



The Shared Mic is inspired, recorded, and produced on Treaty 6 Territory. Treaty 6 Territory is the traditional territory of the Plains Cree, Woodland Cree, Beaver Cree, Sauleaux, Blackfoot, Metis, Nakota Sioux and many others whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries. We are just beginning to understand the significance of the land and want to ensure we honour the people and place. Today, this land is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Eric:

Hi, I'm Eric.

Salima:

And I'm Salima. Welcome to another episode of The Shared Mic.

Eric:

Today, we've got a very interesting conversation between another "Eric" and Jesse. This other Eric is an International Diplomat and a Medical Scientist. And it's so easy to confuse the two of us. Me being an international man of mystery and him being an international diplomat. Jesse is an Actor, a Former Athlete, an Activist, and an Entrepreneur.

Salima:

And today, Jesse and Eric will be discussing negotiating change.

Jesse:

How are you Eric? Good to meet you!

Eric:

Okay. It's my pleasure. I've looked forward to this for some time.

Jesse:



Yeah, me as well. I know before we started recording--we, we just jumped right into it, which was good. I feel, like, that line of question probably would have gone down for quite a while yet. What was it you were asking.



Eric:

Yeah, I was asking you know, what horrible thing you had done in life that brought you to Edmonton?

Jesse:

Yeah, that's right. That's right. And I, and I, and I said--you know, it wasn't necessarily me. I am just a product of my ancestors. So I guess the horrible thing was probably trusting somebody when they offered that "free cruise" from West Africa in the 1800s that ended up my people in the States building a beautiful country. And then fleeing after Jim Crow, West and North into Alberta. You know, one of the 20-families that they let in before they closed the border and ended up in Amber Valley. So I'm a fourth generation Albertan. My kids are fifth generation Albertan and we've been here for some time.

Eric:

Yeah, but I found it interesting in our earlier conversation that some of the Moore family, which is my maternal ancestral line ended up here after having left Moore, Oklahoma after the civil war. When Oklahoma decided to not be so hospitable

Jesse:

Question for you. How far back can you trace where you're from?

Eric:

Well, my family has been at this for generations. I traveled extensively in Africa for several international organizations, as well as World Health Organization at Oxford University. And when I got to Ethiopia, I would walk down the street and people would come up thinking that I spoke Amharic. And the same thing happens to me here in Edmonton. I'll run into Ethiopians and they'll come up to me speaking Amharic and you know, it's, it's the large forehead. So we've gone back that far. And on my father's side it was definitely a Ghana area of West Africa.

Jesse:

Yeah. I've--I see, this is one of the things too, that I've always struggled with in that idea. You know, often people ask where I'm from then of course, you know, I'll say I'm from Edmonton, Canada, but then the, "where you from" aspect is, you know? I took a swab with my brother just to see where, but it's so generic. It's like somewhere in



West Africa, some East Asian and some, some German. I know that the Lipscombe plantation in North Carolina, there's two twins--Ned and Ted Lipscombe--that came over from Sussex Germany. I imagine that's where my last name's from, but, you know, it's interesting to not "know, know" where home was. And then at the same time be here in Edmonton, in Alberta. Where fighting for home, fighting for a place to have a safe place that I, that I can just live in and call my own while still trying to, I guess, like wrestle with the idea that the land I'm on still isn't even mine. It's such a--it's like a weird mess of homelessness, but still being at home, you know? Even talking about negotiations, and in general, this is--there's like an internal negotiation that I always struggle with as I strive to get what's equal in a white supremacist society. But that, that equality I'm striving for is still a part of an illegal operation, which still doesn't... there's just so many areas of this that just don't feel a hundred percent, right. It's very interesting.

Eric:

I came to grips with that as I traveled around the world and it's common to everyone. Canada, for example, is a nation of immigrants. And you know our people might've come as slaves to North America. But the Irish came as indentured servants. You know, they didn't call Caucasians slaves, but they lived a slaves life. And they were slaves and they had to work off their passage. So, but everybody has this--every, every cultural group has been conquered by someone at some time or another and lived in subjugation. It's just that some of those instances are further back than others. And ours might be a 400-year incident, but every cultural group has gone through that.

Jesse:

That's interesting that comparison because oftentimes you'll see the, "you know, Irish people were slaves too." And even, even yourself, you just mentioned, you know, indentured servants, they didn't call them slaves, but they were slaves, but they were able to work off their passage. Which I think is a huge difference in what we're talking about with the American slave trade. There was no working off anything. There's no knowing that it came from some certain place. You know, I don't, I--I always hesitate when I try to compare oppression. Because that's never a thing one should do.

But I--it's weird to say that the indentured servants of Ireland were subjugated to the same things that the African blacks were in the American slave trade. Because there was no working off the labor. That wasn't something that was able to happen nor were, you know, the idea that, you know, everyone has the same idea except for



many other cultures and races... Nowhere there from. You know, there wasn't a complete erasing of who they were in order to find. I don't have an option to say, "well, I know that I'm from Ireland, but now I came over here as an immigrant. I don't know where I came from. That was robbed from me."

Eric:

Oppression in that sense...and I'm going to go to my clinical background here. Oppression in that sense, it's very much like pain. The quality of all pain is the same. There may be massive quantitative differences, but a child with a thorn under his fingernail hurts just as much as a person lying in bed with cancer; there are quantitative differences, but the quality of all suffering is the same.

Jesse:

Yeah. I wholeheartedly agree with you on that note. And this is, that's why I always-- whenever there's this idea of comparing oppression--I'm like, "just hold on". Whatever hurts, hurts. You know? And that's a real thing. And sometimes it's that idea of dismissing someone's pain, 'cause you want yours to be a more pain or more important. And that's, that's often what happens in some of these struggles is fine too. It's we put ourselves at the center of it. I'm feeling "this it's about me" and, and sometimes lose sight of the, of the larger message. So I know I'm definitely on the same page with you there.

Eric:

No, but that's interesting. I may do this often in our conversation. I'll tell these little stories, but I wouldn't use them in lectures at Oxford to get points across. And I'm driving into the United States. I'm with my two of my sisters and we rarely saw each other as I was running around the world. We went to Myrtle beach and I'm actually on a--I've got meetings in Washington, DC--Because I'm on my way to an overseas assignment, but I wanted to take those few days and join my brother and sisters. So we're driving through Virginia and I'm driving at a very high rate of speed. And I eventually get pulled over by the state troopers. I did something that I learned afterwards that nobody does. I've been out of the United States for a little while. I got out of the car and walk back to the police cruisers vehicle.

Eric:

And I had some credentials with me and I showed them to him and he immediately rolled down his window. And he said, "well sir, you were going a little fast." And I said, "well, I gotta get to Washington DC." And he says, "well, you know what am I to do?"

And I said, "here's my driver's license. You do your job. You run through my driver's license in your computer and respond to whatever happened." So he does that. He's very surprised that what came back was a request that he enter his personal social security number. Because once he put my name in, the people wanted to know why I was being pulled over by a state trooper in Virginia. When I'm on duty for the executive branch of the United States government. And then I asked him the question I asked you, I said, "where are you from?"

Eric:

You know, "where are you going in your career?" I said, "I'd like to discuss what I'm doing, but of course I can't do that unless you want to put your social security number on that screen." And he said, "Well, is there anything else I can do for you?" And I said, "Yes, my nephew and niece are in the back of the SUV," and I said, "yeah, you could do me a favor." I said, "come up to the car and just talk to my nephew and niece. They'll be so surprised and stuff like that. They'll probably be quiet, the rest of the trip." And he said, and he said, "uh, rather than to do that," he said, you know, "at least they get along." He said, "when my family gets together, my nephews of me feels it's just fighting, fighting, fighting all the time." So I looked at him, I said, "okay, let me understand what just happened here. I ask you to give me help. And the help you give me is to tell me a story about the situation could be worse?" Yeah. So the point I'm making here, as we get into these situations, because you asked the question about what happens when you are having a conversation with your oppressor? Well, it's the nature of that conversation and you basically have to control it because here he took control of that conversation. By telling me a story that was worse than the one I'm telling him.

Jesse:

Yeah.

Eric:

We were off the subject of dealing with the situation that I have proposed to him.

Jesse:

So that's interesting because I--I fully hear what you're saying with that. However, my next question to follow up that is would you advise someone like myself. Six-Foot-Four, 260-pound, relatively muscular black man to get out of my car? When a state trooper pulls me over to try and control the situation?



Eric:

I still do it now, but that's just because, you know, they have this thing on my driver's license that says basically "do not detain...offer all lawful assistance." But no, but my suggestion would be that you not do that. Because after coming back to North America, after being out of the 25 years, a lot had changed. But that's what we're going to discuss here today. How do we negotiate that change? So you can get out of your car, go back to that state troopers car or that constable's car and say, "Look, I'm in a hurry."

Jesse:

Yeah, I hear you, Eric. It's funny. I just, yesterday was reading this. I'd love to know what your opinion is on it. 'Cause it struck home for me. It was a thing called "white proximity". This white proximity I read about yesterday.--it made a lot of sense too--is this idea that, you know, I, "I may have a lighter skin than someone, or I might have the accent or the language fluently of the language of said oppressor or of the white supremacy structure." Or I might have a job or I might have credentials that allow me to walk back to a state troopers car. And just having an understanding that, you know, 'cause I know for myself, I have, I have some white proximity privilege. Just based on where I grew up how I speak. A number of different things, Just that makes things a little bit more comfortable for people to deal with me differently than they might with someone with a very strong accent that dresses differently. But knowing that and trying not to make rules in a monolithic way.

That say, "Just cause I've been able to do it this way, then this is how we should do it." I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on this idea of white proximity and maybe even so on white privilege, if you don't mind sharing?

Eric:

Oh yeah. We've all had to deal with these issues. I had a friend who had just graduated from a Payne Theological Seminary. That's attached to central state university. One of the traditional, you know, so-called all black colleges, you know African-American?

Jesse:

Oh, I know Payne very well! I went to Morehouse by the way. Graduated Morehouse.

Eric:



Well, okay. Now you pay for lunch and dinner. Okay. I was taking a, a mission to Afghanistan for the Bush administration in the early days of the conflict. We talking after a couple of months after 9/11. And before doing that--since I'm not a permanent employee, state department, White House--you know, any other executive agency. Even though you're going to Afghanistan, come back to Washington. You go through the ceremony, raise your right hand. And the secretary before giving the oath said "Is there anything that anybody wants to discuss about the oath, which you've all read?" And I said, "yes". I said taking this oath will constitute a fundamental and profound change in the nature of our relationship. And of course he looks back and he said, you know, "fundamental, profound change in the nature of our relationship?"

Eric:

And I said, "yes, when I walk through that door, you work for me. After I take this oath, I have to work for you." And this is one of the things I'm going back to your point of, you know, white privilege. That same person who thinks that having that white privilege is a benefit. For decades would go to their employers. And the employer would say "oh, I'm sorry, I can't pay you anymore money, but I could tell you this, I pay that African American less than I pay you." And a gentleman won the Nobel prize for economics for describing the psychological wage. So that employer manipulated that whole society of workers by telling them, "I'm not going to pay you anymore, but I'm paying you more than I pay the people that you hate.



Jesse:

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. So I mean, that sounds amazing because you can say they work for us, but when they don't work for us, then what? And I think that's, that's the other, that's the other piece. It's this idea of, I, you can say all the right things and do other things. And what are the repercussions, unless we, the people who they work for, make those repercussions known? Or make some levels of noise? Or some levels of what basically what can we do then? The we, the collective, we that's the question.

Eric:

I believe that one of the first things should happen is this community, given the shift has occurred. You want a gesture--a verifiable gesture that they recognize. That the relationship in the past has not been ideal or even fundamentally in line with the tenets of Canadian society. A gesture! A verifiable gesture. So we go to negotiating change principle. Number two: after you established the relationship, the second principle is to remember--as you just said--what has been the fundamentals that have kept peace on this planet basically? And we have enormous power. And we also have a right to justice. And when those two things come together, we negotiate our way forward.

Jesse:

Eric, we, yeah, I like what you're saying on paper. It makes a lot of sense on paper. This idea of bringing all of the BIPOC community together to collectively move in one direction. I mean, I haven't seen it. I hope for it. I love it. This is a great idea, but even getting your entire family to go to the same restaurant at times can be a challenge.

Eric:

Jesse, when I tell them that you're going to pay for it, all of them will come.

Jesse:

Okay. Okay. So great. I like that! You're right. So at the end of the day, there's still, there still is a need for a win-win-win. How can me changing--my routine, changing my patterns for the collective good--not adversely affect my day to day? Where's the win? Where's the immediate win for me? And I'm not speaking about me specifically, but just generally when we're looking at people in general. To change patterns, to change habits. To do a collective thing that was on--we used to do it this



way and you want me to do it for some later gain is difficult. And difficult, of course change is difficult. But this brings me back to something you said earlier, when you were talking about the wage and the white man going up to the boss and asking for--for more money, you know? And he's like, well, "no, I can't give you more money, but just so you know, I paid these people less."



Jesse:

So that's the system that we're in while we're trying to change. So this idea, now we have all these different BIPOC community members. Who's to say that in that same system, I can't say, "Well, listen, black man, Jesse, I can, I can't do that for you, but I'll make sure I do worse for this other community." That same mentality that we're living in, which is this white supremacist structure. We'd be crazy to think that we're not also affected by it. And can't be maneuvered into keeping things quote unquote "status quo." I think it's something that often is lost sight of. Especially, like, in the wake of big rallies and big marches.

And so the feelings and the emotions are there and that, "what next" for all--so many people--are there. Because, you know, there's, sometimes these plans are not detailed. They're not thinking, what are we doing with this momentum? What are we doing with this to ensure the next thing happens? And even myself in how I have been an activist in the past is definitely something that I've learned to moving forward. And I want to take advantage of a lot of these waves that exist. A lot of the attention that's there. And that takes some, some, pre-work some preplanning. To ensure that we're prepared for when the moment allows us to use the momentum properly. So I appreciate that.

Eric:

Yeah. You could imagine--who could have imagined that the "Black Lives Matter" movement would have suddenly become the predominant agent for social change on this planet? Or who could have imagined that the Milwaukee Bucks is telling the ballplayers, you know, "go dribble. You know, it shouldn't be political." And the ballplayers say, "they're killing our fans. We have a stake in this. They're killing the people who like watching us play this game."

Jesse:

No doubt. I mean, I think it's fair to say though. Yes, the Milwaukee Bucks, but I got to give a little bit of props to Toronto Raptors. Because it was, it was Kyle Lowry and Norman Powell who did speak of it first. They snapped the game. But just stand up We the North, Toronto Raptors! I see you.

Eric:

I was going there next with the black, but I wanted to get the Giannis Antetokounmpo and he's good.



Jesse:

Yeah, of course, you've got to give Giannis some love.



Eric:

So the Toronto Raptors. It's what they both were saying. Kyle Lowry, and I wanted to write the Minister of Health of Canada. Suggesting that before any Raptors game...everyone with a heart condition should have to sign a permission slip from the doctor to watch the game.

Jesse:

You're not even. Eric...I'm telling you, I don't even have a heart condition and I can't take it. I think there should be a disclaimer, a warning before each day. I wholeheartedly agree!

Eric:

Maybe when you're young. Heart stopping action sounds thrilling! But as you get older... This is not the sort of thing you want to, you know?

Jesse:

It's not at all what you want to hear. Heart stopping. You're trying to do the opposite. Where, where's this like lengthening of, of life activities? Heart stopping activities? You were saying that, you know, who could have seen this happen? This whole "Black Lives Matter" thing happening in the way it did across the planet? You know, I think one of the biggest, I guess, triggers for that in my opinion is also the global pandemic. Oh, you have the entire world less busy; the entire world more looking at what I call like it was a mirror for everybody. You couldn't really escape to do a bunch of things. So everything that showed up was a real reflection of who you are. And I couldn't be as busy doing this, or as busy as doing that. So when this happened and everyone was watching, we didn't, there had never been that many eyeballs. And not just eyeballs looking, but I feel like globally, we were in more of a sensitive place.

Jesse:

Everybody was. Heightened emotions, heightened fears. Like I'm not someone who even gets to be, like, really scared or worried about things. And I noticed. The first time we went out to the grocery store, it felt like "The Walking Dead". And I was in the grocery store and, like, everybody was a zombie. And I was, like, if somebody walked by. But, like, just heightened senses across the board, and then this happens?

Jesse:

So I think where people normally might not have been able to feel it. That same thing I was talking about before--about how do we get like white people to feel the same way? Or other people who don't look like you'd feel the same way during this pandemic? All of our feels were at a higher level. I think that allowed this empathy across the board that didn't have to do with color necessarily for other people just to say, "this is not okay." So in a way that one pandemic really helped this other pandemic of racial inequality that has yet to have a cure, but I think it definitely assisted.

Eric:

One common insult to humanity, allowed other insults to humanity that weren't so common to come to the fore. And plus people have more time. Just because they have more time doesn't mean they did all the right things with it, but you're right. 'Cause you know? No, Jesse this has been fun. This was great. Yes, it has been great. I'm looking forward to doing this in real life sometime soon but I thoroughly appreciate it.

Hey, hey! Here comes the smartest one in the group!

Jesse:

Salima!

Salima:

Man, I wish every time I entered a room, I was announced like that! That was pretty great! That conversation was just so rich, but the part that stood out the most for me was when Jesse was talking about these two pandemics. The pandemic of COVID-19 and the pandemic of racial inequality and racially motivated violence. And I think it's the interaction of these two pandemics that really allowed a conversation and movement to gain some momentum. And I think without the COVID-19 pandemic forcing the world to slow down, we wouldn't have the same clarity that we have around this, around racism. And this anti-racism movement.

Eric:

There were so many points in that conversation that really jumped out at me as well. The first one I think was the quality of all pain is the same. You can't--one's not better



or worse than the other. It's just the quantity of pain that's different. And the other one is that oppressions can't be compared. So many different cultures across history have been subjugated. Like the Irish came to Canada as indentured servants--a form of slavery. But they could work off their indenture. Whereas you know, the, the slaves who were brought here, it was, they were brought here as a permanent property.

Eric:

The Shared Mic is an initiative of Age Friendly Edmonton, which is a joint project between the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council.

Salima:

We want to remind our listeners that the Seniors Information Phone Line (211) is available across the province of Alberta and will connect seniors with organizations and services in their community. Please subscribe to our podcast and tell your friends that they can find us wherever they listen to their podcasts. Apple, Google, or Spotify!

Eric:

Leave us a comment. And if you're generous, give us five stars!

Salima:

And stay tuned for our next episode.