

Conjuring Up Courage #117

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Jermaine Fowler

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #117 of Conjuring Up Courage, and today you get to enjoy two book nerds talking about the importance of history. And if that sounds boring to you, first of all, how dare you? And second of all, I promise it's not.

This episode features historian and author, Jermaine Fowler, who is the founder of The Humanity Archive, a website dedicated to telling the stories of the historically unheard. Jermaine and I chatted about historical events he thinks you should know about, whose stories get told and why, and how to work toward a future where history is more accurate and inclusive.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/117. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/117.

Hey there Conjuring Up Courage listeners! If you enjoy the show and have been thinking about taking things to the next level by working with me, my year-long self-trust membership program, Follow Your Arrow, is now enrolling members for the January 2022 cohort. Follow Your Arrow is a program I created to help you be more of who you are and less haunted by who you think you're supposed to be. It's 12 months of deconditioning, personal growth, and group coaching so you can free yourself from self-doubt and embody a deeper sense of self-trust.

If you want to be able to do things like take the guilty out of your pleasures, say both yes please and no thank you with conviction, break out of the vicious cycle of black-and-white thinking, look fear in the face

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and have the courage to take the leap anyway, and wield your power and influence to make the world a better place, then Follow Your Arrow might be the perfect fit for you.

Each month of the program we'll dig into a new topic to help you develop your self-trust. For every topic, you'll get three lessons, a deeper dive tool or practice that accompanies each lesson, a book recommendation, and bonus topic-specific resources. I'll also facilitate a live group coaching and Q&A call each month for members to foster community, share experiences, and get their questions answered. Plus, I'll host members-only workshops with expert guest speakers and teachers throughout the year.

The January 2022 cohort of Follow Your Arrow kicks off on January 10th. To learn more and become a member, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/fya. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/fya. I'll also include the link for the program information in the show notes for this episode.

[Music plays]

This is Conjuring Up Courage, and I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. As a self-trust coach, I help people come home to themselves so they can be more of who they are and less haunted by who they think they're supposed to be.

I created this podcast to celebrate what's possible when you commit to being brave. You'll hear from diverse guests who are refusing to let fear and self-doubt stop them from building fulfilling lives and creating a

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better world for everyone. I'll also teach you my favorite tools, strategies, and mindset shifts so you can do the same.

Consider this your invitation to stop living according to "shoulds" and to step into your motherfucking magic instead. Stay open, get curious, and let's grow together.

[Music fades]

Hi Jermaine! I am so excited to have you here on the show. How are you feeling today?

Jermaine Fowler: I'm doing excellent. I appreciate you inviting me onto the show, and I'm very excited to get into the conversation today. Thank you.

Shohreh: Yes, well, I absolutely love the work that you're doing with The Humanity Archive, and I'm looking forward to getting to share it with more people through our conversation today.

Jermaine: Thanks. Yeah, I started The Humanity Archive as something that I'm very passionate about, telling stories, and very passionate about history and trying to dig into the archives of humanity to find truth and wisdom and use history as a bridge to connect people. So I'm always excited to share about the work that I'm doing and just my passion for storytelling and trying to connect people.

Shohreh: Fantastic. And for listeners who don't know you, can you share a little bit about who you are and what lights you up?

Jermaine: Yeah, so Jermaine Fowler here, everyone. I'm definitely glad to be on the show as I said. And I am a historian and founder of The Humanity

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Archive, which is a podcast and a website where I tell the stories of the historically unheard. And this just means that a lot of the narratives that deal with marginalized people and groups were left out of our history books. I think that there's been a lot of frustration within myself and I see the frustration in the public sphere where people are like, hey, I didn't learn a lot of things in school. I didn't see myself in the history books represented. So that's where The Humanity Archive fills the void.

So whether it be women's history, LGBTQ history, Black history, Native American history, whatever it is where we see these groups of people, marginalized people, as a footnote in the history books, that's where I try to go in, dig through the archives, and tell those stories, whether it be on the podcast, on the website, through social media, and uplift those narratives and stories and make sure they are placed right there with the stories of everyone else.

Shohreh: Truly such important work, and I count myself among one of those people who, as I have gone through my adulthood and have learned all these different things that I never learned in school, have questioned all of my history education that I received. And we will be talking all about history education as we get a little bit deeper into it. But I also wanted to ask you how your deep love of history developed. Like, is this something you've always loved your whole life?

Jermaine: Yeah, I think it all started, for me, in the free public library. When I realized myself on my personal journey, in school that I wasn't seeing myself in the history books, I didn't live far from the free public library.

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So I just went in there, and a librarian actually kind of changed my life and in a way kind of helped me onto this path.

Because I went in, I was like, hey, where are the books on Black history? And not only did she show me where they were, she suggested books to me, she seemed genuinely interested in my education in regards to trying to learn about my own history. So I would spend, like, whole summers in the library amongst the shelves. My friends who were out doing whatever they were doing, playing football, reading comic books or whatever, they thought I was crazy because I'd be going off to the library, whatever, trying to do other stuff.

But I think that's when I kinda developed this intellectual interest and started living this life of the mind where I would think, starting with Black history, but then I'd go off into other shelves and start reading about women's history, and philosophy, and all these other things. So that kind of was the impetus of The Humanity Archive, although I didn't know it yet, all the way back then when I was like 12 years old in middle school. So I've always had this interest in learning, and then that kinda transformed into teaching as well.

Shohreh:

I am also someone who was a total library lover, nerd, growing up. I was the kid who would check out as many books as they would allow, which would often be, like, 20, and ride them home on my bike, read all of them in a week, and then go back for more. You know, I was on a first-name basis with all of the librarians at that time in my life.

Jermaine:

Yeah, library card is—

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Shohreh: Yeah.

Jermaine: —your favorite possession, right? [Laughs lightly]

Shohreh: Exactly! Like, I was like, oh my god, this free, magical place where I can take out any books I want on any subject. And I don't have kids, but I often wonder if kids today have the same regard for the library given that everything is online now. Like, do kids still go to the library? I don't know.

Jermaine: Yeah, I think—I think they're taken to the library when they're like, toddlers. But as far as like, their own interest, I mean, sometimes when I go in there I'll see teenagers studying and everything. But I do wonder how much of that love of a physical book may have been lost in the digital age of Kindles and e-Readers and different things like this.

But I think it ultimately boils down to it's not even so much the book, it's kind of like that inputs and outputs of what you take in, you know, is what you're gonna put out. So I think as long as people are taking in, uh, good information, then that's the main thing.

So I think the library is just kinda a conduit for knowledge, but I don't think it ultimately matters what the conduit is, you know, as long as people are getting the knowledge, is the main thing. Which is, again, social media for me, I never thought I'd be doing so much on social media teaching. My first love was lecturing and speaking and public speaking and going out in a physical space and speaking to people. But some of my biggest teaching ended up being on social media kinda by

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accident. So all these things are just conduits to spread knowledge and receive knowledge, I think.

Shohreh:

Right, the undercurrent of what you're saying is really about accessibility because when I think about Kindles and audiobooks, they're bringing this knowledge to more people in different formats where maybe they wouldn't be able to have a physical book or get through a physical book for any reason. I know for me, I love audiobooks and I listen to them regularly. And I love physical books so much that if I really loved an audiobook, I'll still buy the physical book because I want to have it on my shelf. But I think having those options is so great.

And social media is the same way. Like, I can't even tell you the number of things that I've learned on TikTok or on Instagram. And being able to teach on there, yeah, it's not the same as going into a lecture hall and being directly in front of people, but your reach is so much wider, which I think is one of the really cool things about it.

Jermaine:

And see, I'm the same way. Like, one of my favorite quotes is "when I have a little money, I buy some books, and if I have any left, I buy shoes and clothes [Shohreh laughs lightly]." So I'm very much a—a reader. I like to look at information visually on a page.

I do agree with the idea of accessibility and just being able to have these different options for different types of learners. I think that's where school fails a lot of kids a lot of times is because everyone's gotta learn the same way, right? They try to put round pegs in square

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holes a lot, to where you might learn visually, you might learn audio-visually, you know, there's all these different types of ways people learn but they always try to box people in, right?

So of course, it's a gift and a curse, but ultimately it's just a consciousness of everyone. So I think it just reflects human beings as a whole, whether it's positive or negative, so we can use that for a positive way to educate people in more accessible ways. So I'm definitely glad to see it's being used in that way, especially by young people for sure.

Shohreh:

Yeah, I think it has allowed people to get more engaged in a lot of things. Like, I am seeing so many younger kids, like, you know, Gen Z, teenagers, who are involved and aware of social justice issues and directly in activism. And those were things I didn't know about when I was growing up just by virtue of where I grew up and the kind of education that I was getting. And I'm seeing these kids who know so much more about the world at ages 13 through 18 that I didn't learn about until I was in my late twenties and in my thirties, and that's a really cool thing to see.

Jermaine:

Yeah, I think it's iron sharpens iron, right? So it kinda keeps us on our toes as far as like, wow, like, you know, you've gotta make sure that we are doing what we're supposed to do as leaders. Because they're definitely a generation, I think, that is saying, hey, like, we need to be talking about these things, we need to keep these issues on the forefront.

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I'm thinking about something like the Sunrise Movement, right, that's pretty much all Gen Z-led movement as far as climate change. They are on *the* forefront of that movement, like they are the leaders of that movement. I think that they're showing up in a lot of ways in terms of activism, whether be trying to educate people or whether that be just actually out there getting petitions signed or protesting or whatever the case may be.

Shohreh: Definitely. Kudos to the kids, that's all I have to say.

Jermaine: Yeah [light laughter].

Shohreh: It's like, I'm so impressed by them at this point.

So I know that the untold stories of history are your bread and butter. And I wanted to give you the opportunity, and for my own self I'm excited about this, to share some of your favorites, like, in terms of people and events that you wish more people knew about. And I will of course direct people to your podcast as well—there will be a link to that in the show notes—but in terms of your personal favorites, do you have any that you're like, oh my god, everyone should know about this?

Jermaine: Yeah, I could just start broadly just by saying I'm looking back now at how some of the atrocities of history have been hidden from us and swept under the rug. I think with everything that happened in 2020, a lot of people became aware more so of what they didn't know. And one

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of the big events that came up, I remember, from 2020, was the Tulsa Race Massacre that happened in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

And a lot of people were shocked that they didn't know about this because that was part of a long line of racial terror that happened through the early 1900s on up through the civil rights movement. A lot of people are like, wow, why didn't we learn about this atrocity of history? And the same thing with Native American boarding schools. There's a lot of information about that coming out.

So I think that that is something to where people want to look back at and have this desire to look back at honestly and say, hey, we need to look at this and see how we can do better as a nation and as people. Events like that really touch a nerve for me, and I like to talk about those a lot because I'm passionate about telling those stories. And I feel like those people who experienced that would want to be heard, right? That's a national trauma that has to be spoken to.

It's kind of like if you're going to therapy, a lot of people have issues where they look back at the trauma of their childhood. Well, a nation is, in that sense, like a person, where in order to move forward from that trauma you have to look back at that trauma to deal with it nationally. And I think by us not dealing with those traumas as a nation is one of the reasons why racial justice seems to have stagnated and been kinda in the same place for so long because people's unwillingness to deal with the unwarranted terror visited upon various groups in the United States.

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So this is a whole—that's one area that I deal with a lot. But of course I have specific examples as well, you know, different histories that I've touched on too.

Shohreh: Yeah, please feel free to share some of those specific ones that you really enjoy also.

Jermaine: I'm very much a generalist, so to me it's about the humanities, and the humanities to me is what connects us as human beings. But what does it mean to be human? So that's the question that I always try to answer with The Humanity Archive. So for me, that allows me to not only touch on Black history, but go into anyone's history and say, how can I connect with that as a human being? So that's the ethos behind everything that I do.

A quote that I love was by Terence, and he said, "I am human, so nothing human is alien to me." So if I look at women's history, for instance, I did a podcast series on women's suffrage, and I wanted to look honestly at, you know, what did women have to go through to be able to obtain the right to vote? And there's a lot of nuance to the story, of course. Black women were sidelined a lot in that history. But then on top of that, though, there was also another women's convention before the one that they tell you about with Susan B. Anthony. It was an interracial coalition of women who came together who not only fought for women's suffrage, but they also were talking about the abolition of slavery at this meeting in New York.

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So there's always hidden things that come out whenever you're studying, like, any history, where you're like, wow. Like, I'm educating myself as I look at these things too because I'm always trying to gather evidence. I'm kind of like a detective when I look back through the history books and say, okay, what was left out? Where is the humanity in this? What stories haven't been told? I've been trying to hit it from all sides.

So it's really, for me, just about telling untold stories. I mean, I've touched on everything from women's suffrage, I've done podcasts—one of my favorite artists is a Japanese woodblock printmaker named Katsushika Hokusai. I've done podcast episodes on the Haitian Revolution, which I think it's a tragedy that that's not taught in schools based on the connections to slavery in the United States.

Native American history—it's Native American Heritage Month right now, so I've done an episode on the real story of Pocahontas, not the Disney version. It's very much a tragic history with the connection to the settlers who came over and just a lot of humanity in that story. And a lot of resistance by the Native Americans, so a lot of just nuance to that story as well.

So I think being a generalist has allowed me to tell just a lot of stories across humanity, across the globe, so that's what I love about it.

Shohreh:

And I think that brings us to the question of who gets to decide what history gets told and why those are the people who have that power? So in your experience with all of this history that you've looked at and

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especially trying to find the pieces that aren't getting told, who is in charge of this? Why are we learning the history that we are learning?

Jermaine:

Yeah, so in America, it boils down a lot to racism, prejudice. You have the historic idea among a lot of white historians what were—I mean, people don't think about race as a measure that applies to academia a lot. You think about the Tulsa Race Massacre, you think about Native American genocide, you think about, you know, some people think about things that have happened to women and different things like that. But as far as racism and all these isms, they're all thoughts, right, they're all ideas, and those ideas stained academia.

So there were a lot of racist historians from the beginning of America. The first historians were racists and white supremacists who thought that non-white people were inferior, so that made it into the tellings of the history, right? So you had this guy named Frederick Jackson Turner, he came up with the Frontier Thesis, and that basically said Native Americans, you know, there's free land here, right? There's nobody here but savages, so that's how we're gonna write this history. And there's nothing to see here, there's no human to see here, to write about. So they wrote it all the way from a white male perspective.

Black history, the same thing, right? There's nothing to see here. No one to see here. These are just inferior people. We're going to write them out of history or not write them into history at all.

Same thing with women's history. There's something called the Matilda Effect, and a lot of women scientists, their ideas and their inventions

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were stolen by their husbands, by males, to where they were written out of history, right? They have names for these types of things, of people being erased from history or not written in history, things being stolen from people and them not making it into the history books.

So this is a trend that needs to be broken, and now is a time where people are starting to rewrite history, but you see backlash, right? A lot of people now still don't want history to be rewritten. They'll call you a revisionist, saying you're trying to revise history. But ultimately it needs to be revised, right, because it wasn't written right the first time. So I think that's kinda the cultural war that we're in right now. We're seeing that with people arguing about what's taught in schools. You know, you have people who are trying to ban certain books from school that tell about marginalized experiences.

So all that stems back to those original historians and the people then trying to make progress from that, but then there's always backlash, there's always going to be pushback. Because there's people who want to stick with the status quo and want to have this American story that doesn't have any stains on it. This American story that, you know, we are exceptional, and we are patriotic, and we are the best nation on earth. So anything that goes against that, then people push back against that.

When you talk about Black history, when you talk about Native American history, when you talk about LGBTQ history, any of these histories, you're gonna have to be talking about revolts. You're gonna have to be talking about tragedy. You're gonna have to talk about

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people pushing back and resisting what was happening to them. So I think that's a lot of the reason where people don't want to talk about that because it kinda complicates the story, the narrative, right?

Shohreh: Oof, yes, all of that resonates. And you know, I live in Texas, so the big battle right now is over Critical Race Theory and taking that out of schools. What's sad for me is I've been seeing these interviews where they'll ask people about it and then they'll be like, well, can you explain what Critical Race Theory is? And it'll be like, these irate parents who, like, can't even tell you what it is, they just have heard that it's bad, you know?

Jermaine: Yeah.

Shohreh: I'm like, oh gosh, this is terrible.

Jermaine: Yeah, absolutely. I think Critical Race Theory is ultimately just a boogie man, this thing that they've put up to mask their real feelings, right? Because really I think they just don't want to talk about things like slavery, they don't want to talk about these tragedies in history.

Critical Race Theory isn't even taught in really even any elementary schools or middle schools. It's just a theory. I think it's a pretty good theory. It's just about structural racism. But they don't want to talk about structural racism. You know, a lot of people don't even want you to say the word racism anymore, you know, so that's what they're trying to push away, I think. The word Critical Race Theory then is just kinda like this buzzword, right, but kinda if you pull the veil back, then you'll see, okay, they don't want us to talk about this.

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I think parents should be concerned about what they're learning in school. I mean, some of the books that they ban, I mean, I looked, some of them are talking about, like, highly sexualized things and different things like that, that I could see where there could be some concern. But I think that's not the real issue. A lot of times people will take a little bit of concern and make that the whole issue, but that's definitely not the whole issue. And I don't think that that's the genuine concern. It's just like, hey, you know, there's some stuff that we don't know about, it's way deeper than that I think. It's not just that for sure. It goes way back to what people, you know, are trying to control history and what they want to be taught.

You're from Texas, and Texas is a state, somehow, someway, I guess, it's a big state or they just have a lot of pull, but they've controlled what went into history books, like, nationwide for a long time.

Shohreh: Yeah, which is horrifying when I consider who's in power here in Texas—

Jermaine: Yeah.

Shohreh: —and looking back at my own public school education here in Texas, where in the state of Texas you are required to take Texas state history as part of your public school education. And of course, in that history, all the Texans are painted as just, like, the heroes of the story.

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And then you learn all these things after the fact, like, I can't remember the name of the book, but there's a book that came out about the Alamo that's basically, like, everything you know about the Alamo is wrong. And I was reading the summary of the book, and I was like, oh my goodness, like, we were taught this totally different story of the Alamo, this great epic battle for Texans. And like, so much of what we were taught is just a blatant lie. Like, it's not historically accurate. But that's the Texas lore and we have to stick with it.

Jermaine:

Yeah, absolutely. I think people who have clung to this, like, patriotic idea so much to where it becomes, like, dogmatic, it's almost like a religion, right? It's like a cult almost, like we can't escape it, this very narrow way to view the world of this overly patriotic, like, it could be Texas, it could be anything, right? You could apply it to anything. 'Cause you know, everything is bigger in Texas, I'm a Texan, remember the Alamo.

And definitely I'm sure all of Texas isn't like that because you have your islands in every state. People say, like, Austin is not like that. I've never been there, I'm not sure. So I'm sure that everybody doesn't think like that, but as a whole, Texas, right, that's the big idea—people with big trucks and cowboys and all that [Shohreh laughs lightly].

But I think, again, it becomes somewhat religious and dogmatic to where it's like, we don't see the rest of that history that's there, right? You don't see the people who were also here, the Mexican history, the South American history that's tied into Texas history. It's just as much a part of Texas as, you know, any white person, maybe even more so than

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any white person. Or the Native American history of Texas. Like, pretty much you don't hear about that. That's not part of the psyche or the persona of Texas at all when it really should be. And it's very limiting, it's very xenophobic. And I think that's, again, one of those things where people are using history to divide as opposed to figuring out how to use it to bring people together.

Shohreh:

And I think what you had said earlier about this idea of sweeping things under the rug that we don't want to deal with holds so true. Because I think one of the main reasons that people don't want to look at this stuff and learn about it and address it is because they're worried about what it says about them. Or what it says about their ancestors. And there's this guilt piece with it. And I think that's so misguided because I think how can we learn unless we have the awareness to be able to see what has been done that we don't stand by anymore. That we would not want to do today. That we wouldn't want to repeat. And when we don't look at that, we can't learn from it.

And so it just makes me sad that people are in this very dogmatic place because I think there's so much to learn and develop as a nation and worldwide by being really honest about that history. And also being able to say, my ancestors are not me. People made horrible mistakes and decisions that have had real world affects, now what are we going to do about them?

Jermaine:

Absolutely. And I think that you've hit on what the essence of the study of any history should be. Nobody's perfect. No nation is perfect. Nations—we've made horrible mistakes as a nation. There's been

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horrible atrocities that's happened as a nation. Of course America has done some great things as well. The U.S. has. But we should be telling all of that.

And for us to just want to tell, you know, the bright and sunny side—if you only tell the half, you'll never be made whole, right? So we have to tell everything in order to be made whole as a nation. Because there's people who feel excluded—not only feel excluded, but are being excluded physically, legally, in society today because the past affects the present. There's past that's in the present, right?

And I'll just go back, for instance, to the boarding schools. They just found, uh, the names of some children at a boarding school in Nebraska. Just the other day I saw a headline about this, so. These graves are crying out, right, it's not like...this history could have already been dealt with before they had to find these mass graves. We've known about these boarding schools and we've known these atrocities happened. We could have been looking for these graves 20, 30 years ago so people could deal with and process their trauma.

People are having to process this over and over and over again as more graves get found, as more race massacres come to life. People are having to deal with this over and over and over again instead of us just coming together as a nation once and for all and having these difficult conversations and these painful conversations so that we can make people whole. So that we can do what we need to do to move forward by having these conversations instead of having to just go over this year

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after year as these things come to light. And there's so much history that's still hidden, it's just ridiculous, I think.

Another instance was the underground railroad. A student at Columbia University was digging through some old archives and boxes in the archives of Columbia, and they happened upon some Underground Railroad stories that has just been, like, thrown off in a box somewhere. And these stories were taken by a journalist as people came from the south to the north. And one paragraph of what—he told, like, where they came from, what they had to do to get there. There was one story about a Black woman who had gotten helped by another Black woman. She gave her money to get to the north. She had to leave her family behind.

So in this one paragraph it tells you more about the Underground Railroad and Black agency and how Black people freed themselves. 'Cause you have this narrative where it was like, good-willed white people helping Black people and hiding them out. That's not the story. Like, the story is in these 200 interviews that he did with these people that could totally help to continue to transform the whole story of the Underground Railroad.

But again, like, history is literally shoved in boxes, thought and seen not to be important enough to put in a book or to bring to light. And history, like, literally all the time is still coming out that's just been pushed away and hidden away like that.

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Shohreh: Right. Earlier you called yourself a detective of sorts, and that's what that brings to mind for me. Like, people have intentionally and carefully tried to bury so much history over the course of time. And I'm sure that some of it is lost forever, right? We will never have it, uh, which is, like, heartbreaking to think about.

Jermaine: Absolutely.

Shohreh: But it also seems like there's a lot of it that's still out there hiding. Like you're saying, whether that's in the actual land itself, like things that people are digging up in boxes, or archives. I'm sure in personal family journals. Like, just all kinds of places where this history might be.

Jermaine: Yeah, absolutely. I think that is definitely a tragic part of it as far as, like, the stories that you can't get back. And especially when you're talking about Indigenous people and just any group of people who are a little more tied to the land who might have lived in such a way to where they valued oral history and they didn't so much write everything down because they felt more of a connection to the stories in that way, to where they passed them down from generation to generation.

So I often think about, you know, how many of those stories were lost when people died or who were killed who were the keepers of those stories, who held those stories, and when they died, those stories weren't able to be passed on to the next generation. Those stories were lost.

History, I think, it's tragic, but it also, for me, it's about dealing on—the truth deals on equal terms with hope and despair, I think. So for me, it's

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about, I find despairing incidents and events in history, but it also offers me hope because there are people who resisted oppression. There were people who were able to find the fortitude to make it through whatever they went through. People who were still able to find love. People who were still able to find life in the circumstances that they found themselves in and build or whatever the case might be. Or were able to find different types of spiritual salvation or whatever that positive life function that they might be able to find, or functions, start families, or whatever it may be. People were still able to do all that. So I find hope, not only despair, in history every time I look back.

Shohreh:

Absolutely. That was making me think about, you know, as a queer person, for the queer community, the AIDS epidemic was something that really wiped out a lot of people and as a result wiped out a lot of history and information about queer communities during that time. And lately there actually has been a pretty big resurgence in finding and telling those stories. For example, like, the big show on Netflix, Pose, that has a lot of really big actors in it. That, for me, was more history about the AIDS epidemic and what it was like to be there as a queer person than I certainly ever received in anything in school. I can't even remember if we talked about the AIDS epidemic in school in Texas, honestly. If we did, it was probably, like, a passing paragraph as part of, you know, that wider era.

Like, I think the first time I heard about the AIDS epidemic was watching the musical Rent when I was growing up. And, you know, as a queer person, this just feels like a travesty for me. And I know there's

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so many beautiful stories of queer culture and resilience from that time if you know where to look for them. If you go find those books. If you are able to watch the documentaries and other stories about it that thankfully are starting to exist because there's been a push for more of that.

It's like, if we don't push for it, if we don't make it clear, like, no, we want this information. We want to see this. This is important. Then it makes it even harder to get it because, again, this is a part of our nation that people don't want to look at because they don't want to admit that this is something that could have been far less deadly if the U.S. government bothered to care about it.

Jermaine:

Yeah. I think those stories—at once the stories humanize groups of people because if you have even an ounce of empathy in you and you are able to walk in the shoes of another person you see, that's going to make you feel that person, right?

There's been a lot of gatekeeping as far as movie studios and television programs. Clearly the gates haven't been just torn all the way down, but there are people who were able to kinda open a door here and there and make documentaries now where I think it is slowly becoming a little more diverse. And some of these stories are actually being able to be told in documentary form, or you know, on television or through books.

And I think when you look back, it stems from the same thing, right? You know, hatred for other groups of people. I mean, homophobia,

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transphobia, like, all of these things are very insidious, kind of like cancers, I think, in society. So again, that's just another group of people who has been marginalized as well and written out of history in such a way to where people look back, and I mean, there's a lot of people who don't even know about the Stone Wall Riots, or they don't know a lot of that history.

Shohreh: Oh yeah.

Jermaine: These are events that, like, helped to shape our nation in various ways and it's, like, again, you just ask yourself, how could those things be left out? But then you think, okay, it goes back to the isms, right? Misogyny, you know, against women, homophobia, transphobia, like all of these things where people are very reluctant to embrace people that are unlike themselves or who are different from themselves. Or where they want to cling to the power that they have and keep somebody else in some form of subjugation. So I think ultimately it always goes back to the same things, but it just, you know, it's affecting people in different groups in various ways.

Shohreh: And I know for you, with the work that you're doing with The Humanity Archive and the work that you're doing in general as a historian, you are dedicated to having a more accurate and inclusive future for history. For the rest of us, for the everyday people who aren't historians or don't have a platform or don't have a movie studio or aren't authors, is there anything that you think people can do to help create that future as well?

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Jermaine: Yeah, I think it starts with learning, right? You have to seek out the resources, and that means that you have to look at a group different from yourself and go to that group and see what books they've written, see what podcasts they're putting out, see what movies they're putting out. So for me, because again, it's about humanity. Like, I never wanted to call it, like, The Black History Archive or anything, 'cause for me, again, it just goes back to humanity, The Humanity Archive.

So what am I doing? I knew I was lacking in knowledge of women's history, for instance, so I specifically sought out women authors on suffrage or whatever the case and pulled however many books I needed to pull to try to start to gain that perspective, watch the documentaries, try to support where I could.

The same thing when I was studying the Pocahontas story, like, what have the Native American people said about this, right? So I found information from the Mattaponi tribe, which was a tribe that was connected to Pocahontas, and they have oral history that was written down. So I wanted to hear from their perspective, what did they have to say about it? So I was always kind of pushing away this white-centered narrative, in that case, and centering their narrative.

So I think that we have to center the narrative of people who are different from us, support them, and then from there, that's where you made the connection, that's where it all starts for me. So I think other people definitely need to do the same thing: seek out what you don't know. Seek out the groups that you didn't grow up around or that you weren't in contact with. Embrace their humanity. Embrace their stories.

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See what they have to say. Of course we're not always going to agree with everything. People different from—but it's not about that, it's really about seeing where we can connect and bridge the gap. So I think I would love for people to do that more. I think that would bring us a very long way.

Shohreh: Yeah, it's about tapping into that empathy and being able to look outside of your own experience. Because, of course, the thing about having privilege is that it allows you to live a life where you don't have to see this stuff. You don't have to acknowledge it if you don't want to. And you really do have to actively and intentionally seek out the information so that you can start to see it and say, alright, now that I can see that this is here, what is my role and how can I change it? And I'm so glad that you mentioned specifically looking to people from those groups. Because of course, for any of these events, for any of these groups, you're going to find plenty of stuff written by white men.

Jermaine: Yeah.

Shohreh: And going out of your way to say, alright, that's great, thank you for that, but let me go look to the members of these groups and that specific history so I can learn from them, is absolutely necessary in this work.

Jermaine: Yeah, and it goes, to me, back to the saying, "an unexamined life is not worth living." So in this process, I mean, you're gonna have to question your assumptions. You're gonna have to interrogate your beliefs. You're going to have to challenge some of the things that you grew up with.

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Because all of the groups of people I didn't grow up around, but I have to get to know them. And sometimes it might challenge something that I might have—like whoa, I've internalized some of this stuff too, I need to challenge that.

But only by getting to know people different from yourself is a lot of times the only way these things are going to come up for you to be able to challenge them. If you could become adjusted to injustice you could become comfortable very easily, but you have to make yourself uncomfortable. You know, studying these things aren't always easy. but it's very necessary. It's absolutely necessary. That's the only way that we can connect with others and move forward.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and I also remind people to remember that we all have these internalized ideas and beliefs about different groups of people. It's literally in the air that we breathe, like, especially here in the United States, but worldwide as well. And so if you don't look at this stuff because you find yourself, like, in this spiral of guilt and self-blame like we were talking about earlier, that's not helpful.

Like, I think what's helpful to know is it's not your fault that you were taught these things and that they were put into your head. But you're the only one who can change them. You have to go out of your way to make a point to change it. So you're not at fault for having these ideas and beliefs, but you are at fault if you choose not to excavate them and deal with them.

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Jermaine: Exactly. I think that's a very important point because it could turn into finger pointing, and people are trying. I mean, it's not really about being self-righteous so much as it is, like you said, it's about recognizing when you have a wrong thought or maybe your belief isn't aligning with your values, and then asking yourself, okay, what can I do about this? What am I gonna do about this? Because ultimately, I mean, we're all complicit in something, right, whether it be consumerism, materialism.

You know, I found out that Starbucks one time, like, had been found out that they used some slave labor out of Brazil to make some of their coffee, right? So if I'm looking at that as an example, okay, like, what am I going to do with that information, then? That doesn't align with my values so I need to look at more of what I'm buying, where it's coming from, and then make decisions about if I'm going to continue to support a company who's done that before, right?

So those are the kinds of processes and decisions we have to make when we're dealing with history or just any choices that we make in regards to how we're functioning in the world, what we're buying, and how we're interacting with people and things. But it's not about self-righteousness, it's just about making decisions that align with, I think, a higher value for me, which is wisdom, humanity, truth, you know, equality, like, all those types of things. So I think that's what it's ultimately about.

Shohreh: And for me, I always think about I'm just trying to do a little bit better every day with every decision that I make. It's not about being the best or being the most good or arriving at some point where you are woke,

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right? Like, that's not a thing. We're all continuously, like, unlearning and learning and growing throughout our entire lives. And so if I can just have the goal of better, that is enough for me, and I feel like that propels me to keep going forward instead of keeping me stuck.

Jermaine:

Yeah. How much better would our national narrative be? Because I mean, every nation needs something to inspire it, right? What if instead of being this nation where we, like, are walking around with our chest out, we're the biggest, baddest ever, we're the most exceptional, what if it was a narrative where we have done these bad things, committed these atrocities, you know, we started with a lot of lies, a lot of things we were saying, people were equal when they weren't, it's been centered on the white male perspective. But, we are always going to be progressing, we're never going to be perfect.

We can acknowledge all of these things that we've done wrong and acknowledge too that there have been people fighting for progress, we're going to embrace that progress and try to just amplify a nation of progress, right? And we're never going to get it right, we're never going to get it perfect, but progress, right? We're not some exceptional, this deity type of country. I mean, I wish that could be the national narrative as opposed to what it is now.

Shohreh:

Me too [laughs lightly]. Unfortunate that it's not. And I think, thankfully, it has become the narrative of many individuals and groups that are slowly gaining traction and more power as time goes on, despite the kicking and screaming of the people who are currently in power who

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want to keep their privilege and their money and all of that. But, you know, we're coming. We're trying to change that narrative.

Jermaine: I agree. I've seen a lot of grassroots movements just picking up over the last couple of years. And beyond that, of course, you know, people have been trying to push for change much longer, but definitely, I see it. I see people who are wanting to change not only themselves but the nation and the groups that they're in. I see a lot of positive interactions involve a lot of people who have, like, a genuine interest in trying to do better, whether that be from a diversity standpoint, an anti-racism standpoint, you know, combating things like homophobia standpoint. Just whatever it might be to try to make, you know, more of an equal nation for everyone, to live up to that promise. So I'm always glad to see it, and I definitely know there's a lot of people out there who are working on that every day.

Shohreh: Yes, exactly. Well, thank you so much for being here, Jermaine. I loved this conversation. I know my listeners are going to get so much out of this. How can people find you? And how can my listeners best support you at this time?

Jermaine: Yeah, thanks for asking. I am on all social media @TheHumanityArchive, so @TheHumanityArchive. The website is www.thehumanityarchive.com. The podcast is called The Humanity Archive. So if you search The Humanity Archive, you will definitely find me. You could support me on Patreon, as well @TheHumanityArchive, so anywhere you want to find me or support, just search that and I will

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be there ready to teach you history, learn history with you, grow with you, and share in our humanity together.

Shohreh: Lovely, and I will put direct notes to all of that in the show notes so it's extra easy for people to find. Thank you again for the work that you're doing, it's so, so important.

Jermaine: Thank you so much for inviting me, I appreciated being here. Thank you.

Shohreh:

[Music plays]

And that's our show for today. If you're enjoying Conjuring Up Courage, don't forget to subscribe through your podcast provider of choice so you never miss an episode. Additionally, if you haven't left a rating and review in the Apple Podcasts app yet, you can do so from any Apple device to help more people find and benefit from the show. I also love hearing from listeners, so feel free to take a screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. My username is @ShohrehDavoodi on all platforms. Finally, you can sign up for my email newsletter, The Sunday Share, and get more details about how to work with me by going to ShohrehDavoodi.com. Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll join me for the next episode.

[Music fades]