

## InSocialWork Podcast Series – “Caring Justice:” Empowering Communities with a Love Supreme

**Speaker 1** [00:00:01] Hi everybody from the University of Buffalo School of Social Work, welcome to in social work. Good to have you along. I'm Peter Sobota, today bringing scholarship to action at the retail level. Our guest is Dr Juan Rios, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Social Work and Criminal Justice at Seton Hall University. He's also the director of the Master's of Social Work Program. We're going to cover a lot of ground with Dr. Rios, scholar practitioner, who is keen on bridging the academic real world divide, taking action and building relationships in the places that seem to matter most. His lab, if you will, is Newark, New Jersey, and its surrounding communities, where he works collaboratively with the East Orange Summer work experience, helping high school students overcome learning gaps through earn while you learn opportunities while highlighting civic engagement. And he works with Community Care and Justice Initiative in partnership with police professionals attempting to re-imagine traditional models of law enforcement to name a few of his activities. All of his work is informed by efforts to promote caring justice in social change efforts, integrating mindfulness and interpersonal healing, and deconstructing oppressive social systems. Regardless of your practice orientation, Dr. Rios offers practical thinking and guidance to move the work forward. He'll also throw in references to jazz titan John Coltrane, which of course, is very, very appropriate. Let's enjoy the ride together.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:54] Dr. Juan Rios, welcome to social work.

**Speaker 3** [00:01:57] Thank you for having me, Peter. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It's great to be here.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:01] All right here. Let's get this

**Speaker 4** [00:02:02] rolling.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:03] You describe yourself as a practitioner scholar and also a futurist. We're going to get to all of that and your work in communities promoting social justice, especially from marginalized groups of people. But first, could you tell us a little bit

**Speaker 4** [00:02:20] about, you know, how you

**Speaker 2** [00:02:22] won? The person came to this work and social work or both?

**Speaker 3** [00:02:27] Yeah, yeah. And I thank you for raising that question because so often in our profession, we just jump right into what have you done? What have you

**Speaker 4** [00:02:35] produced? What is your scholarship,

**Speaker 3** [00:02:37] especially folks who are listening and come from academic spaces? And even if you delve into

**Speaker 4** [00:02:41] in practitioner world, it's always

**Speaker 3** [00:02:43] starts off, okay, who are you and what's your profession? Not really. Who are you really underneath those titles underneath those letters behind your name? And one, it's important to begin

**Speaker 4** [00:02:54] to normalize the trauma that

**Speaker 3** [00:02:56] exists within

**Speaker 4** [00:02:57] the profession. We know that

**Speaker 3** [00:02:58] research has shown how many folks who are going to the profession have high scores. We know that each of us are human beings who are doing this work with lived experiences, although those experiences may vary in the spectrum.

**Speaker 4** [00:03:13] It's important to draw context. So for the

**Speaker 3** [00:03:15] purpose of

**Speaker 4** [00:03:15] this conversation, I want to be very

**Speaker 3** [00:03:17] intentional about joint context into who I am, which informs the work that I do and the interests of the community I really advocate for and serve. Absolutely.

**Speaker 4** [00:03:28] So Peter, I

**Speaker 3** [00:03:29] am a immigrant, was born in Panama,

**Speaker 4** [00:03:32] Panama.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:32] Right now, they're doing pretty good in the World Cup soccer ball that was shot out there. I came over here at a very young age and we moved to Brooklyn, like most Panamanians do. We are in Brooklyn, first for Brooklyn. We bounced around a little bit trying to find space, which we ended up in New Haven, Connecticut. So a lot of folks think of

**Speaker 4** [00:03:52] New Haven, and they

**Speaker 3** [00:03:54] associate

**Speaker 4** [00:03:55] that with what?

**Speaker 3** [00:03:56] Yale University? Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I'm here to tell you that New Haven is now, you know, university. I've been to New York, so a lot of folks, I say, Oh, good, if you live in New Haven, you're from, you know, far from New Haven

**Speaker 4** [00:04:11] and Yale are very clear

**Speaker 3** [00:04:13] lines. It's kind of like the White House in D.C.. New Haven, when I grew up, was the

**Speaker 4** [00:04:20] AIDS capital

**Speaker 3** [00:04:21] of the United States, ranked number one and the most dangerous city per capita over multiple years or the 90s. And to be at such close proximity with a higher education Ivy League institution. And that juxtaposition of divisiveness that occurred within those two worlds is sort of what I lived through, and I'm going to circle back to that one moment. My father was a heroin dealer user and died of AIDS.

**Speaker 4** [00:04:49] My mother lives with schizophrenia.

**Speaker 3** [00:04:51] Has lived with schizophrenia. Most of my childhood, if not all of it, will truly manifest into what it is now.

**Speaker 4** [00:04:58] So being a

**Speaker 3** [00:04:59] child? Living with a schizophrenic parent, a parent when they were schizophrenia, rather, it was fun, but also it came with its implications.

**Speaker 4** [00:05:10] So at one end,

**Speaker 3** [00:05:11] I didn't have to go to school, but I could stay home watching. At the time, it was Ninja Turtles and G.I. Joe all morning, but also

**Speaker 4** [00:05:20] I didn't have to brush my teeth.

**Speaker 3** [00:05:22] I would love to tell you a story one day about how my

**Speaker 4** [00:05:24] mother caught City Pigeon

**Speaker 3** [00:05:26] with her bare

**Speaker 4** [00:05:26] hands. So that way we can

**Speaker 3** [00:05:27] have a pet at

**Speaker 4** [00:05:28] home. Just think about

**Speaker 3** [00:05:29] the magnitude of that. First of all, could I be caught? And who would want you to do this?

**Speaker 4** [00:05:37] I know it's wondrous

**Speaker 3** [00:05:39] to see as a

**Speaker 4** [00:05:40] child, but that's another story

**Speaker 3** [00:05:41] for another podcast. And then on a much more somber note, my uncle who stepped up as my father figure was shot and killed by police officer. Was shot in the back twice in the back of the head once.

**Speaker 4** [00:05:56] So this is, you know,

**Speaker 3** [00:05:57] we're talking about early 90s, late 80s where. Stop or I'll shoot wasn't a suggestion.

**Speaker 4** [00:06:03] And over

**Speaker 3** [00:06:05] a crime that is having

**Speaker 4** [00:06:08] literally a dime bag

**Speaker 3** [00:06:10] of marijuana cannabis in your pocket.

**Speaker 4** [00:06:12] And when you said don't run

**Speaker 3** [00:06:14] and so losing my uncle to police at a very early age who was a father figure to me when he told a narrative about who belongs, who doesn't belong in the area where Yale's on one block. We have police officers protecting our students

**Speaker 4** [00:06:31] on another block and who

**Speaker 3** [00:06:32] serves us. And what is the life and precious life of black or brown folks living in this city? And it really drew a context for me living with all of that. I've experienced lived welfare, like many

**Speaker 4** [00:06:46] folks, Child Protective

**Speaker 3** [00:06:47] Services, foster care. Luckily, I've had folks who loved me and I say that because we cannot have a discussion about social work ever without tying in love. None of us are here because we just kicked ourselves out of the room and really began to tackle life. We were here because someone took the time to love us, and as we do our work, we cannot forget and be jaded because of the lack of progress thereof, our own trauma, showing up and not forgetting about the core essence of love

**Speaker 4** [00:07:21] that really is the sound five

**Speaker 3** [00:07:23] version of this work. And I equate that to beautiful music

**Speaker 4** [00:07:27] such as John Coltrane.

**Speaker 3** [00:07:29] Now we're talking about, we're talking. We think of a love supreme, which he recorded here in New Jersey, in Inglewood police, by the way. So when you come down,

**Speaker 4** [00:07:39] I'll take you there.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:40] Listeners beware, we have to call trade fans on the podcast.

**Speaker 3** [00:07:45] Absolutely. And listen closely

**Speaker 4** [00:07:46] because something could be said about how

**Speaker 3** [00:07:49] music truly changes more in our society. No social

**Speaker 4** [00:07:53] structure than

**Speaker 3** [00:07:55] just social work itself and the publication publications you pop out. That may be a total of six people who read it at. One may be

**Speaker 4** [00:08:01] your mama, so

**Speaker 3** [00:08:02] maybe all five people in the population. So we have to draw that into context. So when I talk about my life and my experiences of what I've lived through, it's because I want to normalize that you can be

**Speaker 4** [00:08:14] not only an academic, could be a practitioner, you could be someone who makes

**Speaker 3** [00:08:19] true impact in a profession and not have to hide or feel ashamed of talking about

**Speaker 4** [00:08:24] how your own work,

**Speaker 3** [00:08:26] your own past and the work that you're contributing really informs the work from that perspective as a credible messenger that more and more

**Speaker 4** [00:08:34] now social

**Speaker 3** [00:08:35] workers are having this lived experience, and we have to embrace that in our curriculum, begin to infuse that into the field, have more discussions and not just about transference as a dirty word, but so often we think about counter transference and transference as things that inhibit our work rather than how does it inform us? What is the message in there that teaches us more about

**Speaker 4** [00:08:56] ourselves and that

**Speaker 3** [00:08:58] we have to adapt and adopt philosophy and the

**Speaker 4** [00:09:01] truth that an

**Speaker 3** [00:09:02] unexamined life is not worth living?

**Speaker 4** [00:09:05] Plato mentioned We should really

**Speaker 3** [00:09:06] just get that tattooed somewhere like a part of our part of our graduation process and be like a collective tattooing

**Speaker 4** [00:09:13] ceremony that we continuously

**Speaker 3** [00:09:15] have to look at

**Speaker 4** [00:09:16] ourselves. With this insightful manner and

**Speaker 3** [00:09:19] possibly examining ourselves in this work because it's something that we should not bracket out, we have to bracket it in. Yeah. So, you know, that's where I really draw all of the work. That interest is within that context, what it means to

**Speaker 4** [00:09:33] be an

**Speaker 3** [00:09:34] ex cisgender male who lives in a racialized black body. What it means to live in all of those hyphens as an immigrant, you know, Panamanian American who lives in a racialized black body. So that's really where we start from here, Peter.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:51] Yeah, I mean, so

**Speaker 4** [00:09:52] much of what I think people

**Speaker 2** [00:09:53] like you and me do, we stand in front of students and we, you know,

**Speaker 4** [00:09:57] we talk about the person

**Speaker 2** [00:09:58] in an environment. That is, you know, the hallmark of social work and you know, how an individual was influenced by their community and by their environment and then vice versa.

**Speaker 4** [00:10:11] All of that just came

**Speaker 2** [00:10:12] to life in your story. And you also said about 20 interesting things there.

**Speaker 4** [00:10:17] But the one

**Speaker 2** [00:10:18] thing that just stopped me in my tracks was this credible messenger term. Can you say a tiny bit more about that?

**Speaker 4** [00:10:24] Or maybe a

**Speaker 3** [00:10:25] lot more that's going to that? Yeah.

**Speaker 4** [00:10:27] Absolutely. So the term

**Speaker 3** [00:10:28] credible messenger is really one that

**Speaker 4** [00:10:31] was sort of birth

**Speaker 3** [00:10:32] in the work of violence interruption. So violence interruption is really a model or a process

**Speaker 4** [00:10:39] in which communities

**Speaker 3** [00:10:40] are now adopting more as how we engage individuals in our community with lived experiences

**Speaker 4** [00:10:47] and

**Speaker 3** [00:10:48] utilize their lived experiences to create change and to teach others about the work so that you not only

**Speaker 4** [00:10:58] are, for example,

**Speaker 3** [00:11:00] if you're working in the community, why aren't we engaging not just former gang members or current gang members into the dialog? A discussion of what safety looks like. How often are we doing that with? Very rarely we talk about gun violence or violence by community, as if only clergy, policy makers, social workers and police police are in that same small microcosm a bubble.

**Speaker 4** [00:11:26] And what about

**Speaker 3** [00:11:26] the folks who are currently actively involved? They want peace as well. They want to be involved in peace. You know, most recently, over the summer, I was at Brownsville, Brooklyn, and I was invited to speak to a group of quipped justice involved folks

**Speaker 4** [00:11:41] Crips gang members. And they said,

**Speaker 3** [00:11:43] Sure, you would come by, you could buy on our block, you pull up to our block and you could talk to us where

**Speaker 4** [00:11:48] we are. And I said, of course,

**Speaker 3** [00:11:50] each home field advantage. Yeah, of course. I'll beat you where you are. And it was the same

**Speaker 4** [00:11:55] area where they

**Speaker 3** [00:11:56] held their business, the same area, you know, which they live.

**Speaker 4** [00:11:59] And the leader

**Speaker 3** [00:12:01] came to me and he said, You know, I don't want violence, senseless violence so much as anyone else. You know, these kids out here are killing each other 15, 14

**Speaker 4** [00:12:08] years old, shooting

**Speaker 3** [00:12:09] each other over an Instagram post. And you know, look right here, why that's where my mother lives. I look down three doors down. I saw my baby motherless. And if you keep looking right down the street, that's where my aunt lives. So when we think about what I want to see in my community change, how do we engage them into what safety looks like? And not just saying you're not part of the conversation because of your history or because of what you are

**Speaker 4** [00:12:34] currently doing, you're

**Speaker 3** [00:12:35] excluded

**Speaker 4** [00:12:36] from that dialog. So engage

**Speaker 3** [00:12:37] in credible messengers are basically saying individuals who have lived experiences that are credible to the community they are speaking with based on their lived

**Speaker 4** [00:12:46] experiences and pushing

**Speaker 3** [00:12:48] forward the message of

**Speaker 4** [00:12:50] change that our

**Speaker 3** [00:12:52] community has to be called designers of changing the future

**Speaker 4** [00:12:56] we want to see. So when

**Speaker 3** [00:12:57] we think about futures thinking and future

**Speaker 4** [00:12:59] is in

**Speaker 3** [00:13:00] essence at the core core construct. And can we have folks be able to forecast, foreshadow and create different narratives of the communities they live in and how they co-design that future so that that future is a co-design is a design for that.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:18] You know, I'm listening to you and I'm thinking I actually grew up in a working class section of Buffalo. I now think I know what a credible

**Speaker 4** [00:13:27] messenger is because

**Speaker 2** [00:13:28] the credible messengers in my

**Speaker 4** [00:13:30] neighborhood were

**Speaker 2** [00:13:32] the police Athletic League Baseball coach, the guy who ran the basketball

**Speaker 4** [00:13:37] program and the guy who

**Speaker 2** [00:13:38] ran the

**Speaker 4** [00:13:39] neighborhood house, who

**Speaker 2** [00:13:41] would get us into places or to keep us out of trouble. And we had no idea they were looking after us. We looked up to them. We were more worried about them often than we worried about the reaction of our parents.

**Speaker 3** [00:13:52] I think I got it exactly. And what you probably did not know is some of the police coaches,

**Speaker 4** [00:13:57] basketball coaches and the folks who are

**Speaker 3** [00:13:59] giving back in that manner.

**Speaker 4** [00:14:00] The community also had their

**Speaker 3** [00:14:02] own checkered past.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:03] Oh, they were very clear about that.



**Speaker 3** [00:14:05] Yeah, yeah. It's very clear, like I was part of their charm. Yeah, right. It's part of what we call Spanish, the SASO and a little bit of

**Speaker 4** [00:14:14] seasoning that they bring it to their personality.

**Speaker 3** [00:14:16] So like, if we don't and this is what in social work practice and in our profession, how many of us write with credible messengers? How many was published with them? Many of us

**Speaker 4** [00:14:28] really not only

**Speaker 3** [00:14:29] hear their voices and then use it for our own publications and not include them. Why aren't we included them in the publication piece as well?

**Speaker 4** [00:14:38] Why are we

**Speaker 3** [00:14:39] not included in the research piece as being the pie and not just the collaborator or the community sponsor?

**Speaker 4** [00:14:47] This is, we're now moving a little bit

**Speaker 3** [00:14:49] more to my

**Speaker 4** [00:14:50] work. Yeah, I'm going to

**Speaker 2** [00:14:50] ask you about that. But if you want to go

**Speaker 4** [00:14:52] there, go. I'll try

**Speaker 3** [00:14:53] that. It's one of the projects

**Speaker 4** [00:14:55] that we've worked on over

**Speaker 3** [00:14:56] the summer and

**Speaker 4** [00:14:57] also this fall. Creating a social

**Speaker 3** [00:15:00] justice in action certificate program out of Seton Hall University. And this program was unique and innovative

**Speaker 4** [00:15:07] about it was that we

**Speaker 3** [00:15:08] collaborated with Howard University, Yale University, which I go into in a minute. Shout out to my colleague and friend Ijeoma Opower,

**Speaker 4** [00:15:17] who I love out of Yale.

**Speaker 3** [00:15:19] We collaborated with the city of Newark, the city of software, which is primarily a suburban town that is neighboring

**Speaker 4** [00:15:25] the city of Newark. That's a pretty

**Speaker 2** [00:15:27] affluent suburb

**Speaker 3** [00:15:28] is there is a pretty affluent, you know, kind of. And I'm going to go into that. Why that's important to engage them in this conversation of social justice in action, because this certificate program

**Speaker 4** [00:15:41] is structured to

**Speaker 3** [00:15:43] provide education to credible messengers in the community in order for them to adapt and adapt the skill

**Speaker 4** [00:15:50] sets needed in order

**Speaker 3** [00:15:52] to create the programs and interventions that they want to see on their block that could create change

**Speaker 4** [00:15:58] tomorrow.

**Speaker 3** [00:15:59] So whether it's mutual aid, whether it's one program that was created, it's phenomenal, was met here at the gate, which where they were providing basic care

**Speaker 4** [00:16:08] packages for women who were recently

**Speaker 3** [00:16:10] released from incarceration. And that program took off

**Speaker 4** [00:16:13] the next day of

**Speaker 3** [00:16:15] those finished programs that we could get folks to work immediately. We're not. It's not taking 12 years to wait for its evidence base to get it started. Now we use the resources from suburban communities to support urban ideas in order to partner

**Speaker 4** [00:16:30] together and create

**Speaker 3** [00:16:32] immediate programs by credible messengers for folks to receive these type of mutual aid immediately

**Speaker 4** [00:16:40] by giving

**Speaker 3** [00:16:41] them the resources

**Speaker 4** [00:16:42] and knowledge necessary to do it. I also want to

**Speaker 3** [00:16:45] shout out until

**Speaker 4** [00:16:46] freedom my sister

**Speaker 3** [00:16:47] and colleague and research partner, Dr. Jamila Davis. If you don't know who she is, I highly, highly

**Speaker 4** [00:16:54] recommend that you google her ability.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:56] Davis spent 12

**Speaker 4** [00:16:57] years in incarcerated

**Speaker 3** [00:16:59] system after she was arrested for bank fraud after they brought down Lehman Brothers. She was one of the four persons who took a lot of the most time out of everyone. Yeah, of course. A Black woman who was taught by them how to create bank fraud was the one who did the most time. They dedicated

**Speaker 4** [00:17:17] her life now into

**Speaker 3** [00:17:19] social action, social change, and I'm proud to say that she was able

**Speaker 4** [00:17:22] to obtain her associates

**Speaker 3** [00:17:25] bachelors, masters and doctorate or in prison or her doctorate. She obtained it right after prison, after her conservation stint, and now what she has is the

**Speaker 4** [00:17:35] community practitioner

**Speaker 3** [00:17:36] in residence at See and Hall

**Speaker 4** [00:17:38] University.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:39] We work together on this project of creating a social justice, an action program.

**Speaker 4** [00:17:43] And we've provided training to folks in the community. Whether you were active

**Speaker 3** [00:17:48] gang member,

**Speaker 4** [00:17:49] whether you were a

**Speaker 3** [00:17:51] community resident, someone who

**Speaker 4** [00:17:53] works there, clergy,

**Speaker 3** [00:17:55] police all like this. We all collaborated together and came up with various interventions and

**Speaker 4** [00:18:01] programs that are now being

**Speaker 3** [00:18:03] implemented out of the city of Newark and South Orange, which is an affluent community collaboratively to be able to solve the problems today.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:13] Dr. Davis sounds like a credible messenger.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:16] Beyond that, she's like, the messenger

**Speaker 4** [00:18:18] whisperer is beyond that. Yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:20] So, OK, you kind of address this, but I'm

**Speaker 4** [00:18:23] going to see if I can

**Speaker 2** [00:18:24] encourage you to be even more explicit than you've

**Speaker 4** [00:18:27] already in describing your work. So how about if I asked you this?

**Speaker 2** [00:18:31] What are you really trying to promote and why are you taking this very deliberate kind of approach?

**Speaker 4** [00:18:39] Yeah, yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:40] So I can't go into that without being able to first recognize those who have influenced me in the work and how I'm doing this work. So a big shout out to Adrian Marie Brown in her merger strategies.

**Speaker 4** [00:18:52] If you haven't read that book, I highly recommend you read. I shout out my mentor, colleague Dr. Teena Massie

**Speaker 3** [00:18:58] out of Fordham University, who's really constructed what is called caring justice

**Speaker 4** [00:19:04] as a term

**Speaker 2** [00:19:06] caring

**Speaker 4** [00:19:06] justice.

**Speaker 3** [00:19:07] Caring justice. Absolutely.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:09] OK, we got to come back to that one, too, OK?

**Speaker 3** [00:19:12] Definitely said we definitely have to shout out to Tina Massey

**Speaker 4** [00:19:15] and design

**Speaker 3** [00:19:16] justice as a framework. Another sort of modality in which I operate from. And lastly, liberation health model. And we're really thinking

**Speaker 4** [00:19:25] about the Oakland Martinez

**Speaker 3** [00:19:27] and the work that they're doing out of Boston University. And how does that all sort of intersect utilizing a futures framework of futures thinking framework? And what of our social worker as Dr. Laura Nissen, the Portland State University? Phenomenal. Phenomenal person. Another mentor of mine. What sort of intersecting all of those models is where something what we have created in South Orange is called community care and justice, in which we're

**Speaker 4** [00:19:55] emphasizing how we

**Speaker 3** [00:19:57] empower community.

**Speaker 4** [00:19:58] Remembers to be able

**Speaker 3** [00:20:00] to one, build compassionate strategies within

**Speaker 4** [00:20:03] themselves, but starting in her personally,

**Speaker 3** [00:20:06] and then moving into

**Speaker 4** [00:20:09] all the other, deconstructing

**Speaker 3** [00:20:11] the system that exists in

**Speaker 4** [00:20:12] our society of oppression

**Speaker 3** [00:20:14] models, whether it's patriarchy, imperialism, white

**Speaker 4** [00:20:18] supremacy, all of those things

**Speaker 3** [00:20:20] that exist in our

**Speaker 4** [00:20:20] society that inform our neighborhoods

**Speaker 3** [00:20:26] that we create these emergent strategies

**Speaker 4** [00:20:28] by changing the small

**Speaker 3** [00:20:29] micro moments that we interact with one another. And then we work our way out to our neighbors, to our law enforcement, police systems and

**Speaker 4** [00:20:37] municipalities, to our bordering

**Speaker 3** [00:20:39] towns, to our visitors that come in and working using sort of that working in and out and out

**Speaker 4** [00:20:46] and about building

**Speaker 3** [00:20:47] compassion, building

**Speaker 4** [00:20:49] care, building empathy, building trust in our communities. And that's trust

**Speaker 3** [00:20:54] starts by being honest about our community history, whether we're talking about redlining or whether we're talking about black codes

**Speaker 4** [00:21:02] or whether we're talking about various

**Speaker 3** [00:21:04] structures that have existed prior to us being there. So what are we doing now to be able to create a more just and caring and compassionate society on my block, on my neighborhood and in my city? And that should always be the discussion of every policy, every research and every community intervention that we create.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:26] All right. So I don't know how far we

**Speaker 4** [00:21:28] are in year one.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:29] I can tell you in no uncertain terms, I now understand the practitioner scholar in action. All right. How about this? I know that a part of your

**Speaker 4** [00:21:42] work in Newark

**Speaker 2** [00:21:43] involves working with

**Speaker 4** [00:21:45] the land minded issue of policing

**Speaker 2** [00:21:49] and particularly, I believe you're collaborating. And I'm sure you know that even the social work profession, you know, the opinions about whether or not that's a good

**Speaker 4** [00:21:59] idea is divergent and the whole

**Speaker 2** [00:22:02] defund the police thing. Can you talk about what you're doing there and what you're really trying to do there?

**Speaker 3** [00:22:12] Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

**Speaker 4** [00:22:14] So I'm going to talk

**Speaker 3** [00:22:14] about it from two contexts one from the city of Newark and also from the township of South Orange Village, which is the neighboring

**Speaker 4** [00:22:20] city. It's a tale of two

**Speaker 3** [00:22:22] cities literally, figuratively and every aspect.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:25] Pulitzer Prize surprise,

**Speaker 3** [00:22:27] surprise, surprise. But I worked with both communities, and I'm going to tell you why that's important, that we cannot leave suburban communities out of it as we currently work with urban communities. Because when we have this conversation about what is community policing, what is modern policing. I actually think that community policing is old hat. That isn't something to do. I mean, we talk about committed police.

**Speaker 4** [00:22:50] This is what it is.

**Speaker 3** [00:22:51] Think about that. We talk about that now and it's a

**Speaker 4** [00:22:53] hot topic, but it's been around

**Speaker 3** [00:22:55] for quite some time. But rather, what we should be reframing is how does each community define safety and how do we use that as a focal point? And to what is it that we can intervene and implement in order for the community to feel what safety is

like for them? How do we build community? OK, so first, I want to start off with Southbridge because it's important

**Speaker 4** [00:23:21] to note that South Orange is

**Speaker 3** [00:23:22] the affluent community diverse and racially diverse community class not so diverse. Very, very affluent. A lot of them call it baby Broadway, baby Brooklyn. That's a

**Speaker 4** [00:23:36] new name. But because a

**Speaker 3** [00:23:38] lot of the folks that transplant from living in Park Slope or something, they buy their houses in South

**Speaker 4** [00:23:43] Orange and a great majority of individuals who live, who rather work

**Speaker 3** [00:23:47] on Broadway Live, it's outdoor.

**Speaker 4** [00:23:49] OK. Where do the police live?

**Speaker 2** [00:23:50] Do you know where the police live?

**Speaker 3** [00:23:52] Well, there's a requirement that police officers have to live in the town. OK. Yeah, majority of them do live in South Orange or some area close by. But that's an interesting point because we could get into that as well.

**Speaker 4** [00:24:04] What a

**Speaker 3** [00:24:04] majority of the folks who work on Broadway live

**Speaker 4** [00:24:06] in supports. That's very

**Speaker 3** [00:24:07] interesting. It is very huge, an arts, very big body promoting culture. But how does that translate into practice? You know, South Orange has a motto in which you say, everybody belongs OK. And what we say to that is, how are we doing and living out our law sides? It's not just a cool lawn sign that you put in a suburb to. Everybody belongs Black Lives matters. How does the community put that into practice and not just a yellow paint in the middle of the street because the same people who will be marching along with you are the same individuals will be become the cops saying that the loud music is playing and there's a bunch of black and brown kids in the center of our town playing loud

**Speaker 4** [00:24:53] music, and we should

**Speaker 3** [00:24:54] call the police so that they could disrupt this group of six of. Individuals playing music in the middle of the village. The same individuals who are calling the police when there is a suspected person at 3:00 in the afternoon walking through your neighborhood who you haven't seen before, particularly with a black or brown to a lot of the community care, a justice is saying.

**Speaker 4** [00:25:15] When we define community care, we

**Speaker 3** [00:25:18] define what it's like to work within ourselves about our own stuff, our own biases, our own issues of

**Speaker 4** [00:25:27] isms, our own

**Speaker 3** [00:25:29] discomfort around blackness, whether it's about too much loud music or too many black people in the store. You know what I'm talking about being a you know what I'm talking about?

**Speaker 4** [00:25:39] You know, you live in Buffalo. These issues are not unilateral.

**Speaker 3** [00:25:43] Only just exist in South Orange is it exists of every suburban community, OK? That's how redlining was created with the proximity and the nature of how many

**Speaker 4** [00:25:52] folks of color are living in that community. Redlining wasn't just about, you know, whether

**Speaker 3** [00:25:57] you were black or white. It was also quantify how many

**Speaker 4** [00:25:59] Polish folks immigrated.

**Speaker 3** [00:26:00] The community

**Speaker 4** [00:26:01] defined the level, whether

**Speaker 3** [00:26:03] it was a green, yellow or red community.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:05] Thank you for throwing the Polish folks. And by the way, thank you.

**Speaker 3** [00:26:09] Shout out to my oldest brother.

**Speaker 4** [00:26:12] Absolutely.

**Speaker 3** [00:26:13] Absolutely. And another great sex to read right is before the Irish were white, and that in itself right itself is it's ever moving target as far as what

**Speaker 4** [00:26:22] whiteness is

**Speaker 3** [00:26:23] and how it has contributed

**Speaker 4** [00:26:24] into the various structures

**Speaker 3** [00:26:26] that exist, who was considered

**Speaker 4** [00:26:28] white or not. But that's another

**Speaker 3** [00:26:29] podcast for another day.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:30] That's a that's a part of the fabric of Buffalo, New York, by the way.



**Speaker 3** [00:26:33] Interesting. I know very little about Buffalo, so that's actually yeah. Well, way I don't want to hijack your picture.

**Speaker 4** [00:26:40] This is

**Speaker 3** [00:26:40] collaborative. We're having great calls.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:42] OK, good. Yeah. All right. You know what? I was just going to say here, you know,

**Speaker 4** [00:26:45] our way of doing what you're

**Speaker 2** [00:26:47] talking

**Speaker 4** [00:26:47] about is Buffalo

**Speaker 2** [00:26:49] is an incredibly diverse place, which is ostensibly a good thing. We are an incredibly segregated place. Not surprising. And we have two enclaves that

**Speaker 4** [00:27:00] remain in the city proper that are

**Speaker 2** [00:27:03] the exclusive domain of Irish immigrants. And I don't know how to say this other than the crude way that I'm going to say it is that

**Speaker 4** [00:27:12] apparently Irish

**Speaker 2** [00:27:13] people were barely above the contempt that were held from black people.

**Speaker 3** [00:27:20] Right, exactly.

**Speaker 4** [00:27:22] And they were pretty white. Yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:24] It's just like there's a hierarchy, right? Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:27:26] Yeah, yeah. I don't know. Absolutely. And I think our our listeners and you know, whether a young person is social workers out there listening that it's important when we think about social work that we have to have to recognize and understand our history of social political.

**Speaker 4** [00:27:40] One social work is

**Speaker 3** [00:27:41] a quintessential transdisciplinary feel that it's not just staying dug in into our own discipline and feels it's going to be a private

**Speaker 4** [00:27:50] practice. I'm going to be a researcher, and that's one of a study.

**Speaker 3** [00:27:53] You have to understand the community context from which

**Speaker 4** [00:27:56] you work and its history and its trauma.

**Speaker 3** [00:27:58] And so we're talking about so whether we're talking about Buffalo, Detroit, New Haven, Jersey City or Newark. You must, must, must create as much closeness to the history to the people and integrate them into all of the work that you're doing. Because if you're not, what you're doing is you're doing a disservice to the folks that you're serving and now you're operating for a single narrative. And we know the dangers of the single narrative, right? We know what happens there. So that's a little commercial break for us. But being able to go back into why is that important to engage South Orange? Is that 75 percent of

**Speaker 4** [00:28:33] New Jersey looks more like South Orange than the

**Speaker 3** [00:28:35] city of Paterson, the city of Newark, New Jersey

**Speaker 4** [00:28:38] City.

**Speaker 3** [00:28:38] Camden looks more like South Orange City, like New York City, New York State, rather right the state of New York. It's not

**Speaker 4** [00:28:45] just, you know, the

**Speaker 3** [00:28:46] heights Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx. We have Buffalo,

**Speaker 4** [00:28:50] you have Syracuse,

**Speaker 3** [00:28:54] Rochester and you can go on and on and that we have to understand that community context. But also these affluent communities have to be engaged in this conversation because when they have these neighboring cities and you say everybody belongs and you have young, black and brown folks going into the neighboring cities to be exposed to art, to be exposed to a John Coltrane. And how are they being welcomed? How are they being embraced when you say, Okay, well, you know, we have jazz in the village today in the

**Speaker 4** [00:29:25] center and we say,

**Speaker 3** [00:29:26] come on over black and brown folks from Newark and I. Whoa, it's a little uncomfortable because

**Speaker 4** [00:29:32] it's now 80 percent of that. We have a

**Speaker 3** [00:29:34] quota as to how much we're comfortable with. Right? Is that comfortability quota that exists? And unless we work with these communities and engage them collaboratively and very, very open and honest dialog discussions and edge preventions together that we're working together in action, right? Social justice in action as the key piece there that what we walk away from this program, you have a capstone that exist together to design to change that. We're not waiting for policymakers to do it and we're not waiting for the police to define that.

**Speaker 4** [00:30:10] So when we think

**Speaker 3** [00:30:11] about going back to your original

**Speaker 4** [00:30:12] question is how is

**Speaker 3** [00:30:14] the police and communities

**Speaker 4** [00:30:16] being how we

**Speaker 3** [00:30:17] collaborate together in on this? It's truly about first have the conversation to be able to gauge the community

**Speaker 4** [00:30:24] aid programs like this so that as we think

**Speaker 3** [00:30:27] about safety, we're informing our attorney generals what safeties to look like for us. We're informing our chief of police, the lieutenants, the sergeants and the patrol officers to engage in these conversations as well together. It doesn't stop the monolith, which is

**Speaker 4** [00:30:46] the police structure for being what it

**Speaker 3** [00:30:48] is.

**Speaker 4** [00:30:49] OK, so a lot of folks

**Speaker 3** [00:30:50] are like, Well, why are you working to get the police and you know, the police to be structured around slave patrols? You know, it's white supremacy, white supremacy, and you keep moving on.

**Speaker 4** [00:31:01] Think about what

**Speaker 3** [00:31:01] Tammany has done in the city of

**Speaker 4** [00:31:03] New York, and you go on and on

**Speaker 3** [00:31:05] and moving right down to my

**Speaker 4** [00:31:06] own uncle

**Speaker 3** [00:31:08] who was shot and killed by a police officer my

**Speaker 4** [00:31:11] own. You also have experience

**Speaker 3** [00:31:12] in on that. And my fear of police officers being, I know what it's like to have my head put on the hood of a car. I know what it's like to sit on a curb with my hands tied because I look like a suspect. I know what that feels like. And what I'm saying here is that there are specific structures that we may not be able to

**Speaker 4** [00:31:30] change today, but we have

**Speaker 3** [00:31:31] to move

**Speaker 4** [00:31:32] towards, as we say, in

**Speaker 3** [00:31:33] Spanish, Upwork or why. What is the why in which we're moving towards X direction? Because we want safety to look like this for us here in Newark and say to you, look like us for us here in South Orange

**Speaker 4** [00:31:48] and us here in Detroit

**Speaker 3** [00:31:50] and us here in Rochester and us here in Buffalo. And we have to be able to hold our law enforcement officers not only in accountability, but in collaboration because they are also, you know, so often this is what we don't do in these projects. Let me tell you, Peter, what we are not

**Speaker 4** [00:32:09] doing here, what we're not doing is coffee with a cop or cole over the

**Speaker 3** [00:32:12] top of your kid. Yeah, you see that all the time. It's okay. You know, community work and

**Speaker 4** [00:32:18] policing is let's have a cup of

**Speaker 3** [00:32:19] coffee and chat. Okay, so you

**Speaker 4** [00:32:22] see there, you see the same

**Speaker 3** [00:32:23] cop that you seen last year is usually either a woman cop,

**Speaker 4** [00:32:28] police officer or a

**Speaker 3** [00:32:29] black or brown police

**Speaker 4** [00:32:30] officer. But you don't often see the cops

**Speaker 3** [00:32:33] who need to

**Speaker 4** [00:32:34] be. There are the ones who

**Speaker 3** [00:32:35] are never there and very rarely does that information that happens at these meetings on a precinct level

**Speaker 4** [00:32:41] for information to others. So part of this

**Speaker 3** [00:32:43] Community Care and

**Speaker 4** [00:32:44] Justice initiative is that

**Speaker 3** [00:32:45] we're working from the top social workers. Structural changes. Education policy changes are

**Speaker 4** [00:32:53] happening with the

**Speaker 3** [00:32:55] mayor and the chief because it starts with the chief because he owes the other officers accountable. You know, we can't stop what's happening at the training academy. That's the reality. The training academy is

**Speaker 4** [00:33:06] defined by what the

**Speaker 3** [00:33:07] attorney general says of your state. What should be included

**Speaker 4** [00:33:10] in on that? So what we need to focus

**Speaker 3** [00:33:12] in on, how do we vote the right person into that

**Speaker 4** [00:33:15] position that

**Speaker 3** [00:33:16] can implement the

**Speaker 4** [00:33:18] training at the police

**Speaker 3** [00:33:20] academy level? That includes more mental health

**Speaker 4** [00:33:23] training, you know, that's

**Speaker 3** [00:33:24] just one slide and one PowerPoint.

**Speaker 4** [00:33:27] That includes resiliency

**Speaker 3** [00:33:28] training for their own wellness. That includes how do we

**Speaker 4** [00:33:32] appropriately look at implicit

**Speaker 3** [00:33:35] bias and et cetera, et cetera, et

**Speaker 4** [00:33:36] cetera. Right? So the

**Speaker 3** [00:33:38] difference here in this program that what

**Speaker 4** [00:33:39] we've done in most programs is that there is an embedded

**Speaker 3** [00:33:43] creative position on a municipal

**Speaker 4** [00:33:44] level, which is the community

**Speaker 3** [00:33:46] care and justice director that works on that level within the

**Speaker 4** [00:33:50] municipality next

**Speaker 3** [00:33:52] to the chief so that they're also working on both ends, educating the

**Speaker 4** [00:33:56] community that seeing, you

**Speaker 3** [00:33:58] know, black and brown kids playing music

**Speaker 4** [00:34:00] is not a call to the police and also

**Speaker 3** [00:34:02] a worker of police officers, in essence saying that, well, how was it you're driving in your car for 12 hours during your shift and never getting out is not community

**Speaker 4** [00:34:12] policing. You just showing

**Speaker 3** [00:34:13] up for coffee with a cop is not community

**Speaker 4** [00:34:15] policing, it's not community

**Speaker 3** [00:34:17] engagement. It's not having those relationships. How do we embed more compassion empathy within police

**Speaker 4** [00:34:23] culture, which is

**Speaker 3** [00:34:24] very

**Speaker 4** [00:34:24] hard to penetrate unless

**Speaker 3** [00:34:26] you

**Speaker 4** [00:34:26] have those credible best

**Speaker 3** [00:34:28] teachers within the

**Speaker 4** [00:34:29] precinct? And that's super important here. Let's stop talking about the beat cop. Let's stop talking about that person. It's about

**Speaker 3** [00:34:36] these lieutenants and these police chiefs that I position that are not embedding the importance of more of these engagements on a cultural

**Speaker 4** [00:34:45] practice level.

**Speaker 3** [00:34:46] They're calling each other out and hold each other accountable when this happens.

**Speaker 2** [00:34:51] Absolutely. Absolutely. So how about if I ask you this? But this goes back to the beginning when you talked to. Yourself as a futurist now, I have a pretty good idea about what kind

**Speaker 4** [00:35:01] of future you would like to

**Speaker 2** [00:35:03] see, but I kind of looked you up before we before we had this

**Speaker 4** [00:35:07] conversation.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:08] And I know you are involved with the project where you're using virtual reality to promote social justice. Absolutely. Would you would you be willing to kind of just say what? You're up to them?

**Speaker 3** [00:35:22] Yeah, sure. Of course.

**Speaker 4** [00:35:24] I would love to again shout out

**Speaker 3** [00:35:26] to Laura Nissen and all of my colleagues at

**Speaker 4** [00:35:29] the social work

**Speaker 3** [00:35:31] health futures lab who've really helped me through a lot of this push and

**Speaker 4** [00:35:37] pull about futurism itself. And I just

**Speaker 3** [00:35:39] want to draw a little bit of a

**Speaker 4** [00:35:41] reframe. I consider myself.

**Speaker 3** [00:35:42] Yes, a future

**Speaker 4** [00:35:43] is one morsel

**Speaker 3** [00:35:44] of futurist, thinker, social work, futurist,

**Speaker 4** [00:35:47] thinker, and I'm adopting

**Speaker 3** [00:35:49] all of that title within

**Speaker 4** [00:35:50] itself because

**Speaker 3** [00:35:51] of my identities

**Speaker 4** [00:35:53] being a racialized

**Speaker 3** [00:35:55] black afro Latin X cisgender male all play a role into, well, how could I be more neurodivergent into the future? We really think about and create that it should not just be about my future, right? It's about our future. And who are we not including in that conversation. So we think about future thinking it's being able to create also multiple possible futures and scenarios

**Speaker 4** [00:36:22] through collaborative

**Speaker 3** [00:36:23] world

**Speaker 4** [00:36:24] building. What does a

**Speaker 3** [00:36:25] world look like if there were no police officers? What does a world look like, if there were more? What does the world look like if we don't have social work as a profession? OK, we'll touch

**Speaker 4** [00:36:36] you with that one. No, I

**Speaker 2** [00:36:38] thought that was the goal.

**Speaker 4** [00:36:39] Well, is it? That's another podcast. One that is another

**Speaker 3** [00:36:42] podcast there, right? Even all universities, when we move to stop monetizing education and the way that we do and look at butts in

**Speaker 4** [00:36:53] seats as success, we need to move

**Speaker 3** [00:36:55] away from

**Speaker 4** [00:36:56] that right. We need to create Paidia.

**Speaker 3** [00:36:59] As Cornel West talks about PI data, which is what Greeks define as deep thinking in our profession and our field in our classroom, where we're getting our

**Speaker 4** [00:37:07] students to be deep

**Speaker 3** [00:37:09] thinkers and

**Speaker 4** [00:37:10] wrestling with these

**Speaker 3** [00:37:11] possible

**Speaker 4** [00:37:11] worlds that may exist

**Speaker 3** [00:37:13] to be able to create forecast simulation, radical optimism so that weird co-designing the future that we want to see that we want to live in rather OK, and that this Pi Day at this deep thinking has to be the priority of our social work

**Speaker 4** [00:37:28] education and not quantifying the ratio of

**Speaker 3** [00:37:31] student to faculty, not quantifying

**Speaker 4** [00:37:34] that. If we have

**Speaker 3** [00:37:35] to now cut

**Speaker 4** [00:37:36] this course because we only

**Speaker 3** [00:37:37] have seven students instead of 70, oh what? We've only graduated 1000 students this year, undergraduate proper social work.

**Speaker 4** [00:37:44] And last

**Speaker 3** [00:37:44] year we graduated one thousand

**Speaker 4** [00:37:46] five hundred. What's going

**Speaker 3** [00:37:47] wrong? What are we failing? Because what we

**Speaker 4** [00:37:50] do know is that although

**Speaker 3** [00:37:51] we're graduating more and more students that there's still a disproportionate rate of folks who are being licensed



**Speaker 4** [00:37:57] and passing this licensure right? Are we go back to

**Speaker 3** [00:38:01] testing black and brown students and poor students? But what we're teaching affluent students in schools of of the humanities and other small Ivy League institutions that may not have social work programs. If you go look at Yale, there is the social

**Speaker 4** [00:38:15] program that exists with a public health policy is geared

**Speaker 3** [00:38:18] towards integrating more of a social work perspective. The most social work schools, I will argue. But yet we hold that as the gold

**Speaker 4** [00:38:25] standard of our

**Speaker 3** [00:38:26] profession when they need to learn more from us than we from them. But the problem is, is that we're constantly within a profession have this imposter syndrome that exist. We postulated kids psychology, sociology, criminal justice even, and we look at ourselves as coleslaw rather than meals. Right. We're not coleslaw. We're not. We're not circled back to what you're saying here about futures

**Speaker 4** [00:38:52] thinking and how is

**Speaker 3** [00:38:53] that virtual reality embedded in my work is that I'm not just exposing it in the classroom, I'm exposing it on a local level on the block with justice, involve youth active gang members and using virtual reality so that we could use it as a

**Speaker 4** [00:39:07] tool to

**Speaker 3** [00:39:09] build more empathy and shout out to Courtney Cockburn in her work was a journey, which is phenomenal, phenomenal program, you know, deconstructing implicit biases that we

**Speaker 4** [00:39:19] have and

**Speaker 3** [00:39:20] using programs such

**Speaker 4** [00:39:21] as those on a practice

**Speaker 3** [00:39:22] level in places where they may not be exposed to emerging technology is part of the work of doing so that we could have more divergent conversations, both on a street

**Speaker 4** [00:39:33] level, but also

**Speaker 3** [00:39:34] with police officers. I've used the journey with law enforcement officers as well to have richer or deeper discussions

**Speaker 4** [00:39:42] about when you have

**Speaker 3** [00:39:43] your hand on your hip that that's abuse threatening because you have guns right there. And you may not even realize that until you're in that position, until you're on the ground

**Speaker 4** [00:39:51] with your knees up with your hands up rather. And even

**Speaker 3** [00:39:54] having that as a resting

**Speaker 4** [00:39:56] posture is one that. Elicits fear, even

**Speaker 3** [00:40:00] a luxury window he got pulled over for speeding or rolling down the

**Speaker 4** [00:40:04] stop sign and a cop knocks

**Speaker 3** [00:40:06] your door has his chin resting on his hip. What begins to elicit with you cinematically and what virtual reality does is rather than placing people in those situations, place them as close as possible so that we gain more insight recognizing what's happening within us

**Speaker 4** [00:40:20] and begin to have deeper

**Speaker 3** [00:40:22] self-awareness in order to cultivate change and thus cultivating practices and thus changing policy.

**Speaker 2** [00:40:30] Fantastic, Dr

**Speaker 4** [00:40:31] one rious thank you. It's been

**Speaker 2** [00:40:34] an absolute

**Speaker 4** [00:40:35] gas. We're going to

**Speaker 2** [00:40:36] have to run through our legal department to find out how many notes of a love supreme. We can play on the outro here before we get to it. So we'll get back

**Speaker 4** [00:40:44] to you on that.

**Speaker 2** [00:40:45] But thanks again, Juan. It was a pleasure.

**Speaker 3** [00:40:48] No problem. A love supreme. A love supreme. I'll start my stuff. All right. Thanks a lot. Yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:40:55] What is that? Like 40 minutes? And that's all you hear. That's all you ever hear.

**Speaker 3** [00:40:59] That's right. Each one is a different sort of different, though. So that's what I'm talking about there, Peter.

**Speaker 4** [00:41:05] I know we're done, but we're not.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:06] Nor not. Oh, OK. This is what I'm talking about saying. That word over and

**Speaker 4** [00:41:13] over

**Speaker 3** [00:41:14] is when we think about positive neuro linguistic reprogramming from a collective perspective. Mm hmm. Where's the love supreme in our society right now? What music are we listening to? Could we embed more into our work into our classrooms when we're repeating that? What is a love supreme

**Speaker 4** [00:41:34] mean to you? And when I drop this

**Speaker 3** [00:41:36] snare with that drum

**Speaker 4** [00:41:38] in that tone and it begins

**Speaker 3** [00:41:40] to move

**Speaker 4** [00:41:41] you, it makes you

**Speaker 3** [00:41:42] want a gorilla, right?

**Speaker 2** [00:41:44] Absolutely. All right. One. All right. Thanks again.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:47] Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:49] All right. Thanks again to the Juan Rios. And thanks to the folks who improvise and mindfully work to put our podcast together, our director and website through the always amusing Steve Sturman, our production assistant desk coordinator, recording and editing genius and content contributor Cate Bearss. I'm Peter Sobota. Missing Episode one to suggest the podcast. Why don't you give us some feedback on the things we've done? Want to comment on a specific episode? Go to [in social work dot org](http://in.social.work.org) and have at it. Check us out on Twitter and Facebook, too. Don't leave us out here wondering how it's going. See you next time, everybody.