

[music]

[00:00:14] Intro: Welcome to *The Skin You're In* podcast, where we create a space to learn about health and social injustices rooted in racism through in-depth conversations with experts and everyday people. We explore the issues, potential solutions, and the effects those injustices have on individuals, families, and communities.

[00:00:40] Intro: Welcome back to the Skin Your In podcast. In part one, we heard from the filmmakers and featured participants as they discussed the making of the documentary and the broader forces shaping health disparities in America. In this second installment, the conversation expands beyond the stage. Panelists and audience members offer their own perspectives, highlighting the importance of community dialogue, shared experience, and sustained engagement in advancing better health outcomes for all. Here is part two of our live discussion from Montgomery, Alabama.

[00:01:20] Dean Meminger: Tey Mack, I want you to explain, because we saw one side of you in this docuseries, but explain what you are doing now, all of these years later, to better your community.

[00:01:33] Teyvon Robinson: Right now, in Brownsville, I'm big on, if you wasn't a certain age or a certain-- a lot of people was playing follow the leader. I played follow the leader, but everybody's not going to be as fortunate enough to run into Dr. V's and the likes of these people. 'You know what I mean? That's my main thing. At a certain age, you have nothing to do with nothing. To them pools and stuff that he's saying that we can't access, that's just us. Y'all don't have to follow that. They are pools. There are certain things. Some of them things just happen to be on the other side. The juice bar might be over there, but the pool might be over there.

'You know what? I don't know what we going to do, but let's just start right here. You got to start somewhere. 16 and under, y'all can do whatever in Brownsville.

[00:02:18] Dean Meminger: You're working with kids 16 and under right now?

[00:02:20] Teyvon Robinson: I speak to people on both of them sides. I speak to people from the so-called enemies or the so-called other neighborhoods. We came to an agreement that if you were a certain age, well, you're basically targeting the youth. Targeting the youth.

[00:02:37] D. Meminger: All right. Well, keep doing that because we need that.

[00:02:40] Alejandro Orunga: He's good. You're being modest.

[00:02:41] D. Meminger: What, he's being modest?

[00:02:42] Alejandro Orunga: He's being modest.

[00:02:42] D. Meminger: Go ahead.

[00:02:43] A. Orunga: What he's doing is basically, he's one of the leaders ending the gang wars in Brownsville, which is going to dramatically reduce the amount of community violence, and that is one of the solutions to making Brownsville a healthier community.

[00:02:56] D. Meminger: Okay, good.

[00:02:57] A. Orunga: That's what he's doing.

[00:02:58] D. Meminger: Alejandro, I want to come to you after we get this question about how you can give people information about telling their own stories because I think that's important that we get more of these stories out there because they're happening in every city and town across this country. Your name, who you represent, or where you're from.

[00:03:16] Nichelle Wilson: Can you all hear me?

[00:03:18] D. Meminger: Yes.

[00:03:18] Nichelle Wilson: Ok

[00:03:18] Nichelle: My name is Nichelle Wilson. I'm originally from Bridgeport, Connecticut. I was like, "Okay."

[00:03:24] D. Meminger: Bridgeport? Okay. I know Bridgeport well.

[00:03:25] Nichelle: Yes, Bridgeport.

[00:03:26] D. Meminger: Okay.

[00:03:26] Nichelle: Then I moved to Toledo, Ohio. Currently, I'm pursuing my master's in public health at Vanderbilt University, and I'm studying health policy. What I wanted to say, not really a question. Well, it's a combination of both. This series, to me, was very inspiring and very heartwarming. What I wanted to say, not really a question. Well, it's a combination of both. This series, to me, was very inspiring and very heartfelt. Growing up, I felt I went through some of these things where I was seeing how people were mistreated within my communities. Both of my parents came from Jamaica, so I'm the first one in the United States.

With that being said, there's a lot of pressure, and a lot of-- it all comes with that. Also, I have a younger brother, he's 14. The things that you guys were talking about in the documentaries are things that he's currently going through in Toledo, Ohio. Toledo has a 70% higher crime rate than all of the United States. These fears and this-- we're talking about the high cortisol levels and all of that, I think that's something I deal with every single day. I think that this is very powerful and I think it's something that needs to be shown to the youth within schools.

Then I guess my next question is, you said to combat these issues because that's what I'm going to school for, to combat these issues because we know the issues, right? We need to figure out the solutions. I'm trying to be a hospital administrator, going to policy. What are some strategies that you have for me as a young Black woman who's trying to combat the issues of health inequities and disparities in the United States?

[00:04:51] D. Meminger: Mr. Researcher?

[00:04:53] A. Orunga: Me?

[00:04:53] D. Meminger: Yes, you. Me?

[00:04:56] A. Orunga: Do the best you can to raise healthy Black children who become a part of the solution. That's one thing I would say. In your career, use your position in every way that you can. Use your position to advance this agenda. There are ways to do it. So many of us get into these positions, and they don't use their position in that way. That's what I would admonish you to do. I've been to Bridgeport, I've been to Toledo, and I've been to Nashville, and there's a Brownsville in all three of those cities. I know that.

I've seen the Brownsville in BridgePort, I've seen the Brownsville in Toledo, and the one in Nashville. These communities are everywhere. There's an opportunity for everyone in this room to find a community that they can have an impact in, whether it's the community they grew up in or not. Use whatever assets you have. As you become a hospital administrator, you're going to have a lot of opportunities to have an impact in a role as a hospital administrator. Take those opportunities, use them. Also, bring somebody along. You need to be thinking about, well, who is the person that's going to come behind me? Who are the two people that are going to replace me? That's how you multiply. For everyone, everything, you need to be building two other people up behind you so that you can begin to grow that pie and make it an even larger group of people who are making a difference. That's what I would tell you to do.

[00:06:16] D. Meminger: Good. Keep doing it.

[00:06:17] Nichelle: Thank you.

[00:06:18] D. Meminger: All right. I'm going to come to you, Alejandro. I want to point this out because when you were talking about Brownsville, you did admit whether it was in 1990 or current day, there are issues with young men being violent, unfortunately. We can change some of those things. I also like to point out to people because as a newsman, I'm always doing the negative story, I'm doing the shootings. Across the country, crime is going down. I want people to understand that in many places, crime is going down.

Maybe not every single city, but just for instance, in the city we're in right now, according to officials here in Montgomery, violent crime is down 28% for the first half of this year. Non-fatal shooting incidents down 22%, homicides down 12%. I know they had a horrible incident a few weeks ago, but those are numbers that are here. New York City,

one month left for this year, murders and shooting incidents are down by 20%. Atlanta, homicides down 26% for the first half of the year. New Orleans, by the end of November, murder's down 11%. Fatal shootings down nearly 30%. Non-fatal shootings down 7%.

I give you those stats because sometimes when we do these stories, it seems like it's all just doom and gloom and we're just killing each other. The numbers are getting better, but we have to continue to work on all of these points getting to a better place, whether it's the health or the violence. Alejandro, there's so many people who want to tell their stories, whether it's in Watts, Detroit, Atlanta, Birmingham, how can they do it?

[00:07:54] A. Orunga: The quickest way is to pick up a camera and shoot.

[00:07:56] Dean Meminger: Pick up a camera and shoot?

[00:07:58] A. Orunga: That's it.

[00:07:59] Dean Meminger: That's it. He's behind the camera, you can tell. He doesn't like to speak a lot. I'm trying to pull it out of him. We also know a lot of people are just using their cell phones or whatever. They can tell stories that way. Am I correct?

[00:08:10] A. Orunga: You're right. They can tell a story, pick up a paintbrush if you paint. If you take photos, take the photos and tell the stories that way.

[00:08:21] Dean Meminger: If you want to tell the story, you can do it?

[00:08:23] A. Orunga: You can do it.

[00:08:24] Dean Meminger: You can do it. You started with them, what, 11, 12, 13 years ago, maybe longer?

[00:08:31] A. Orunga: Probably longer.

[00:08:32] Dean Meminger: Probably. He's like, "Probably. I'm not telling." I'm just amazed because whenever I was talking with them, your name always came up. They're like, "Alejandro, Alejandro." I know you were forced behind the camera. He's an artist, so he's quiet. Go ahead, your name, where you're from, who you're representing. Then I'm coming to you on this side.

[00:08:54] Audience 2: I'm an artist and I'm not quiet. I want to talk about therapy. All right. I'm an artist first, but I am an art therapist as well with over 10 years of being in the field and working with Black and Brown individuals across all populations, ages, whatever. We talk about this stigma, right? Black people don't want to go to therapy, da da da da da. I honor that because I understand the weaponization, the lack of access, not having somebody that looks like you, the theologies that are rooted in very anti-Black and racist things. The over-necessity to want to diagnose everybody and fix everybody instead of using very strength-based equitable approaches to really give people spaces to just thrive. I'm curious, after listening to you, I never heard therapy

mentioned. Don't take that like I'm saying you need therapy. What I'm curious about because of the fact that there's so much gaps in the time span we have with getting therapists to go to school, to get educated, to get training, it's getting wider and wider and wider. Over 10 years from the both of the two gentlemen that were in the video, I heard community. I heard friendship. I heard support. I heard, "Just see me." I heard the opportunity to just be myself, to express myself.

I'm not saying therapy is not important, but with the issues we have in therapy and redoing the mental health field and the system, can you speak to, did you feel like therapy was necessary for you, or was it really that you just needed people, you needed support, or is there a both-and there present?

[00:10:49] Teyvon Robinson: Is the question directed to us, or--

[00:10:52] Audience 2: Yes, the two-- I'm sorry, I forgot your name.

[00:10:53] D. Meminger: Young man, that's okay

[00:10:54] Teyvon Robinson: I got you. My mother's actually a therapist. It didn't work. Basically, when the problems get to a certain magnitude, and I know therapy's been around forever, but every now and then you get certain years and certain incidents where it's just out of hand, and you got to attack the issue as heavy as the issue is. People are dying and stuff like that. You can't just put somebody in the office for two weeks. We got to do something dramatic. 'You know what I'm saying? As big as the problem is, what we got to do is the solution. Now, I know therapy is a great solution, but it's like we need therapy on steroids or something. I don't know what it is. I don't have the answer, but it just has to be a big bomb.

[00:11:45] Audience 2: I'm glad you say that.

[00:11:46] Teyvon Robinson: Actually, but I can sit through therapy. I'm growing. I'm in a different level, but there's a lot of people that don't have the same circumstances. They're not listening to their parents. They're listening to their mothers. They die for them. They love them to death. People are killing their friends, and police are bothering these people on a day that we need something just as big, as positive.

[00:12:07] Teyvon Robinson: All right.

[00:12:08] Teyvon Robinson: In my opinion, I feel like therapy is not taught in a Black household. Therapy is not glorified. When I mention things that's glorified, therapy is not something that's glorified in a Black household. From where I come from, if you want to seek therapy, you are looked at as crazy, or you are looked at as unstable. From where I come from, how you are viewed is everything. How you are viewed is your world. To not be viewed as crazy or to not be viewed as someone that's unstable, you don't seek therapy. When you don't seek therapy, that's when you self-soothe, which you cope with alcohol or you cope with other coping mechanisms. Therapy isn't one of them. In my opinion, therapy is not something that's taught in a Black household. That's not

something that's glorified, and that's not something that's-- the term I'm looking for. That's not something that's-

[00:13:07] A. Orunga: Encouraged.

[00:13:08] Teyvon Robinson: -encouraged. Thank you. That's not something that's encouraged.

[00:13:11] D. Meminger: Go ahead. Your name and the question.

[00:13:11] Rebecca: Okay. My name is Rebecca, and I'm from Harlem. I'm excited to see-

[00:13:17] Dean Meminger: Harlem

[00:13:18] Rebecca: -other New Yorkers here. I live in Chicago now. Dr. LaVeist, if you want to do one of your next episodes in Chicago, highlight me. I'm curious. I study gentrification, and so I'm interested to know from y'all, since this film has been shot, how do you think that Brownsville has changed?

[00:13:40] D. Meminger: Okay. I see.

[00:13:40] D. Meminger: We got it because he wanted that question. Parts of Brooklyn definitely deal with gentrification.

[00:13:47] Dr. Thomas LaVeist: Coming, like Hyde Park.

[00:13:47] D. Meminger: If you two, I know you're the man, but keep it short because I'm getting the eyes and the signals from the audience.

[00:13:55] Dr. Thomas LaVeist: I can talk about that for hours, and we can talk tomorrow for hours. Gentrification, Brooklyn is gentrified. Brooklyn is the new Manhattan. When I heard that, I was like, "That's-- " When I went there, I was like, "Yes, Brooklyn is the new Manhattan, except Brownsville."

Now, Brownsville, it's a lot of public housing projects. It's not like other neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy or Park Slope or whatever. These beautiful brownstone, people come in and they bought these brownstones. They fixed them up, and they're now more than \$1 million properties. You don't have as many of those kinds of properties in Brownsville. You have high-rise housing projects, and that's owned by the city. It's one thing for a person to sell their brownstone in Crown Heights and make a bunch of money. It's a different thing for the city to sell for housing projects. That's one of the things. Now, there is gentrification happening there. You see stuff going on. You were talking about that earlier.

[00:14:50] Teyvon Robinson: Yes, I was.

[00:14:50] T. LaVeist: Things are sold in the neighborhood. Give them your perspective on it.

[00:14:53] Teyvon Robinson: In my perspective, the gentrification that's going on in the neighborhood is not so much as the neighborhood is becoming better. The neighborhood is becoming overpopulated. Just like how Dr. LaVeist said, they starting to sell projects. They are starting to sell projects. They are making projects private entities, and they are building even more project buildings within the projects. In my opinion, they're making it overpopulated. Yes, it is becoming gentrified to where other ethnicities are moving in, but it's still poverty-stricken.

[00:15:34] Teyvon Robinson: ...that ethnicities ...that are moving in is not a higher class or a different social class from what's already there.

[00:15:47] T. LaVeist: Let me just add this. Brownsville was started in the early 20th century when they wanted to do new projects in Manhattan. They built Lincoln Center, Columbus Circle, those things. They tore down those tenements. Brownsville was basically swamp land at that time. They backfilled it, and they started putting housing there. They moved people from those tenements into Brownsville. Then they put the streetcar lines and the subway from Brownsville all the way to Manhattan. Brownsville was the holding bin for New York City. It's always been the holding bin, but the question is where you put people when they already live in the holding bin. What they're doing now is they're adding more buildings, and they're putting more people in the holding bin.

There was a line in the film where I talked about the population density in Brownsville is already double the population density for the rest of Brooklyn, and they're adding more. Since I've made that statement and had that statistic, more has been added. That's what's happening. That's the kind of gentrification that you're getting there in Brownsville.

[00:16:47] D. Meminger: All right. Last question. Go for it.

[00:16:49] Justin Morgan: How are you doing, Dr. LaVeist? I'm Justin Morgan coming from DC. I work for a narrative change organization. I'd be interested to hear from you all because this is a pretty amazing example of researchers working with artists and storytellers to create narrative change. What have been the early impacts and reactions you've been getting from other people you've been screening with in terms of how they're receiving the film and what has changed for them when they see it?

[00:17:20] T. LaVeist: This is the premiere. This is the first audience to see the film.

[00:17:22] W. LaVeist: You said you saw different-

[00:17:24] T. LaVeist: Earlier-

[00:17:25] Justin Morgan: Oh, the rough cut in Brownsville.

[00:17:27] T. LaVeist: -you've seen rough cuts. Yes, you've seen some work. Okay, I'll talk about this one, the Brownsville one.

[00:17:32] A. Orunga: Yes, talk about that.

[00:17:33] T. LaVeist: I went to...

[00:17:33] D. Meminger: What was that like at some of the film festivals you had mentioned?

[00:17:37] T. LaVeist: Oh, well, those are people who went to see a movie, they got entertained. Now, when I showed the film in Brownsville-- I don't get nervous on stage anymore. At this point, I'm my own musician. I spend a lot of time on stage. I showed that film at Jefferson High School, Jeff, that was the most nerve-wracking thing I have ever done because those kids, that was the audience. I needed that audience to like the film. They needed to think it was authentic. To me, that was the test of whether or not I really captured what I wanted to capture, how they reacted. They were watching the screen. I sat off to the side, and I was watching them while they were watching the screen. They were sitting on the edge of their seat. The way that they responded so positively to that film just said, yes, I think we've got it because they would have told me if it was not legit.

[00:18:30] D. Meminger: All right, good. Hey, we're going to wrap up there. What I want to say is because he bashed me a lot in this docuseries, "The media this, the media that, the media doesn't tell the stories." What I want you to do, and I encourage people to do this with me all the time, you can follow me on social media, all social media, @deanmeminger. Do that. Follow me. Let me know what you thought about *The Skin You're In*, but your local news stations and your papers, force them to do these stories. If you don't speak up, they won't do them. They'll just do the negative stories. There are great stories out there, stories that impact people. For those in Montgomery, from *Spectrum News New York One*-- there's actually a *Spectrum News* in Montgomery now-- call them. Make them do the stories.

Now, let's give it up. Will and Thomas LaVeist, Alejandro Aringo, and I want to give it up for these two men. You see how they have grown over the 10 years. Tavon Robinson, Taymack, and Sharon Bryant Jr. Give it up for them.

[00:19:39] A. Orunga: Great Feel

[00:19:40] Dean Meminger: Thank Impact Montgomery Performing Arts Centre for having us. What did I say? Say it with me. *The Skin You're In*.

[00:19:47] A. Orunga: *The Skin You're In*.

[00:19:50] Outro: We extend our thanks to the filmmakers, the participants who shared their stories, and the Montgomery community for Deaning this meaningful dialogue during such significant moment of remembrance and reflection. To learn more about *The Skin You're In* and future screenings, please visit tsyi.org.

[music]

[00:20:24] Outro: Thank you for joining us for this episode of *The Skin You're In*. Be sure to visit our websites, tsyi.org, and partners4healthequity.org. That's partners, the number four, healthequity.org. Follow us on your favorite social media platforms, and be sure to subscribe wherever you enjoy your podcasts. This podcast is brought to you by Partners for Advancing Health Equity, which is led by Tulane University's Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. It's part of the Tulane Health Equity Institute and is supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Until next time.

[music]

[00:21:10] [END OF AUDIO]