off his office wall and waves it towards the camera so you know a few things.

Well, you can't have an AR-15 in D.C. or a gun at all in the Capitol Building. Representatives are exempt from those laws, moreover his AR15 is inoperable. When he got the gun in 2015 the bolt carrier assembly, which is necessary to fire the weapon, was removed before he brought the gun to Washington. But nevertheless, it still looks like a gun, and the intent was very much for it to be viewed as a gun. Also, just in general, don't point your weapon at anyone, ever, even if it's a staffer filming you and also don't threaten your colleagues.

*****music plays*****

JJ

Unfortunately, we started this week with a series of sad realities about gun violence in Memphis, Tennessee. After more than a month, there's still no arrest in a drive-by shooting that killed a young boy in Orange Mound. Jadon Knox 10 years old, was hit and killed by a bullet while playing at a friend's house on January 19th. Two more children were killed in Memphis the very next day. But in one of those horrible acts of irony that we see all the time months before his death, Jadon was captured on video with a group of kids asking for help to prevent the very crime that ended up causing his death. So last summer an activist P. Moses was running for office and she went to Brightwood Park and ran into a group of children who asked her, you know a really important question when you get in office, what will you do to get the guns off the street? Moses started filming their responses then, including Jadon's. His shooting is still under investigation by anyone with information that could help police should call Crimestoppers at 901528CASH will have a link to this in the description.

We also lost Baba Punjab Singh, who was shot in the head and sustained an anoxic brain injury during the 2012 Oak Creek shooting. He had been paralyzed and was dependent since the shooting. Singh was one of the four Sikh Temple of Wisconsin members injured in the shooting on August 5th, 2012 that left six temple members dead over eight years ago. Singh was in Wisconsin as a visiting religious leader from India and was known for helping to set up schools

for poor orphan children in his hometown in the surrounding areas, just like Jim Brady. The medical examiner ruled the manner of death a homicide due to complications from a gunshot wound to the head. This is just another example of the endless toll of gun violence and why it's a public health crisis.

Finally, to try to at least end on a high note, voters in 2020 sent a clear message that they're looking for action on common sense gun policy. And how do they do this by sending every Brady endorsed candidate up for election on Super Tuesday forward to the general election. So Brady endorsed 21 candidates in California, North Carolina and Texas and did so because of their consistent support for common sense gun violence prevention policies. As I've said, when over 100 people a day are killed by gun violence, every community and every voter is looking for answers, Brady is proud to work with any candidate who will work to end this crisis.

*****music plays*****

Kelly

Thanks for listening and as always, Brady's life saving work in Congress, the courts and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you. For more information on Brady or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence, please like and subscribe to the podcast. Come see us online at Bradyunited.org or follow us on Social @BradyBuzz, be brave and remember, take action, not sides.

*****Brady musical outro*****

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