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MBS (00:00):

One of my favorite questions, and of course, it's one of the questions from the Coaching Habit Book is simply this, "How can I help?" Or if you want a slightly blunter version, "What do you want from me?" I think the power of the question is twofold. I mean, first, it just asked the other person to name the help that's required. And that's powerful for them because sometimes... and in fact, often, it's not totally clear what that is even to them.

MBS (00:36):

Now, the second power, and I think this might be even more important, is that it disrupts your own assumption that you already know what they need, because sometimes it seems so, so, so obvious. And when it does, your advice monster is unleashed and it all goes downhill from there. But all of this points to a bigger

question, how do you best give more to the world than you take? How do you best give more to the world than you take?

MBS (01:12):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them, and then a good conversation ensues. Garrett Bucks is the founder of the Barnraisers Project. Now, you may be able to guess roughly what that's about, particularly if you're in the US or in the UK, where there's actually a history of this experience. And in fact, in the US, particularly amongst the Amish community, there's still this tradition of what it means to be a barn raiser.

MBS (01:49):

Now, what it is, is a local community gets together and they collectively build and create a barn. They create a resource for one of their members, a resource that's essential to the individual, of course, but also to collective success. Now, we'll get to what that means for Garrett in just a minute and why he called his organization this. But with all of us, it took Garrett a while to realize just what his path should be. And it wasn't the one that he started on.

Garrett (02:21):

I like to say I spent a good portion of my life on a pretty typical White do-gooder trajectory. And I don't mean that disparagingly. There's a lot of good folks on that trajectory. But what I mean by that is that, I had good activist parents who taught me that I should go and help make the world a better place.

MBS (02:41):

Now, as you know, I'm pretty keen for people to be ambitious for themselves and for the world and to be a force for change. So, I am all aboard with this. And to be honest, Garrett had exactly the same instinct that I would've had on where best to begin.

Garrett (02:57):

I assumed as a White person from a middle-class background, a White guy, that my job in making the world a better place was going to be in other people's communities. And so, I did a lot of the things that somebody does when you decide that your job was being helpful in other people's communities.

MBS (03:16):

He taught in the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, and he worked with refugees in Chicago. And actually, it was in these different communities that he started to ask himself some tough questions.

Garrett (03:27):

There's a lot that I didn't really dig into or think about critically during that time, right? This idea that if something is wrong in the world, my job is to come and solve it. And my job is to come and solve it. And I have a right to, in places where Black, Brown indigenous people live and work, and I can do that without asking a lot of questions about what their plans, what their dreams, what their hopes, what their visions for the places where they live and they're trying to build are.

Garrett (03:57):

So, I'm proud of a lot of that, but I'm also not proud of a whole bunch of that. And a White guy in particular, I think I spent a whole lot of my career feeling like I just had a right to leadership wherever I went.

MBS (04:10):

This is a great, powerful, difficult question. One worth really examining, holding up a merit towards. I have the right to leadership. I mean, who do you have the right to lead and where, in what context? And in those contexts, who might be thinking, "I have no right to leadership." And what are the implications of that? So, let's dig in here.

Garrett (04:36):

First off, what right do I have trying to go "fix" other people's communities, even if that's not the language I use. And secondly, specifically as a White person, I was looking out in the world and I was looking at what is actually preventing progress. And by progress, I mean, a world and here in the United States, a country that is committed to the common good that says, "I care less about just what's happening for me and my family. And I want to make a hard decision on what might be right for this generation, for future generations, etcetera."

Garrett (05:08):

And it's hard to look at that and not say that there is a pattern of behavior, of mindset, of belief, of holding onto power, of holding onto comfort amongst White communities that actually is that's where the alarm bells are ringing. And so, not only was I not asking the question of, "Do I have a right to go and fix other people's communities?" But I wasn't asking the question of, "What is my community and what does it mean to be responsible to that community?"

Garrett (05:32):

Because I think that there is a crisis right now in whiteness that goes beyond just racism, that goes beyond simply the pain and harm we cause for communities of color, but also has a lot to do with an ache and an isolation from one another that I think that we need to fix. So, my work right now is something I call the Barnraisers Project, but it's a heck of a... man, it's a dream.

Garrett (05:57):

I get to train and coach and learn from hundreds of White people across the country, in the world, who are very, very different from each other. We've got 70-year olds and we got 17-year olds. We got wealthy folks. We got poor folks. We got folks in conservative areas, folks in liberal areas across the world.

Garrett (06:16):

But what they've all come together is said, "I want to look very closely at my community." Perhaps that's the community of parents in Boston, perhaps that's a community of churchgoers in rural Iowa and say, "That particular White community what's holding us back from being committed to the common good.

Garrett (06:30):

And how can I work with the people that I'm closest to, that I care about to move that?" And I get to be on the sidelines, cheering those folks on, hopefully giving the resources, hopefully being useful for them. But my life is rich right now because whereas once I was wondering, "Does anyone else seeing this? Is anyone else concerned about this?" I now every day get to be connected with this broader and broader tapestry of folks that I think is building something pretty cool.

MBS (06:58):

Garrett, was there a moment when you went this idea of me assuming leadership is perhaps not... is problematic and you dissented yourself, you put yourself on a sideline and said, "This is a different way to serve."

Garrett (07:17):

Well, I mean, I got an interesting answer to that because I'm going to tell a very resonant moment that I ignored at the time.

MBS (07:25):

Right, right.

Garrett (07:26):

And it goes back to... but that then came back to me that I really needed to think about. And it came back to, in my second year of teaching on the Navajo

Nation of New Mexico, when in my first year, I did all right, but like a lot of first year teachers, the thing I wanted to work on between the first and second year in particular was my classroom management. I was like, "I think that a little crazy at different points. Let's tamp that down." And there were a couple times in particular when my class would be walking through the hallways that I'd annoy other teachers, because my line was too loud and stuff like that.

Garrett (08:00):

So, second year on and on, we're going to get ship shape. We are going to be known for our quiet immaculate lines, right? And I was a tour guide in college, so I could walk backwards while watching my kids and be like, "No, we're quiet and stuff like that." And I was feeling really good about.

Garrett (08:20):

In fact, I was getting compliments in particular from other White teachers about how quiet my lines were. And then, one day, one of my kids' parents saw me and saw the line, and they were a guest. And they took me aside later after they picked up their kid and said that they actually still had memories, this particular parent, of going to the old Bureau of Indian Affairs Boarding Schools, which of course were infamous both in the United States and similar residential schools in Canada for absolute brutality, the idea was, "Save the man, kill the Indian."

Garrett (08:59):

Right? And a renunciation of culture. And this parent said, "When I saw your line, that quiet line that you were just watching like a hawk, it brought back all of these images and memories at the boarding school." Right?

MBS (09:14):

Yeah, yeah.

Garrett (09:15):

And at the moment, I took just the simple lessons of that, I was like, "Okay, cool. I should chill out the line. That was really, really bad." And apologize to the parent and stuff like that. But years later, as I look back on that memory, you asked this question of stepping back, right?

Garrett (09:31):

And stepping back is a question of, I think for me, of what you notice, what you care about and what you decide is important to learn, before you decide, even if you're ready to step into community with other people. And for me that context of what is school here, when has it worked, when has it not, what has been the role, if I would like to be a White teacher in this indigenous place.

Garrett (10:02):

Perhaps, a, do I have the right to do that at all? But b, if I do, what should I know about the history of White people at the front of classrooms and how that feels in the past and how that feels now? And is there a role for me in this? And be okay with the answer of if there's not, but to situate that answer both in what you're hearing from folks now but also being curious about the context for what is true, not just in this moment, but what might be true under the surface, what might be barely buried.

MBS (10:34):

And how did you come to place neighborliness at the... it feels like that's the word that's at the heart of your work. And I may be wrong about that, but this idea of being a neighbor has a power to it. And it's not such a common word. How did that word, that concept, become central?

Garrett (11:04):

There is an element of it that is intellectual and an element of it that's instinctive. Right? The intellectual part of that story is that if, as I kept asking,

"What is this crisis in particular within whiteness, within White people?" I kept coming back to these stories of White people didn't just wake up one day and said, "Let's be mean and evil and racist." Right?

Garrett (11:26):

That all of this is rooted in a broader story of capitalism, is rooted in a broader story of imperialism, but also more broadly at a simple level was rooted in the idea of individualism, that what is most important is each of our individual walks through this earth. And then, when you get there, you eventually make all sorts of moral excuses for other people being less than human, less important, secondary characters to your primary character story.

Garrett (11:55):

Right? And so, if I'm looking for antidotes to that, neighborliness is an antidote to that, right? Is the idea that my primary identity is not myself as this self-actualized hero of the story, but that my primary identity is in existence and relationship to the people that I get the absolute privilege of being around closest every single day as a neighbor, right? It's this random experiment in having to live around and therefore have your actions have an impact on and be impacted by the actions of a random group of people around you.

Garrett (12:34):

And I think it's a small unit to start understanding interconnection, start understanding our story as connected to others rather than isolated from that. But then, when I think that's the intellectual element, but on the instinctive, right, when I think about the first person outside my family that I associate with kindness and that I have just this resonant image of, right?

Garrett (12:59):

I didn't grow up with a whole bunch of neighbors. I grew up outside Clancy, Montana, in a Gulch Gulf, called Lump Gulch. And my family's only neighbor

when I was young was an old, former... this is out of central casting, this like perfect Western character was this grizzled old prospector named... like literal prospector named Bunchy. And Bunchy was just this old, like 90% wrinkles, right? And like mean looking dude on the surface, right?

Garrett (13:29):

But here's was my relationship to Bunchy. Bunchy had a plow on the front of his truck. We had a big, old driveway. So, every time it snowed, which of course does a lot in the winter in Montana, 5:00 a.m., Bunchy was out to make sure that we had our driveway clear before all of us kids had to go to school. We growing up didn't have a whole bunch of neighbors we could trick or treat at. So, Bunchy threw out all the stops whenever we came to his house. Big, scary masks, big candy bars.

MBS (14:03):

But he was [inaudible 00:14:03] trick or treat.

Garrett (14:03):

He was our neighbor, right?

MBS (14:03):

Yeah, yeah.

Garrett (14:03):

And so, it's part of this instinctual. When I say neighborliness, I think that we can think of people in our lives that have embodied that and people who didn't. Bunchy didn't choose to have this family with six kids move in next to his idyllic mountain hideaway, right?

MBS (14:20):

Yeah, yeah.

Garrett (14:20):

But we were there. And because of that, we were in relationship with him.

MBS (14:24):

Well, I'm excited to get to the two pages, but I've got a question I want to ask before I ask you about your book, which is at the heart of this, I think, which is, so how do you begin to unlearn the heroic individualistic narrative? Because I feel both, I feel the tug towards neighborhood and community and service and selflessness. And I feel of strong need to be in a spotlight and be recognized and praised and be a leader and all of that.

MBS (14:58):

And I'm just wondering, where do you find the teachers? And what's the practices that helps you to unlearn some of this stuff, which feels so deep?

Garrett (15:10):

I appreciate that. It is funny, you mentioned that, right? Because I'm writing a book right now myself, and I'm writing about this, trying to unlearn individualism and the moving from all these moments, my past, when in particular, I felt really addicted to it. And obviously, the narrative of a book, this has to be some positive narrative arc.

Garrett (15:31):

So, I'm writing a story in which I get less addicted to it by the end. But as I keep writing this, I'm like, "I'm literally writing this in a book that is going to be in bookstores across the country with my name on it, really, really fancy pants." And I'm pretty amped about that, right? And so, this is never... this contradiction is never going to be something that I think I win or I defeat, right?

Garrett (15:59):

And this is in our brains, right? Our brains are simultaneously have incredible, incredible reminder mechanisms that as human beings, our job is to be communal. Our job is that we would not have survived our ancestors if they'd not in a responsibility to each other. And our brains are hardwired to look out for threats to our individual status, right?

MBS (16:27):

Right, right.

Garrett (16:27):

So, both of these things are in my brain. So, it's never going to be a defeating one, right?

MBS (16:32):

Yeah.

Garrett (16:32):

And so, on a daily basis, I think that it is like any other practice when you're trying to sustain something that is hardier and actually more fully satisfying when part of you really, really wants the quicker, easier, like instant gratification fix. It's like anything else of realizing that there is a ritual to my slow morning coffee and a big glass of water that is less immediately satisfying than if I woke up and had a beer and a big bowl of ice cream, but it's going to make my stomach feel better over the course of the day, right?

Garrett (17:14):

It's that same sort of thing that when I noticed throughout the day, the different choice I can make and where my energy goes, that there is something very, very quick fix that I can get on social media, that I can get if I apply to this big

fellowship and get this big award, or if I notice that I'm now getting invitation to do a podcast and that feels great, or any of the above.

Garrett (17:36):

And that part of my brain that responds well to that, the dopamine, what have you, is always going to be there. But I think it's a daily process of noticing that when I look back on the days, I don't actually remember those little hits. What I remember is... let's use this, what I remember about this podcast wasn't the thrill of getting recognized in going to be a podcast, what I'm actually really enjoying about this podcast is I'm going to talk to a cool person who has really, really interesting questions and that-

MBS (18:03):

Who is that cool person?

Garrett (18:05):

I'll introduce you later. He's great. No, no. And that I have my own questions because I have my own curiosities and all above. And that's just a delight, right? That there is a gift in when a friend reaches out to me with a really, really hard situation that they need someone to sit with, right? There is a gift when my literal neighbor has a great thing happened to him or her at work, right?

Garrett (18:34):

And the thrill of that. And that it's tracking throughout the day that the thrill and the joy of connection actually fulfills me longer than all of those little spurts that, let's be honest, I'm still going to love going after. But then, I'm going to try if I'm doing better to have a little more thoughtful relationship too.

MBS (18:57):

That's great. Thank you.

Garrett (18:59):

Yeah.

MBS (19:00):

Garrett, what's the book you've chosen for us?

Garrett (19:02):

Yeah. I've got, They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us by a poet and a cultural writer and just an absolute genius. In fact, I think he literally got a MacArthur Grant this year. So, I think he's officially genius from Columbus, Ohio. So, another Midwestern guy. His name is Hanif Abdurraqib. And yeah, this book, I think I first found it, it feels like a decade ago in a bookstore, in a train station in Chicago, just randomly. It's got a very, very cool cover. So, I bought it for the cover.

Garrett (19:40):

And best, best absolute dumb reason to buy a book ever because it paid off. And of course, this was his first work in a sense, just gone on to write so many other books. But this first one in particular has really, really influenced me in a number of ways.

MBS (20:00):

I love that. I hadn't come across this book. But when I was doing some background research on it, I realized I had read another one of his books, which is-

Garrett (20:09):

A Tribe Called Quest book. Yeah.

MBS (20:11):

Yeah, Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to a Tribe Called Quest, it's a love letter to a group, a sound and an era. And it's a wonderful book. He is a poet and he loves

music, and he has that as a lens on race as well. So, what pages did you choose from it? How did you... I mean, it's always interesting to know how you end up picking the two pages that you pick.

Garrett (20:31):

Yeah. Well, you just said it, right? He's a music writer, right? And so, he's writing about something that can be often understood incredibly superficially, right? But for my work, I read... what do I have to, I just do. I read just about every book possible about race. Most of them incredibly heady, incredibly luxury and incredibly self-serious. And these are... the books he writes are also extremely serious books about race.

Garrett (20:59):

And you'll see this in the passage, but I think why he gets it deeper truth than most do is because I think he, like most great cultural critics understands that there is something within culture and within the creation of art that tells us... and even below art that tells us something, a societal truth that we often can't find when we are putting on a front.

Garrett (21:25):

And Abdurraqib in particular, I think is somebody who... he's a Black man from Columbus, Ohio who has navigated his entire life whiteness because that's, all Black people have to navigate whiteness in America. But also, because as a music fan, as somebody who was both into traditionally stereotypically Black forms of music, like hip-hop and soul but also was into punk rock.

Garrett (21:51):

And in that community was weaving in and out both of unintentionally having to deal with whiteness and sometimes intentionally inserting himself in White communities as well. And because of that, I think his lens on whiteness, which of course what I'm really, really interested is significantly deeper than anything I

could ever have to. Because I watch whiteness without the lens of having to survive in it, right?

MBS (22:14):

Yeah, yeah.

Garrett (22:15):

I can take it for granted. So, the chapter, the two page I picked are from a chapter, an essay called, The White Rapper Joke. And so, the first two pages of that essay.

MBS (22:26):

I'm excited to hear it. So, over to you, Garrett, the first two pages from Hanif Abdurraqib's book, They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us.

Garrett (22:38):

In the music video for the 1991 3rd Bass single Pop Goes the Weasel, MC Serch and Pete Nice are beating an actor playing Vanilla Ice with baseball bats. The actor, with large blond hair and Vanilla Ice's signature American Flag track jacket, collapsed on the ground moments earlier.

Garrett (22:57):

Serch and Pete Nice become more aggressive, swinging the bats down with a type of fervor only reserved for the movies. Pop Goes the Weasel is a song aimed at the rapid commercial shift happening in rap. The first wave of rap's commodification was starting at the dawn of the '90s, when aspects of it were becoming less feared and easier for White people to digest, in part because of prepackaged megastars like MC Hammer and, of course, Vanilla Ice.

Garrett (23:22):

3rd Bass, a celebrated underground group from Queens, seemed to be fed up with the rapidly changing landscape. And so, the actor playing Vanilla Ice is curled on the ground and we are to believe he is being beaten within an inch of his life. There is no actor in the video playing MC Hammer.

Garrett (23:39):

He is not also on the ground being beaten with bats, though he is as much a part of this song's structure as Vanilla Ice is, both manufactured, with somewhat fabricated histories created to push into the mainstream and spread their shadows over everything they could so that White mothers in the suburbs might think of them as fun, wholesome rap music, and feel more justified wagging their fingers at the other stars of the genre. The fictional attack that 3rd Bass is playing out in the music video, when looked at through this lens, feels like a type of retaliation. Now, the joke is that MC Serch and Pete Nice are also White.

Garrett (24:14):

White rappers taking a bat to a White rapper at a time when the need to separate their whiteness from his was urgent. White rappers fighting to save the world from other White rappers in the name of real hip-hop. The other joke, if you look closely enough, is that the only Black member of 3rd Bass was the DJ.

Garrett (24:33):

His face wasn't on the cover of the group's debut album. In the second album cover, he is there in the back. The funny thing about Eminem is that me and my crew F with him because he talked that reckless ass, like the White boys we'd known from a few blocks over who would scream at their mothers. One of them, Adam, punched his daddy one day, right there on the front lawn of his house.

Garrett (24:55):

And his daddy didn't even do anything except cover his face and shake his head and tell Adam that he was sorry for not letting him use the car. On the east side where me and my boys were from, if you raised your hand to your father, you wouldn't be raising it to anything else for at least a few weeks. There is a level of danger that proximity to whiteness makes thrilling when taken in from afar. Knowing that you could never survive it, or even attempt it in your own life.

Garrett (25:19):

Eminem was rapping directly into that proximity. For the Black kids in the hood, he gained a type of credibility for the ruthlessness and carelessness with which he regarded human life, particularly his own. We understood nihilism and a desire for exit. We understood angst, anger, bitterness and the rage that fueled it. What we didn't understand was a way to express what we understood and walk away unscathed. Eminem's fantasies often involved the blood of people who were living, and it must be funny to be on the other side of a fantasy about death.

MBS (25:56):

Wow, that's a killer last sentence.

Garrett (26:02):

Yeah.

MBS (26:02):

What's the deeper truth here that gets spoken in these two pages?

Garrett (26:09):

I read these particular two pages quite a bit, which is a funny thing to say about two pages that are primarily about a now forgotten rap group from 1991, right? But I actually come... it's one of those that I often use a grounding force, a

grounding reminder in my own work. And I check on myself because there's a couple truths that are here for me, at least.

Garrett (26:36):

The first in that passage about 3rd Bass is this idea that I think is actually endemic throughout whiteness and has been endemic in my life of trying to separate yourself from other White people, that identifies there is shame in whiteness. There is shame in what we do. There's shame in what we've been a part of. But that if I work hard enough, if I have... in 3rd Bass' case, if I am as students of hip-hop and if I am a real part of this culture in a way that Vanilla Ice isn't, then not only can I be respected as something that other White people aren't, but I can actually be on the frontlines of guarding this culture, which now I decide is mine from other White people, right?

Garrett (27:28):

And when I think about the way I've done politics through the years, and by doing politics, I mean, engaging in the world, I think about all of these moments of trying to separate myself from other White people that that first decision, "I'm going to be a teacher on the Navajo Nation instead of go and sell out and keep making money and all the above, I am doing something good that is different from what this country has done for a number of years." Right?

MBS (27:55):

Right.

Garrett (27:56):

That if I have read all these books about race and have these right answers, then I am a million miles away from somebody who might have stormed the capital on January 6th, right?

MBS (28:06):

Right.

Garrett (28:07):

And so, that's the first piece, right? And this idea, it took me so long to discover a lot of things about that. One of which was just how transparent and easy to just snort that, and just how cartoonish that attempt on the part of White people looks to people of color, quite frankly. Like, "Yo, who are you fooling? You guys are White too. You don't get to beat up Vanilla Ice, effort down that you've saved hip-hop, right? So, that piece is really, really true.

Garrett (28:42):

But then, there's another... but when I leave it there, this attempt to try to run from whiteness, I can feel badly about it. I can decide, "I don't want to do this." But if I leave it there, I can still convince myself that the only sin of it is that it was cheesy, right? But then, later on that second passage about Eminem, and the way in which Eminem operated within hip-hop without an awareness of what violence meant for him and what nihilism meant for him and what he had the right to do, and what society would allow him to do versus what that meant for Black rappers or Black artists or Black people.

Garrett (29:43):

The danger of that, of saying, "Not only do I have a right to other people's experience, but I'm going to operate from an interiority of that experience. I'm going to operate as if I'm an insider and pretend that the rules are therefore the same for me when they aren't." It's actually a very, very dangerous assumption, because it means that you are, as a White person, increasing the likelihood that you're going to destabilize the situation, because something that's safe for you and that proximity to you is safe for you, but proximity to you might not always be safe for other communities.

Garrett (30:22):

So, the idea that my attempt to run away from other White people and try to just be accepted within communities of color and try to feel as if I'm an insider community of color is not just that it's cheesy. It brings with it all sorts of harm and danger. And I think that is just alive throughout that passage.

MBS (30:41):

So, there's a lot going on here, Garrett, and I'm holding on as best I can. I guess I got two questions for you. And I think they're interrelated. First is, how do you sit with whiteness now? And secondly, how does a person who is White play a role in the injustices we see based on race?

Garrett (31:15):

Whiteness is completely made up, right? Any racial category is completely made up, right? The idea that there is a meaning to pigmentation and that has any societal function, yeah, total myth, right? The contours of who has been considered White at different points has changed dramatically at different points, that there have been... that the Irish have not been White at different points. Jews have not been White at different points. That there is a long process of assimilation welcoming into power that then all of a sudden you get to be part of this made up category.

Garrett (31:49):

So, I say all that to say that completely made up, just as the concept of something called Black is completely made up. The concept of something called Latinx is completely made up, et cetera, right? But we've been making that up for a few hundred years now. And we have been making that up in the context of America for our entire history as a country.

Garrett (32:10):

And we were the place where that story in particular really, really took hold, that there is something called whiteness that is imbued with it, something that society grants special powers in. And that means that right now, that made-up idea is actually very, very real even though it's completely a myth.

Garrett (32:30):

And that realness means that there's an experience of being White in this country and of growing up White and wrestling with history and wrestling with this moment and wrestling with what it means to have inherited the top tier of a hierarchy but knowing implicitly, even if we don't want to admit it, that if society's actually going to function in a way that works for all of us and our children, that we're going to have to move away from that tier, but we don't know how.

Garrett (33:04):

That there is actually a common experience of being White and of not having figured out what comes next within whiteness, that all of us who are White are in the middle of right now. And so, if you've got a community, even if it was fake to begin with, but a group of people that now is a real societal category with meaning, that has a dilemma that none of us have actually figured out, which is, "What does living in the world without being artificially on top it look like?

Garrett (33:36):

And what does moving from here to there look like?" And scares me about that, what does that require of me? What am I going to... what do I not even understand about it? That's what binds us together. And we focus a lot, in particular, progressive White people on the ways in which our understanding of this moment seems to be different from other White people, right? Like, "I'm not mad about an immigrant coming into my country.

Garrett (34:01):

Therefore, I am not... I don't struggle with this moment in the same way somebody else does. I might however struggle with whether or not my kid gets to be in the fancy magnet school in our public-school district. And do I still commit to the public-school district if they don't get into?" Right? "What happens if I don't get to be the leader of every group that I'm in?

Garrett (34:21):

What happens if my children don't get to a mass generational wealth through housing, the same way that I did?" And stuff like that. Those are actually things that, you know what, if you're really prick, I got some questions about and I haven't figured out. And so, this moment in whiteness is all of us get stop in the front, stop in pretending that there's a set of us doing really, really well, like the third basis of the world, if you will, the Eminem's that have figured out how to be White in this moment. And that there's other folks who haven't.

Garrett (34:52):

And with each other, this is an intragroup conversation. Having an intragroup conversation about, "Damn, we're all scared and weird and dumb about this, how do we figure out?" And having that conversation not be the only one we have, right? I think if we stay and if our only responsibility is to a conversation within whiteness, then I think that conversation will become myopic. It will probably... there's a lot that we don't learn.

Garrett (35:18):

And I think one of the things that I love about this book obviously is that Abdurraqib keeps view of whiteness is so much richer and wiser than anything I could have gotten without his gaze on whiteness. And we have a responsibility to be in heterogeneous community as well and not to self-segregate ourselves. But when we are in White spaces, I think there's an urgency of having our

conversation be rooted in, "Damn, we don't know how to do this. And damn, we would really like to figure out how to do this in a way that we haven't."

MBS (35:50):

Because I can feel scared and paralyzed around this place. I'm like, "Okay. So, I feel like I'm at the liberal left, progressive," all of that sort of stuff. So, I can self soothe around my moral righteousness around all of that. And the conversations I have with my White friends are self-reinforcing about our outrage and therefore our inherent goodness, because we feel outraged about it.

MBS (36:21):

There's part of me that wants to say, "How do I be an ally? How do I support the people who are less... haven't got the same cards that I've been dealt, because I've been dealt most of the pack? How do I do that in a way that isn't me coming as the White male savior to fix it and solve it?" How do I... when we started this conversation, you're like, "I'm in White communities helping to metaphorically and maybe literally raise barns with White communities around that."

MBS (36:50):

Are we now... do you just walk away from places with other racial issues and go, "Look, my job... good luck, guys, because I believe I want to impose my White saviorness on you?" There's so much to navigate through this that I am overwhelmed by the complexity of it all, because every choice feels loaded.

Garrett (37:14):

Yeah. Not in common.

MBS (37:17):

I don't have a question.

Garrett (37:19):

Well, I appreciate you being honest with me about that, right? So, that's so real, isn't it? That this overwhelm, and it probably feels familiar with other forms of societal overwhelm right now. Like, "I don't know what to do about climate." Right? "I don't know how to participate in the economy in a way that is moral and ethical." Right? And if the conversation stops at the big picture, we're just going to be stuck in that mere ass, right?

Garrett (37:46):

I mean, you and I will be having intellectual conversation about, "Oh, I feel very badly about this, but I don't know what to do." And it seems like there is snake pits of mistakes to be made on both sides, right?

MBS (37:58):

Yeah.

Garrett (37:58):

And that's why I don't work on any big national political issue at all. I don't... when somebody asks me this big major news event, Trump said this, or did you know this famous podcaster said something racist, et cetera, I said, "Look, let's not fight that fight right now. Not that it doesn't matter enough, not the accountability, et cetera. But if you live your entire life at that altitude, you're only going to get more and more confused. So, instead, let's take your altitude down to the place in which you live. And the immediately what's going on in your town, in your city, in your neighborhood, et cetera."

Garrett (38:41):

And the first question is, "Do you know the people you live around? Do you know their needs? Do you know their story? Do you know their history, et cetera?" Then more broadly, in particular for those who are lucky to live in heterogeneous communities, in diverse community, in diverse metropolitan

areas, et cetera, have you been learning from and listening to activists, Black, Brown, indigenous activists in your actual community about the kind of things they're working on, right? Perhaps they attempt to desegregate school systems.

Garrett (39:10):

Perhaps there's an attempt for affordable housing. Perhaps there is specific demands being made of your police department, things like that. And once you've started listening to that for a while, and you've also been getting to know your own neighbors, for a lot of us, even in diverse Metro areas, a lot of those neighbors are going to be White disproportionally.

Garrett (39:29):

And you're walking on both those paths. What you're eventually going to discover is you're eventually going to discover in that story of like, "Yeah, we're trying to work with the police department. We're trying to work at the school district and stuff like that." You're going to discover a set of things that are barriers, assumed barriers, that we would love ideally to get this bill passed, but there's a set of White people that aren't going to allow it to be passed.

Garrett (39:53):

"This Voting Rights Bill is being blocked by this conservative state Senator in the Senate." Or, "This amazing desegregation plan for the city is going to be opposed because there's a set of White families on this side of town who don't want their really, really like A+ whatever, like Gilded Lily school to be moved."

Garrett (40:10):

And then, when you have those two, you've been listening to the local issues enough, and you've also been getting to know actual White people in your area and where you come from enough, what you're going to have there is you're like, "Oh, you are specifically naming not a big national problem but a specific concrete problem that there is a vote coming up in the school board.

Garrett (40:27):

And you need White families from this district, from this school to show actually that they support it." And then, when you've got that, what you've got is a specific conversation with a specific set of people who are your actual neighbors that, yes, you want to move, but hopefully you also have a spirit of also caring about them. Maybe some of those parents have a really, really... like they've got kids with special needs that needs... and a story of how they've been treated in the district that also demands dignity and respect.

Garrett (40:59):

And you're going to listen, but you're also going to push and you're going to care. And you are... when people you're working with are getting sick, you're going to bring them food over. And when you get sick, they're going to bring you food over. And before you know it, you're not even paying attention to this week's controversy of the week on Twitter because what you're doing is you've got a set of people you care about. You've got a project that you're trying to change that is specific, tangible, concrete in your community.

Garrett (41:23):

And if you're not there yet, most of us aren't there yet. I've noticed in most communities, we don't even know what's going on. Our city council is talking about tremendously interesting things every week, but we find that it's easier to scroll a timeline to find out what that is. You got a few months of noticing what are the activists talking about not nationally but locally, and what are my neighbors' stories, are going to put you... I will often find for the vast majority of people I work with, from that high level of nothing makes sense miasma into a place where the world is still tough and still really confusing.

Garrett (41:58):

And still we're very, very far from the world we dream of, but there's something to do. And more importantly, there's something to do with a specific group of people together.

MBS (42:08):

In your experience of looking at neighbors and neighborhoods, have you come to see if there's any one thing or two things that feel non-negotiable for a neighborhood that has vitality to it?

Garrett (42:27):

The thing you take pride in has to be something other than your property value. The thing that you take pride in has to be something other than a lack of a crime rate. And the thing that you are proud of has to be something other than the test scores of the schools where the kids in neighborhood go. The reason why I say those three things as negative, I'm naming negatives first, is we talked earlier, Michael, about this draw towards individualism, right?

Garrett (43:07):

And those three things are the moments that neighbors stop being neighbors and become individuals. When the only thing we care about is safety in a fearful like castle doctrine sort of way, when the only thing we care about is making sure that our little piece of the economic puzzle keeps going up, up, up, up, up, or the only thing we care about is whether our kid gets into the best possible college, that's the only thing that we're proud that we live in here.

Garrett (43:34):

You don't actually care about a community. You care about your neighborhood. You care about an investment opportunity, right? And you care about the maintenance of a story, right? So, if you don't get to be proud... if that's the

number one thing that you... if you don't get to be proud of those three things, then you have to be proud of something else.

Garrett (43:57):

And the neighborhoods in this country, in this world that have the most vibrant stories that has a neighborhood festival that's going on for 40 years, that is all volunteer run, that's an incredible art and music and kid space and things like that. And people come from all over to see it, that neighborhood only created that because a group of neighbors said, "We're going to be really, really good at." Is something other than those three things.

Garrett (44:25):

A neighborhood that is safe and walkable and green is something where everyone will decide they're going to be proud of, something other than that. A neighborhood where every older person and elder doesn't have to worry about whether or not they're going to have their walk shoveled for them, is doesn't have to worry about, are they going to be able to get out to go to the hospital or go to the grocery store, and someone will be able to bring their groceries, where every kid can know that they can play on the front steps, and they're going to have a neighbor watching and caring about them.

Garrett (44:55):

Those are things for a neighborhood to be really, really proud of. That you don't discover until you take those other three things off the table.

MBS (45:04):

Nice.

Garrett (45:04):

Say, if we aren't going to be proud of these three things, but we want to be proud of the neighborhood, I trust that you're going to come up with something pretty of that.

MBS (45:13):

Nice. Garrett, it's been a very rich conversation. What needs to be said that hasn't yet been said?

Garrett (45:20):

We are in a moment where all of us, the angst and the questions, like, "Garrett, I don't know how to do this." That you expressed earlier, none of us do. And that's the bad news, right?

MBS (45:35):

Right.

Garrett (45:36):

But it's also the really, really good news because I think that what's lost in this moment is that there is a universal yearning across race, across class, across gender, across geography, across nationality that knows that we're on pretty precarious ground and that we are coming to the limits of what the story we've been on has been, and that we need a different story. And oftentimes those moments we can approach with a lot of bravado that our analysis of how we got to this place is right, other people's analysis is wrong, et cetera.

Garrett (46:09):

But I actually think that it's the vulnerability of this moment, of we don't know quite how we got here perfectly. We don't quite know what comes next, but the gift is that there is a universal longing for something different. And I have seen that conversation with every single type of person where there's a universal

longing for something different. And once you get close enough with somebody, a universal admittance that we don't have figured out that I feel like is going to be that connection with each other is going to be what gets us through.

MBS (46:48):

You could probably sense me just trying to hold onto this conversation with my fingertips. It was a tricky thing for me to navigate, I think because of so much of what Garrett's pointing to are not just elusive and challenging, but the things that I'm working with right now, trying to figure out myself.

MBS (47:07):

And I'm going to pick two things to try and weave together. I don't have an answer here, but I'm just trying to make a connection. First, his statement, "I'm trying to unlearn individualism." That feels important and it feels impossible because of course, so much of our lived experience is individualistic. And then, the reflection that often when you want to take action, every choice feels loaded. And that can be paralyzing. And in part, this is connection back to individualism, which is, "What's my action? What am I task to do? How am I the hero of this?"

MBS (47:46):

The Therapist, Terry Real, Terrance Real as he calls himself on the book, has actually just put a new book out called, US. And in it, there's a quote, or maybe this comes from his marketing around it, but it's really resonant. At a time when toxic individualism is rendering our society at every level, we need the tools to find our way back to each other through authentic connection and fierce intimacy. Authentic connection, fierce intimacy and perhaps the willingness to raise a barn in the place where you live.

MBS (48:23):

Two interviews that I think supplement this one really nicely, Minna Salami, that's called Joy and Power, and Matthew Barzun, What to Do with Power. You can see both of these. In fact, this triumphant of interviews is all about wrestling with what it means to have power, what it means to give power away, what it means to see how power works. And I think that is an extraordinary, forgive the bad pun, powerful place to stand, to actually start noticing what might otherwise be invisible. Do you want more of Garrett? Barnraisersproject.org is the website.

MBS (49:00):

Here's an occasional newsletter that I subscribe to, and I'd encourage you to think about that as well, Barnraisersproject.org. Thank you for listening. It's always lovely to have you as a guest. Welcome if you're a new person to the podcast. We've had a little bump in subscribers recently, which has been fantastic. If you are so moved, bragging the podcast in some ways helps other people find it, tick the algorithm along.

MBS (49:26):

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