

Episode 171-- How Racial Resentment May Be Repressing Gun Vi...

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SPEAKERS

Jonathan Metzl, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson



JJ Janflone 00:08

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JJ Janflone 00:37

Hey everybody, welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue and Brady,



Kelly Sampson 00:40

I'm one of your hosts, Kelly,



JJ Janflone 00:42

And I'm your other host, JJ, thanks for being here all.



Kelly Sampson 00:44

Yeah. And today, we're trying to answer a pretty big question. Why do people support things that are against their interest or things that could actually harm them? And further, why is racism at the heart of that decision making for a lot of people in America?





JJ Janflone 00:59

I mean, we see this all the time, Kelly. Most farm suicides in the US are white men living in rural communities. And yet that demographic does vote against many policies that may help to curb the number of gun suicide deaths that are affecting them. So you know, why is that? How does that happen?



Kelly Sampson 01:14

Yeah. And to find those answers along with some ideas on where we can go from here, we are joined by the prolific Dr. Jonathan M. Metzl, a professor, researcher, who, among many other highly impressive things, wrote the book "Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland."



Jonathan Metzl 01:35

I'm Jonathan Metzl, I'm the Director of the Department of Medicine, Health and Society at Vanderbilt University, and the author of a bunch of books, including "Dying of Whiteness."



JJ Janflone 01:45

And just to kick off, I mean, you're a psychiatrist who studies gun violence. I don't imagine most people would necessarily connect those two things. And so I'm wondering, can you explain how you came to that expertise?



Jonathan Metzl 01:56


It's funny because like, I think about this a lot for a lot of people in our field, like, we're very unlikely gun violence prevention experts. So it's funny that we're in this fight as, I mean for me, like I grew up in Missouri, I grew up around guns, I, you know, was born on a military base, like it's not like it's oh my god, so foreign to me or something like that. But I never thought that, I never thought guns would be a main focus of my research, I'd say a couple things turn for me. One is that I, my the book before "Dying of Whiteness" was a book called "The Protest Psychosis." And it was a book about kind of stereotypes of who, who is seen as violent. And guns were a really tiny part of that book. But I had a bunch of stuff in there about how when white men carried guns, they were coded as patriots and Black men were coded as gangsters or threats or criminals. And I didn't really think that much about it.




Jonathan Metzl 02:44

But the book came out right before Trayvon Martin, and all of a sudden, I just started getting a lot of calls from the media that and started doing a lot of interviews and stuff like that, because people wanted to know, like, what is it about guns and threats and racial threats, and I got kind of thrust into this conversation that really was a conversation about race that then increasingly became a conversation about guns and race, because it just was unavoidable for me that a lot of these policies like Stand Your Ground and Castle Doctrine and other other things that were

core to that case, and many others, and the kind of racial Stand Your Ground politics, you needed to kind of understand something about gun policy to understand those. And so that became a bigger, a bigger focus for me. I've studied mass shootings, gun suicides, and just kind of tried to find ways forward for for these issues.

 Kelly Sampson 03:34


Before we dig too much into your most recent book, "Dying of Whiteness," could you share with listeners what whiteness means? And why is it important to define it?

 Jonathan Metzl 03:44

Sure, well, I'm not talking about whiteness as a biological category, or genetic category. I'm even not really talking about it as like, an identity category. It's really like, I mean, the kind of premise of the book for me is there are a lot of different ways to be white. In America, you can be religious, or communal or generous, or in many people occupied many of these characteristics. But growing up in Missouri, I just saw the rise of a kind of politics of what it meant to be white, that was anti-government, anti-expertise, anti-immigrant, strongly pro-gun, and it was based on this idea that kind of whiteness was was defending something, you know, some honor that it once held or something like that. And, and there was a lot of kind of resentment and anxiety in that position. And so I guess one of the premises for me is, why among the many different kinds of ways of being white, that there are, why is this coming to dominate, at least the politics of where I was living in where I live now Tennessee, why did that become the dominant politics because you could think of a lot of other ways to say, you know, we have a social responsibility as the demographic majority of this country to take care of other people or to be communal or to build bridges and networks and so why does, why did this "Don't come take away my stuff," narrative come to dominate? So I think I think part of it was that, and it turned out to be a profound political rallying cry. And in certain parts of the country, it came to silence, other modes of whiteness. And so really, for me, it was really a story about of kind of, how did how did we get here? Exactly. And what does that mean?

 JJ Janflone 05:23

Well, and then kind of going along then with that definition, and in the book "Dying of Whiteness," you talk about how, you know, white Americans tend to back policies that place them at a greater risk of, you know, poverty, illness, and even death. And I'm wondering, I mean, it's a very big question, we highly encourage all of our listeners to go out and check out your book. But I'm wondering if you could maybe start to unpack a little bit about why it is that folks select into policies that harm themselves?

 Jonathan Metzl 05:52

Well, it's a double edged sword, right. And so part of the issue of highlighting that that notion of whiteness was to say that the performance of what of what that meant, like to perform to be a member of that tribe meant rejecting the Affordable Care Act, rejecting all kinds of other healthcare interventions, from rejecting vaccines, for example, having a gun under your

headboard or under your bed or on your nightstand or all three. You know, that'd be that became kind of a signal that here's what it means to be white in this way, is to be against the government, against these things. And so part of the book is I just kind of as neutrally as I possibly could just add it up the health effects of what that meant, what did it mean? What did that mean, in terms of longevity, and certainly, those positions themselves became health risks, they were as dangerous to people as not wearing seatbelts in a car, or secondhand smoke are living in a house with asbestos, they literally became health risks. So partially, from a health perspective, I felt very confident that what I was showing is that those policies were really bad for everybody's health, including the health of the people who were the kind of foot soldiers on the ground, who were ostensibly the, the people promoting and benefiting from them. But the flip side is, if you are building a political movement, you kind of need martyrs on the ground. And so if the bigger political aim is to have people lay down on the train tracks, so that we can control the country and own the libs and control the Supreme Court and enact policies that are going to stick it to the other guys who we already fear are coming to take away our stuff, then I have to say, it's not like the people were idiots, right, they were part of what they saw was a winning team in a way.

J Jonathan Metzl 07:41

And so in a way of trade off that I feel like a lot of people consciously or unknowingly, were making that, you know, I'm, I'm willing to do this, in a way is what they were saying, because I'm part of a team that's going to dominate the Supreme Court for the next 50 years and expand the Second Amendment everywhere and overturn affirmative action and women's reproductive choice. And so in that sense, people were making a choice to do that, you know, in a way giving up their bodies for for this. And so I feel like in a way, that was a point that a lot of liberal readers and probably myself as an author missed, was that on one hand, they were losing, it was kind of like, "Oh, those dummies, why don't they want their own healthcare," but they, from their perspective, they were winning, because they were winning elections and winning court seats and winning local elections and things like that. And so it was, it was a, I think, a very double edged sword, I guess, is what I would say. But certainly, it was, it was not a great move, if you wanted to live a long and happy and prosperous life, or as, as long and healthier, prosperous life as you could.

J Jonathan Metzl 07:43

That's a really important point that it's not, from the outside, it can look like a completely irrational decision. But there's some framework there. And kind of as we're laying down the groundwork for this session, one of the things that I wanted to draw out is, for someone who's not familiar with your work, they may be thinking will "Dying of Whiteness," why are we talking about white people, when non-white people definitely are harmed by whiteness, but you were really careful to acknowledge that, but then also, you really wanted to make a point of explaining that particular ways that this concept of whiteness does harm white people. And so I'm wondering if you could explain a little bit why it's important for us to understand the impacts of whiteness, not just on non-white people, but on white people, too.

J Jonathan Metzl 09:30

Yeah, it's kind of like we're gonna bring down the whole ship and not have lifeboats for

anybody. You know what I mean? Like this idea that basically, we're going to sink the whole enterprise or rather than create structures that help everyone, and when you're sinking the whole enterprise, the people who are going to get hurt the worst are the people who were the most vulnerable to start with. So that's true in all the topics I look at, I look at healthcare, I look at firearm policy, I look at education policy, and now I'm doing a lot of work on the pandemic. And when you're basically doing this kind of performance, the people who are going to get harmed the worst. I mean, Kansas was a great example in the book, that Kansas had this really good public health, public school system, they were number seven in the country, and commitment to public education had helped everyone in the state, really, I mean, across the board, but the people who got the benefit, the least the last were children of immigrants and children in low-income areas, and things like that. And so, but they had seen because of investment in public education, fourth and eighth grade reading, math and science, exam scores go up, graduation rates go up.

J Jonathan Metzl 10:39

And then they just basically, it was Sam Brownback and his cronies in Kansas basically said, you know, "This money is yours, it shouldn't go to the government." And it was kind of an earlier iteration of Critical Race Theory, you know, these people are brainwashing our kids and all that kind of stuff. And people rallied against funding, funding for public schools. And they have this this obliterated that all the all the funds for honors programs, after school programs, everything else. And within a year, the Hispanic and Black students saw dramatic, dramatic falls in fourth and eighth grade reading, graduation rates. And then two years later, you saw the same demographic for white students. And so the people who, you know who the people who were were the most vulnerable saw the effects first, but then the whole system started to fail. And that was true for healthcare, also that, you know, when they started cutting away funds for health care in Tennessee, the health of a, you know, minoritized populations in the state suffered the worst, but ultimately, the entire system started to fall apart, and everybody's lifespan started to fall. So I guess the point of that, is that we're all connected, and either we build systems that help everybody or we're, we're all in different ways going to go down the tubes together.

K Kelly Sampson 11:57

Yeah. And we also see that domino effect in gun violence too. One policy, one event affects another, and so on. And I'm wondering if you could share how the pandemic has changed, or maybe impacted the way you look at your research.

J Jonathan Metzl 12:12

I mean, surprisingly, yes. You know, the pandemic, the first couple months of the pandemic, it was a call to humanity. I mean, all humans were vulnerable by nature of being human to a new pathogen. And that was a moment to say, like, let's, let's build a fortress around everybody, let's build a national healthcare system, let's make sure that people have access to all the medical treatment they can, because if they end up having to go to work sick, it's going to just spread the Coronavirus, and everybody else will get sick and, and all these other social issues. And so I think partially, there was a moment in the pandemic, where we had a moment to do a

kind of, let's fix our social vulnerabilities, because they're making certain people much more vulnerable than others. But they're also making our society much more vulnerable, for this pandemic, and future pandemics. And instead, very quickly, we politicize the pandemic and became a tribalizing moment. Two months into it, Trump basically signaled to people that they didn't have to, you know, that red states wouldn't have to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, which would have made sense, they made guns into essential businesses, and everybody got armed. And, you know, it became a tribalizing moment rather than a humanizing moment. And we're really paying the price for that now, I think.

K

Kelly Sampson 13:31

And to bring this home a little bit to the issue that we focus on here, gun violence, one of the things that you discuss in the book is how white supremacy is key to understanding America's problems with firearms and gun violence, and the debate around gun violence prevention. And I'm wondering if you could explain that link to listeners?

J

Jonathan Metzl 13:53

Sure. I'm just to be clear, and I love the question. And all these are wonderful questions. I, for people who know, the book, I don't use the term white supremacy in the book. And I do that pretty consciously, because, I mean, you know, I do a lot of work on race and things like that. But in this case, I really was in, in very red state America and trying to understand what were the anxieties and politics and, and drives for people to want to arm themselves in the way that they were. And so what I found was, there was certainly a fomentation of a lot of anxiety toward poor rural white people that were basically being told, "Hey, there's a, there's a protest in, in Ferguson right now. And these people could be coming and stealing your big screen TV, 200 miles away," or something like that, like it was kind of just overt, like, you know, nobody was coming to take their big screen TV or something like that. But it was very powerful. It was kind of like, "I better defend myself," and things like that. And so, you know, I used the term racial resentment because I think that it was so, it was so based in kind of the DuBoisian notion of a wage of whiteness, that racial groups are in competition with each other for resources, that's fomented by people who benefit a lot by having people with common socioeconomic interests fight or compete with each other.

J

Jonathan Metzl 15:16

And then also it taps into the deep history of racism and kind of this idea that, you know, Heather McGhee and other people write about that. Basically, this idea of, you know, it's, it's, it's a sellout to your tribe, to work with people from other tribes. And so, you know, so, so, so again, the terms I used were resentment, because I really felt like that's kind of what it was like, it was a narrative of like, "You better protect yourself, because people are coming to take away your privilege or stuff, your all these kinds of things." And these were people who were themselves quite vulnerable for a lot of reasons. Part of the reasons were ones that they that they voted for, you know, and things like that. And so, but, but I, I guess, I guess, being there, I mean, I write against this idea that just like having empathy is going to change anything. I mean, I argue that we need better structures that that can show people, you know, in real terms, the benefit of cooperating with each other, I don't think sensitizing people is going to

help us in this particular issue. But just you know, just to bring that home I, I thought that white supremacy, I didn't use that, because I felt like it got in the way of, for me at least. And this is a personal decision of having the kinds of conversations I wanted to have with people or promoting the kinds of solutions that might help us even imagine a way out of the really, honestly bonkers situation that we find ourselves in right now.



JJ Janflone 16:38

And I think what you're really underscoring here is something you know, that you do in your book so well, which is introducing how hard these conversations can really be. And I mean, some of the most powerful and heartbreaking parts of your research take place in your discussion of gun suicide in Missouri, like with this particular story about a young man, lost, named Connor. And I showed him that most firearm suicides in the US, you know, are white men. And yet that demographic votes, as you point out in your research against a lot of the policies that could help that same demographic. Can you share with listeners a bit about that research and why it seems so hard for folks to process that dissonance?



Jonathan Metzl 17:14

Well, the best I can summarize this as to say that just giving up what we're already talking about, people are I mean, I'm not this is not some call for a group hug or watch more Teletubbies or something like that. Like people were people were anxious and angry, and, and afraid in particular ways. And they were afraid that, you know, the world was slipping away from them, or they were losing resources, or I mean, there's a lot of anger there. I mean, I have no problem saying there's just a ton of historical racism that also, but it was just like a lot of a lot of anxiety. And in their culture, because of history, because of marketing, because of messaging, they had been told that the way to protect yourself and your family is through a kind of narrative of individualism. And that narrative of individualism is kind of encapsulated in owning a gun against any threat that might come your way. And also, because the "government is tyrannical, and it's not looking out for your interests," protecting yourself against the government and against a government that is going to take your money and put it into social programs that benefit other people who are undeserving, etc, etc. And, and it's a really powerful narrative. I mean, people grow up with that particular narrative. And so guns come to occupy a particular place that is a place that the NRA and the GOP understand very well, which is, it's a symbol of, it's a symbol of resistance to social change. And, and so that's a powerful narrative. And then imagine a bunch of like East Coasters, like myself coming on down and saying, "Hey, you know, you should use a gun safe or something like that," like, it's the least sexy argument in the world, because you're not talking about safety, you're not talking about, you know, you're not addressing why people feel like they own guns in the first place in a certain kind of way.



Jonathan Metzl 19:10

And so, you know, I just I just started thinking a lot when I was down there, because the stories are so tragic in the book, I mean, the story you're talking about, parents lost their son who had was, you know, depressed, suicidal, kind of the typical story, lost his job got broken up with, was drunk, and then committed a horrible gun suicide and the horrible part of that story was

talking to the parents about how they had always wanted an open casket funeral for their family members, but the only part of his body that could be shown was the arm so they had an open casket funeral of, of his arm, and he was just like, I don't know, he was such a. I mean, the people honestly were incredible, like, generous, thoughtful, brave people. It wasn't like they, they weren't crazy. The way you know if I, if I just told the story on Twitter, or if I told the story to e-, you know, to people like my friends of mine in New York, they'd be like, "Oh, those Trump supporter," but it wasn't, it wasn't like that they were, they were really, honestly, really incredible people, but, but I would also say that guns were such a marker of their own version of safety that, you know, that it was just hard to see the role that gun played in their lives and not think, you know, we need a more nuanced approach for people like this, you know, because, because if, if they were the ones that were saying, "We need safe storage," it would have been a different a different story. But it wasn't coming from that, that was, that's like my narrative for them.

K

Kelly Sampson 20:44

Yeah, and that that interview really was quite devastating. And that was just one of several. And I think it's really powerful how you did that, to ground readers, like me, and in understanding the human toll. And I want to touch on something you said, which was that guns can take on this meaning, as a means to resist social change. Because in the book, you talk a lot about nostalgia, and the role that nostalgia plays in whiteness, and also the role that it plays in whiteness and firearms. So what role is nostalgia playing in this?

J

Jonathan Metzl 21:20

You know, it's a very easily manipulable narrative, but it's kind of like, America was great. At some earlier point in time, when there wasn't, there wasn't the kind of competition that you face now. I mean, gender scholars write about how there was a lot less competition for white men in the job market through the 1950s, for example. So things like construction jobs and other kinds of jobs, particularly, you know, working class jobs. There's that, you know, so part of the issue is part of the resentment that I talked about is, with a minute, the job market opened up to all those other groups of people, in this narrative, it this isn't, I mean, it's obviously much more complicated than this. But it was kind of like these, these people are coming to take your jobs, and then they're coming to take your "fill in the blank" in a certain kind of way.

J

Jonathan Metzl 22:14

And so it's easy for me to say, oh, no, our economy works much better when there are more people participating in it and more taxpayers and more educated people and stuff like that. But I think in this narrative, it was kind of like, this was one of the many moments where we, we lost our, our position atop a hierarchy, maybe. And, and, and there is this narrative of kind of, we've been displaced, you know, or we've been displaced. And I will say, I mean, I, hopefully in my work, I mean, I'm critical of many positions. But I'm also, I mean, I don't think there needs to be a group hug on white people. I'm not saying white lives matter. I'm not saying any of that stuff. But I would also say that there are better ways to maybe handle that. In many different ways. Of course, it's hard. Because if you've been oppressed by the system for 200 years, you're not, you know, thinking, you're thinking like, how do I live? Right? So it's not that but I

would just say, as a political move Kelly, because the question was also about politics. It just opened a space that of space a mile wide, that the GOP drove right into, which was, "Man, nobody, nobody loves you, like we do, we're taking your interest to heart unlike those other guys." And so, even if it wasn't a personal vulnerability, it was a political vulnerability to say, and, you know, that was not just the 50s. It was every other time where there was different kinds of competition, but I see it mostly as competition in the labor market, even though that plays out as as other as other factors that kind of, you know, there's an answer. And the answer can either be, hey, let's all join together. But but, you know, the right has been incredibly, incredibly good at at kind of, you know, playing to those turning points.

J Jonathan Metzl 23:58

And that's why you can see things like the backlash now against things like white fragility, or DEI or other things like that, because they're like you're being made to apologize for who you are, and whether or not that's the case. I mean, I, I have my own, you know, as somebody who researches in the south, like, I have my own complicated relationship to like white fragility kind of politics. But it's kind of for that reason that I do feel like you can maybe bring people along if they're not feeling defensive, but but also there's in a defensive industrial complex that's getting people to feel guarded, in order to get them to their side, and we don't have really an answer for it sometimes.

K Kelly Sampson 24:34

I would love to, you know, round out, one of the themes that come out through this conversation and through your book, is thinking about and putting yourself in the shoes almost, of people who are making decisions that could put them at risk and, and understanding sort of empathizing with that. And you made the point earlier about how on one hand, it may feel good to sort of have a strident position, but it may not be expedient or even helpful when we're talking about, for example, let's not have a, you're not advocating for a group hug so much, but thinking about how can we bring people in who might feel alienated and feel like the GOP is their only answer. And I'm wondering if you could help listeners understand what that looks like? Or what that could look like, in our environment today, what might it look like to capture some of the people who are no longer interested in going that way?

J Jonathan Metzl 25:35

Number one is listening to those people. But number two is broadening. I mean, it's already happening, right? If you told me that Liz Cheney was going to be a hero to centrists, centrists and Democrats, two years ago, you think I was insane, right. And so, but I think that that's that model of kind of, we just need the broadest tent we can right now. And I think that, you know, the, the, the, the more we can kind of think about ways that, you know, DeSantis, is now doing this thing about like, he doesn't want people to feel discomfort. But as much as we can be like, talk about what makes us talk about discomfort constructively, and broaden our coalition as much as as much as possible. Think about ways we can form alliances as as broadly as possible. I think that's the issue. I mean, there certainly are a lot of people on many sides who are who are dissatisfied right now. And I think it's important to note that there are a lot of people who are dissatisfied with a lot of different aspects of politics, politics feel like they're

going to the fringes in both directions for certain people. And so in a way, kind of building, building center coalitions I just know from what I've studied, like, that's when things got done. I mean, Kansas, built its public school system with a broad center coalition, and people on on on on the fars thing that had their had their positions heard, but the Tennessee health care system was built by a broad coalition of people across the aisle. And so all the all the buildings, and all the structures that I'm building that I'm studying, none of them were built by, by one party in a way. And so I think that's part of the story. And even Missouri gun laws, for example, you know, that they were very, very bipartisan for a very long time. And so the question is kind of how can we build that broad coalition in a way that also still stands for the rights of people who feel, I think, rightly, like they're being left out of this system, I think that's really the trick right now.



JJ Janflone 27:33

And I think so much of this. And I think you bring this out in some other pieces you've done, which we will link to the, in the description of this episode to your website, where folks can see some of the other publications that you've put forth beyond your fantastic books. But I sort of said the importance of even reframing conversations. And so I wonder, sort of in that vein, you know, what might you say to someone, who talks about how we shouldn't blame the gun, the guns just a tool, rather than an individual person and in response to gun violence, because that seems like a reformation as well of a conversation.



Jonathan Metzl 28:04


Right? I mean, it's hard, right? Because, you know, again, it's, it's, I mean, I understand the desire to like, have this conversation be like, how can we talk to individual people and change individual lines, but I think it's also important to see just how much these are structural conversations, right? I mean, the price that people pay for even, like the the politicians in the south are almost genetically selected to be people who are like, any, any conversation about even opening the door, anything about any kind of opening the door to any kind of gun safety conversation is immediately circumspect. And the people who were centrists were pushed out, right. I mean, and so there was a political move, which I saw a lot on the ground. And I've seen a lot in Tennessee, which is that even when somebody says, you know, "I'm very strong. I'm A-Plus member of the NRA. But I also think we should have safety laws for when kids around." They will get primaried in five seconds, right. And and the thing is, there's no, there's no mob-, mobilizing the other side, there's nobody to protect a politician that is going to compromise and politicians who might have been willing to compromise on on the right, they've all been voted out of office, by people who are not willing to compromise.




Jonathan Metzl 29:20

And so part of this issue is not just about changing into people's, individual people's minds. It's also like, I don't know, I do kind of feel like our side dropped the ball, when all these people primaried with all these billboards and stuff like that across the south. And we didn't come to their defense in a way, like there should have been a defend these people mobilization effort or something like that. And so this is so much of a structural issue because there's a bigger morality trail, tale, which is if you even compromise, this is what's going to happen to you, which plays out in politics and it plays out individually, you know, and so, you know, it's seen as

a selling out in a way to compromise on these issues. And what it does is evacuates the middle ground. And I feel like the gun debate has been, in a way, the way it played out, it was probably unavoidable the way it played out. But it did create these kind of, "Oh, you're not for this, you're not for this, you know, for this." And so, you know, I felt like if we had to do it all over again, maybe we could have gone back and mobilized to protect people who were willing to compromise a little bit, even if they weren't in our political party or something like that.

 Kelly Sampson 30:24


And is there a way in your opinion, to untether gun violence prevention, from this perception that it only belongs to one political party, and if you're for gun violence prevention, and you're for everything that Democrats are for, or you you must be a leftist or something like that, because we see this in the book that everyone wants their families to be safe. So that should be a bipartisan thing. So in your opinion, in your experiences, is there is there a way to do that?

 Jonathan Metzl 30:53

Well, I again, I think the way is not as much, as I want to talk to individual people in my books about talking to individual people. I also think that this is, that's a political question. Right. In other words, I think that there are plenty of examples in the United States and other places where, when you're able to pass viable laws, people kind of get down with them. Right. And, and when you can pass structure. So I think the question shouldn't be, I mean, it's important to get out and change people's individual people's minds. That's how you win elections. But I also think that we have to figure out how to win elections also, I guess, is what I'm saying, which is hard when when this binary, so so I don't have an answer about like, I mean, you know, I found I've had incredible individual conversations with a lot of people who differ tremendously from me on these issues. But I would also say that I think that this is a, it's not a hearts and minds issue. It's, uh, let's figure out how we can win elections issue. And it did seem like 2018 was going to be a turning point, you know, there were a lot of people who were running on the gun safety platform that won, you know, the, the Lucy McBaths of the world and other people, but then their response was to mobilize the stuff we're talking about so powerfully, and then think about those Virginia rallies after you know, after 2018, and things like that. So I just think, you know, we're, we're figuring this out. I mean, I truly wish I had a better answer, except I would say that the answer is a is a structural answer. It's not an in not so much an individual answer.

 JJ Janflone 32:23

Well, I'm going to follow that up with another sort of unfair question where I asked Professor Metzl to solve everything for us, you know, what do you have any thoughts on, you know, what can our listeners who may be either after having read your work, or having listened to this podcast, or who, certainly by choice who tuned in to gun violence prevention podcast, right, like, want to be doing better in this area, whether they're gun owners or non gun owners, do you have any suggestions for them?

 Jonathan Metzl 32:49

Yeah. I think run for school board

Yeah, I think, run for school board.



JJ Janflone 32:51

All of our guests late recently, I would say the last seven have all been like, "Run for school boards run for local offices."



Jonathan Metzl 32:58

Yeah, that's in a way, that's what we forgot. We were having all these big national conversations, but we've kind of forgotten about grassroots politics. And so like the power of this movement, you know, and that's what, that's what sets the judiciary, all these kinds of things. So yeah, run for school board. I think that's really the most important thing you could do right now. You know, and, and also, like, a lot of this gun debate is about safety. And so when people are telling you, they don't feel safe, I know my approach is, I don't want to argue with them about guns, I want to say like, I usually ask them, like, tell me what safety means for you and things like that. I'm these days, I'm asking a lot more questions than I am trying to prescribe the answers. But I but again, I also think running for school board is pretty important. Because we've, we've kind of forgotten that. So glad other people are saying that, too.



Kelly Sampson 33:47

That's very good advice. I agree. Because sometimes we can get so caught up in the big picture that we miss really important things that are happening locally, in our own communities. So thank you so much for the advice and for taking the time to come on the podcast.



Kelly Sampson 34:04

Well, JJ, I mean, that was I think you'd agree a really insightful conversation.



JJ Janflone 34:09

I do agree. And I couldn't think of a better way to sort of end this series on conspiracy theories. Because I think, you know, at the heart of conspiracy theories, is people believing that they're being harmed or damaged in some way, even if it's very much unfounded.



Kelly Sampson 34:26

Yeah. And I mean, one thing that I've been thinking about, since he said it is, you know, as a Black person, which I am, who is working to prevent gun violence, the notion that Dr. Metzl put forth, which is, you don't need to do a group hug, or center, white people, but we do need to kind of put ourselves in their shoes, at least, for the people who feel alienated by the perception that there's not a place for them within our coalition. Because it left me with a

question which is, you know, if part of what's going on with those folks is a feeling of alienation. But another part of what's going on is, at least in part, some desire to hold on to positions of power. And this belief that racial grievance is how they can do that. Then what can a gun by information advocate do to open the door to those people who feel alienated without also buying into or perpetuating the racial grievances that they're looking for?



JJ Janflone 35:23

And that's so important too, because, as he points out in his work, like this is harmful, right? Black people and other vulnerable people in the country are also dying of whiteness, and frequently, and so I think it's just something we and our listeners are going to have to continue to think about and and work on very seriously. You know?



JJ Janflone 35:45

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Kelly Sampson 35:59

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