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INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Dr. Javier Wallace. If you have not yet listened to [part one](#), I highly recommend you go back and do that first, because it provides some really important context for this episode. If you have already listened to [part one](#), then please enjoy part two of my interview with Dr. Javier Wallace.

Matt Bowles: Matt Bowles: Javier, I want to circle back to some of the dynamics that you were explaining about anti-Blackness and the other dynamics that you were experiencing in Panama. And I want to ask about the impact of some of those dynamics on sports, in particular, both in Panama as well as the Panamanian diaspora. Can you contextualize that for us? And then I want to go on that journey in terms of where that eventually led you, in terms of investigating and looking further into that?

Javier Wallace: Yes, of course. A great question. So just kind of contextualizing it all, Panama is very much like any other country in the world that we live in now, whereas these largely these ideas exist, that Black people are physically superior than other racialized groups. But that also suggests that Black people are intellectually inferior than other racialized groups. And so, people subscribe to these ideas that Black people are physically superior. And it lends ourselves to creating a lot of myths about Black people that translate very well into sport.

And so, one of those big myths in the Panamanian context is people explain why Black Panamanians do so well in sport because of having #1, being enslaved and surviving enslavement gives us this physical advantage over non-black groups that didn't experience racialized enslavement. And then Panama specifically, we have this Caribbean gene where people say, because most of them, even more successful athletes in Panama are of west Indian origin, that means that because their ancestors came to Panama and they survived the construction of the Panama Canal, which was violent and which was very caused a lot of amount of deaths, and even more because they come from people from the Caribbean, where there wasn't as much intermixing, if you will.

They're like, these are the true Black people. They're like, nearly Africans. I'm saying this is what people say just in Spanish. And because we came as truly Africans and we survived the construction of the Panama Canal, that makes us great soccer players, because we survived slavery, they bred us like animals. We survived the construction of the Panama Canal. And so that idea seeps into the minds of people. And people start explaining, any Black person doing well in sport through this very messed up racialized logic.

That's the only reason you're good, because you were bred to be this way. And many Black people subscribe to this logic as well, too, because that's largely what has been fed to us by society. And then also we have social phenomenon where Panamanians explain that the reason why kids from the ghetto are good is because the ghettos are mostly black. And these marginalized areas, and I'm going to say marginalized areas, y'all got what I mean by ghetto, intentionally marginalized areas are full of these Black people who are descendants of these physical beings and specimens. And because they live these rough lives in these marginalized areas, that makes them rougher football players and makes them better at everything that they do.

And so, they don't take into account enough why Black people in Panama have been positioned to live in these very marginalized areas. We don't stop and have an honest conversation about many of the marginalized areas in Panama that we now call Zonas Rojas, or Red Zones, are historic west Indian and Afro colonial settlements. And particularly, like on the Afro Antillean side, the west Indian Panamanian

communities were very strong communities that dealt with a lot of institutionalized exclusion. And they built communities in spite of.

And these communities that they built, it enabled them, people like my father, to migrate and leave and use sport to leave, use sport to get out of Panama and go make a life for themselves in the states and take advantage of these segregated institutions in the U.S. that are built for Black people, like historically Black colleges. But Latin America says we don't have institutionalized racism at the contractual level like the U.S. So, we never had a need for historically black college and universities.

So, when Latin America says we don't have racism and we got rid of that in our independence wars, you can say what you want to say on paper, but you can't get rid of 500 years of this system that have put people on the bottom. And you are continuing like, you can't get rid of that just because you say it. I can say what I want to say, that doesn't mean anything's going to change. And so, while all these myths exist in the Panamanian context, there's so many ways at least that I look at, like with my father and these people myself, where those myths about who they were existed.

But it's really an effect of, one, them practicing, being good, never take that away. They practice to be good. And two, they operated in these networks that they created that provided opportunities for them through sport, to supersede all the BS that their mainstream society was trying to give to them. And so, you have a strong line of Black Panamanians, mostly of West Indian origin who are coming to the states and excelled. And a large part of my research is tracing how do these pipelines begin, instead of just relying on, they were black, and they were good, and they came, great, but no, they did it.

Now, in the contemporary setting, you have people that do prey, and that's the word I'm going to use, that prey on these marginalized communities and people living in these marginalized areas in their real conditions to make them believe that the only way for social mobility is through sport. And it does provide many people, not a lot, but some, the opportunity to supersede or have upper social mobility. But in the context of Panama, a lot of the ideas that we have about sport and race are created in a product of just large racist ideas.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about the political economy and the political economic dynamics in both Panama and the United States that contribute to human trafficking of vulnerable youth, particularly through high school basketball networks, which I know has been one of the main centerpieces of your research?

Javier Wallace: Yeah, of course. So, the simplest way I can put it is I'll just use the Panama Canal as the example. The United States wants to control the two main waterways in the world, the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean. The Panama and isthmus present an opportunity which has long thought about to be this place where we can have a canal, and then this waterway can be opened up. The capitalists, the people with the most money, the imperialists, the United States, make an agreement with certain Panamanians or oligarchy, where they are coming in strong arming Colombia out of this portion of their country.

Believe me, I'm not advocating that Colombia should stay with Panama, they were full of it as well, because some people might interpret it that way. I'm definitely not going that route. But the U.S. comes and basically extracts. Extracts from Panama, extracts from the people there, for the benefit of the country and primarily the benefit of people that live in the United States. For us to use all the things that we need at a very cheap price, most of all, the equipment that we're probably using to produce this podcast probably passed through the Panama Canal. And you probably got it at a price that people that live in Panama would

never get it at, because that's how long the US has controlled trade for our consumption as Americans, as people in this big, industrialized post, whatever you want to call it, in the United States and like the global north, to use such an academic term.

And so, basketball, as we talk about trafficking, is very similar. And so, all of the NBA franchises are based in North America. Only one of them now being outside of the United States, which are the Toronto Raptors. We love the NBA. We love it. We love the NFL too. We love it. And we want the best talent. And we have now gotten into our minds in the reality that the best talent in the NBA is no longer exclusively in the United States. 1992 helped us understand that with the Dream team. What happened to the Redeem team in 2004 really crystallized it. Over a quarter of the NBA's opening day roster are now international players. That has been a 180 from 1992 to the current moment. And so now we're all over the world.

However, to make it to the biggest leagues in basketball in this moment, you need to be in the U.S. or North America. You have to be here. Even with the investment of like NBA Africa and these other ideas that infrastructure doesn't exist in the way that the NBA exists here. If you want to be at the top level at the men's game, you probably need to be in the U.S. And so, what ends up happening is this pool factor where now these young people are aspiring athletes who want to be in the NBA. They need to find their way to the United States because the NBA is tied to our college system.

Even with the things happening in college ball right now and all the changes, the intercollegiate system of the US is still the best pathway to professional sport. It's the closest to guaranteed pathway for the lucky few to make it to the pinnacle of the sport, the NBA. But you have to be a student to be in the intercollegiate. And that means to be at college you need to be a high school student. And so, to be in that pathway, the easiest possible, you need to come to the U.S. So again, like with the Panama Canal, extraction for our consumption, it happens the same way for young people wanting to play in the NBA primarily or now the NFL is extraction for our consumption. You have to come.

There are very few regulations that exist at this high school secondary level that regulates the type of migration and movement that needs to happen for these young people to get to where they want. And it sets the stage for what can become human trafficking in sport because of the way people are moving. Who's moving them? Under what pretenses, under what contracts are they being moved, what ideas are they having? You know, so that sets the stage like this extraction for our consumption in the global north. Just the like colonialism. I mean, that's how you explain it.

Matt Bowles: Can you give some specific examples of how human trafficking through high school basketball networks in the United States actually works? Some case study examples. I've heard you even talk about examples right here in the state of North Carolina where you and I are both sitting right now. So, can you just share with folks so they understand how this actually works and manifests in the United States?

Javier Wallace: Yeah, great points. I'll use North Carolina as the example. So, there was a school outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, called the Evelyn Mac Academy. The Evelyn Mack Academy was founded by a woman named Evelyn Mack. And it was a private school that had the authorization of the United States Student Exchange Visitors bureau program that could bring international students on the F1 student visa. Only institutions that have that authorization can bring students to the U.S. under this very specific program.

Public schools around the country largely do not use this system because the schools are funded with public dollars. And so international students have to pay, they don't get to use the tax benefit of going to public school, if you will. What happens with the few schools in the case of Evelyn Mac that have this ability to bring international students in this official program? What she did was get in communication, or she was reached out to, I don't know how it happened, by people who did not have the authority to issue student visas to legally bring students. And what she did was she processed the kids and their visas through her school.

So that means she sends the paperwork to the student living in whatever country. So, she might not have brokered the deal with the family. It might be a coach or somebody that told the kid, I'm going to get you to go to Evelyn Mac Academy and she's going to send you the paperwork. She sends kids paperwork. The kids and their family go to the U.S. embassy and whatever country they are finally approved, because it's not an easy process. And then they come to the U.S. But instead of going to Evelyn Mac Academy, coach takes them somewhere else, the place that did not have the authorities to do that.

At that moment, trafficking has happened. Even if the coach is a great person, even if the school that kid goes to that they're not authorized to go to legally. Trafficking had happened in that moment. Fraud happened in that moment. So regardless of what the outcome is for the student, because it might not be bad per se, they might have a bad experience, but they had experienced trafficking in that moment because how they came, labor is being exploited. They experienced it.

And then in other cases, like the ones that make most news and the ones like that I've been in media about are the ones that get real bad or like, kid comes in school, where they go, doesn't have food, doesn't have proper housing. They're getting mentally, verbally, psychologically abused by coaching staff, not going to a real school, and it gets blown up, and it's just horrible. Kid doesn't know what to do.

They ended up jumping from school to school. That trafficking happened there as well, too. It's a spectrum. It's not just these bad actors, because there are people that are bad actors, and they're doing things intentionally. Well, okay, if I keep it at trafficking specifically, but trafficking is not the only way that kids can get in trouble with their visas just because it's so convoluted. There are other ways for them to fall out of proper status that can mess up their time in the U.S. But trafficking is usually a bad actor somewhere that is intentionally defrauding them or exploiting it.

And again, even if that person who defrauds them, treats them nice, treats them well, gets them into school, but the fact that they took them, they sent them something from one place and didn't take them there at that point, that's trafficking. And so, Evelyn Mack, just to put it back together, in those instances, she sold the visas or the I least 75 kids to different coaches around the country for about \$1,000 each. And many of those kids, we don't know where they are, because the only record that we had of them was supposed to be at her school, which many of them never made it to, and now she's dead.

Matt Bowles: I know that you chose to eventually go to do your PhD at Utah Austin, as you said, and you ended up studying this very topic as a centerpiece of your research. Can you talk about your decision to go to UT Austin and then what your experience was like there, being back in Austin and being at the University of Texas?

Javier Wallace: I went to UT Austin because it was the only place I applied to. I mean it literally that simple. I had a relationship with UT because when I first was at Florida A and M, as I mentioned, the

woman who woke me up, if you will, I refuse to use woke now because the way it's been co-opted by the right wing. But before it was co-opted, before I was woke, I got woke through the help of Dr. Don Norwood.

At that time of waking up, I was invited to go to University of Illinois on a visit to do for a PhD program with a wonderful woman by the name of Jacqueline McDowell. And I did want to research Black men in sport, and she was largely thinking about Black women in sport. And so, she recommended me out to different people who she thought would be better advisors and one of them happened to be in Austin, who becomes my advisor, Dr. Lewis Harrison. And he invites me to come to UT because I was in Austin. I was on my internship. He invites me out, and I come, and I meet him. I meet Langston Clark. I meet Albert Bimper, played in NFL Super bowl ring. He's now at Colorado State. And I meet Martin Smith. And all these guys are studying PhDs.

Langston says something very striking to me. He calls this thing the intellectual barbershop. As we're sitting, I'm like, oh, my God. I never thought about that. Like, oh, damn, that's deep, bro. And I'm like, oh, I want to be a part of that. But that's when I applied and got denied because my GRE scores were so horrible that UT was like, nah, dog. And I was cool. That's when I went to Panama, because I was like, deuces. Like, I didn't want to come anyway. I was going to Panama. I was only supposed to be in Panama for six months.

It turned into six years because I was supposed to go to Panama, reapply for the program, come back in the fall with this same full scholarship. It just never happened. It took six years for that to happen. But what ends up happening? I stay in contact with a lot of these guys, specifically Martin Smith. I stay in contact with Martin. Martin graduates from his PhD, and Martin comes to Panama to coach basketball and live after his PhD, and he comes and lives with me, and so we spend a lot of time together. I hire him as a coach at the school where I'm working, and he's coaching basketball for me. And then we just talking out of it like, I'm 26, maybe I'm an athletic director at this point in time.

Like, I'm the highest I can go in Panama without working for the government, and I ain't working for the government down there. Cause I already know how they get down. And I'm like, y'all ain't going to carry me off to nobody jail. I might make a lot of money now. See, that's one of those money decisions. It's like when I could have been a coach, but I wanted to be woke. This is another one. I could have loaded my pocket right now. We wouldn't be sitting here talking, but me always trying to take the high road. And, no, ain't nobody wins like that. Nobody wins like the high road. I took the high road and was like, no, that ain't going to be for me.

And so, Martin was like, what you going to do then? You might as well just go do your PhD. And I was like, cool. So, he gave me the game. They had this thing called the Black student athletes something. He said, do this. He said, go there and start your presentation in Spanish. Don't say nothing in English. Just start talking in Spanish. I'm like, cool, bro. I ain't got nothing to lose. So, I go out there, I do exactly what he says. And then after I finished, people literally rushed the stage, and I had an offer on the spot to be an athletic director in Mexico.

And then Lewis Harrison jumps up and says he cannot come be an athletic director because he's coming here to school. And I'm like, oh, I am? Really? I didn't. I was like, I didn't know that. Like, I was like, oh, okay. I guess that's how this is going to go. So basically, he told me I was going to come to school, so I didn't apply anywhere else. I did what he said I was going to do, and somehow was, like, literally only making one point higher on the GRE I got in this time. And so that's the history of getting into UT.

But because I spent so much time working in sport in Panama, while I wanted to go to UT and think about Black athletes from Latin America as a research topic, I also met this kid in Panama who was on the national basketball team under 16 at that time, and I met his mother at a basketball tournament that I was organizing, and she was raising money for him to go to the states. And this young person from Klong, where my father is from, I wanted to help him, but I didn't have the money. So, I called my dad, and my dad was like, no worries. I'm going to pay for everything. She was just looking for a donation. He was like, how much does it cost? He like, I'm going to pay for everything.

And so, he paid for his trip to go to the states because he was on some. My parents didn't have any money when it was time for me to go to the states from Panama. But all of my uncles and everybody from the community literally chipped in a little bit of this, a little bit of that until it made enough for him to get a plane ticket to leave Panama. And so, he was like, I got to pay it for it. He does that, and me, this kid and his family just develop a relationship, and he ends up getting a scholarship to Texas to go play at a high school. And I'm going to UT. Literally, we leave within a month of each other to go to Texas to start this academic journey, and him and his family and I were close. Now, his parents know I work in sports. They're like, hey, look out for bro. And I'm like, cool, no problem.

And so, when I get to Texas, I go first, he comes a couple of weeks later. He missed my parents in Austin, and he goes to where he's going, and then it just turns out being horrible. Like, it's absolutely trash. I don't know what's going on. Nobody knows what's going on. They end up kicking him out of school, and he ends up living with me and my family in Austin. And at the same time, I'm doing a PhD, and so I'm supposed to be studying things, and I wanted to study Black kids playing sport and Panama, but soccer. And I was talking to my advisor, two of them, both Lewis Harrison and Dr. Jennifer Adair. And they both were like, yeah, that thing you are talking about, football, it's cool. I like it. But this thing you are talking about with this kid, like, you need to write about that. You need to do that.

And I never thought about studying it. I just was like; we're dealing with it. And I'm taking him to immigration appointments. I'm reading immigration law, and I'm doing the work without knowing I'm doing the work. And so, once I'm literally at the dissertation stage, they were like, you need to do this. And I just sat there, and I wrote everything that happened, and I just turned it into some resources. And so that's how I ended up on basketball, by just being in a place again, like I mentioned, I just thought my parents met on that tennis court in Austin, which it could have been divine intervention that they met. It could have been divine intervention that I met that young kid. But I know that there were larger things that were happening in society that when we did meet each other, it put us in a position that only the world could have had happened. And I just was seeing all of that happening.

And so, in the book that I write, I write about that I'm right. Like, yes, he ends up being trafficked, but I don't want to take away from how him and I met, which is a product of my father being a part of these Black networks through sport that they created in spite of the Panamanian state. Not wanting them to have opportunities, of wanting them to do that allows him to go to Austin, meet my mother, have us, me go to HBCU, have this understanding, thinking, move to Panama, be aligned with these ideas to meet this Black kid who wants to do the same thing that my father did and seeing my dad and him, because I'm like, if this was my dad before he leaves, and he doesn't have those people who help, I don't exist. I have to do that.

And so, I wanted to not only think about trafficking as the horrible thing that it is, but think about, like, how we meet each other and how, in many ways, we help each other, which is a product of how we met in the first place. Without us doing really anything. We just met.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about how your dissertation turned out, what you found in your research, and your first book project that is being published by Duke University Press?

Javier Wallace: Yes, of course. So, my first book about basketball trafficking, I have to give it a name that's only in English. That's what the press wants. But the findings are what I talked about before with how trafficking happens, where there are bad actors that are intentionally doing things that bend, break rules to get people here. But in addition to that, I also found that there are ways. I kind of alluded, I mentioned it a bit, that there are other ways that kids get into migratory issues that can resemble how kids experience in trafficking through the use of the visa, in the lack of oversight and the lack of experience that coaches and families have of using this visa for sport, that can just put a kid in a bad situation that's bigger than just being exploited.

Because while, unfortunately, the most newsworthy titles and the sexiest part of basketball trafficking are the kids who have been exploited horribly by this bad, bad, big person. Like, we love that. But there's also these other kids who just find themselves in bad situations that they didn't even know they were in. That puts them at risk of being deported, puts them at risk of being barred entry into the US or reentry, puts them at risk of not knowing how to leave or operate. So, I found that.

And another big finding was the 14th Amendment. Wow. The way that the 14th Amendment is even playing into this whole thing, you know, 14th Amendment is this naturalization is amendment that comes as the ending of slavery in the United States. And Black people, largely Black people, which give us birthright citizenship, gaining citizenship to the United States, and access to things. And one thing that we're having access to, it's not a constitutional right, but we hold it in high regard, is access to education and not denying somebody access to education.

In our contemporary understanding, which I write about in the book, there's a ruling called *Plier versus Doe*, where the state of Texas and our grandiose nature, we decide to not allow undocumented kids entry into our public schools. And we're deciding that if we do allow them in, we have to charge them the full rate of tuition for them to attend. Now, how do we know who is undocumented versus documented? That means we have to interrogate. We have to ask people their status, which is not a best practice.

And so, what *Plyler versus Doe* does, it prevents any school from denying access to a public education to anybody on the basis of their migratory status in the United States. You cannot ask somebody's migratory status in the U.S. So, effectively, it's a pretty strong statute that we use in the 14th amendment to ensure that people in our country have access to public education, because the logic is that if these young people don't have education or access to education, they might become a charge or a burden to our society, because they won't go to school, they won't have access to jobs.

And so, it's better, even though they're not legally in the country or legally admitted into the country, that they at least have access so that they don't become a charge to society. And so, I love it. We need it. But the catch 22 with this protection is like what happened to Evelyn Mack, where I can't bring you to my public school, and I want you because you're from Nigeria, you're from Panama, but I can get somebody like Evelyn Mac, who can bring you in through her school, and then I can just bring you to my public school.

And since I can't ask you what your migratory status is anyway, because it's protected by the 14th amendment, I just put you onto my basketball team and don't say anything about it. So that's a big finding in the book, is the way that this protection has been perverted. And I'm careful how I talk about it,

especially in this time, because of the way, particularly where we are in the country, in the United States, around immigration, in the way that very anti-immigration rhetoric and politics and parties are talking about immigration, that is something that they could easily grab hold on and co-opt to say, this is why we need to further punish these people, further do these things to these people, because look what they're doing. They're just being malicious and taking advantage. Eating cats and dogs. That's what we heard. And that's exactly what is at risk of happening. And so, I'm very careful on how I talk about that in the book, but it is a reality, and a big finding is the way it's been co-opted.

Matt Bowles: So, with regard to potential solutions. When you identify in your research the factors that enable this to continue happening, what types of policy changes, for example, are needed and would you perhaps recommend protecting vulnerable youth and ultimately end the basketball trafficking?

Javier Wallace: To mitigate basketball trafficking, we need a complete overhaul to our visa system. It currently doesn't have any designated portion that makes us at least reveal that a young person is coming to the country for sport, which I don't think will solve the problem, but at least it will give us an indicator, a record of knowing who's in the country for sport. And so that would be extremely beneficial. And I think that's the least that can happen.

I think more drastically, which will probably affect more change in a positive direction, is to just reevaluate that visa full stop and make something for sport. And of course, the writing is already on the wall, and it was almost happening with name, image and likeness. And Congress was supposed to debate on reevaluating the F1 student visa because the same things that allow trafficking to happen for the student through the F1 student visa, as far as sports are the same thing that prevent international students from taking advantage of this new landscape of name, image and likeness, because it's the education visa, not a work visa, so they can't do certain things.

And so, Congress was supposed to reevaluate it in this last session, and they said nothing about it. But that would be drastic. And I think a better way of mitigating is if we just create something completely new that attends to the billion-dollar sport industry that interscholastic and intercollegiate and professional sports are. That would be a better solution.

Matt Bowles: Well, while you were at UT Austin studying all of this, doing your PhD, you also founded [Black Austin Tours](#). Can you share a little bit about what led to the founding of the award-winning Black Austin Tours and what makes it so different and unique?

Javier Wallace: I was broke. I left a full-time job in Panama to come be a student in Austin. That's how I like to explain it. And I had experience giving tours of Panama. It just made sense. But importantly, what was happening at UT was, I was in classes like black education in America with Dr. Kathleen Brown and learning about all these big phenomenon's that happen in the African American education experience that I largely wasn't familiar with.

But I was at home. I was in Austin learning this, and I was living at home. And so, when I had these questions that were happening on the national level, I was literally at my local level being able to ask these questions to people that were older than me and do very individualized research. And so that research was not only traditional scholarly research, but I was thinking about, like, the family reunions and these older people that are around. I'm like, oh, my gosh, there's so much about Austin that I'm learning that I didn't know that I'm learning because I'm a doc student and I'm just learning about these things.

And because I have this experience giving tours in Panama and really taking these high-level topics and bringing them down to a level that anybody can understand. And the gig economy is really emerging. So, Airbnb has Airbnb experiences newly minted. So, I don't even have to think about, like, how do I start this business? I go Airbnb, and I create the East Austin history walk. And that's the origins of [Black Austin Tours](#). It's a way for me to make money in the talk with the public based on the experiences that I've had previously and what I'm learning at UT in combination what I'm experiencing historically with being a Black Austinite.

And so, I'm just giving tour any day that I didn't have to go to class. I was on Airbnb taking that little \$30 at a time. They are taking 20%. 20%. I'm getting hustled. They are hustling me. But I don't know no better. So, I'm letting them hustle me. It's better than not having no money. Cause, shoot, UT ain't paying us nothing. And to answer your question, what makes it unique is I don't know what I'm doing. I'm just being me, as you can see, talking a lot. And people actually like it because I get Airbnb hits me up, and they're like, you know, we're looking at our experience platform, and we're looking at all the ratings that we have across our entire platform.

And you have the best ratings for storytelling. Would you be interested in telling us how you do this? I'm like, hell, I don't know, but okay, y'all, come on. And so, they came to Austin. They filmed the video, which is on the website, and they called me the master storyteller. I don't make this up. People think I don't make that up. They made that up. I'm like, okay, sounds all right. And I can say, oh, Airbnb gave it to me. Add an extra zero to that check, right? You know what I'm saying? Like, give them that.

But what I realized is when they come, they hit me up they do this thing, and then the news in Austin, they hit me up. Somehow, they found my experience on Airbnb, and they're like, we want to do a story. And I'm like, huh? If the news does a story and more people come, and the only way that they can find me is on Airbnb. Airbnb is going to take 20% of every ticket person that comes. I'm like, hell, no more. They've been hustling me, but not no more. They own to it. I'm on to it now.

So, I literally figure out how to I go on GoDaddy. I need a website because these people are coming next week. I got to get this down before next week comes. I'm like, yes, news, come, come. I'm going to let you go. So, I'm like, oh, shoot. What did I do? What did I do? What did I do? What is this? I'm like, hell. [Black Austin Tours](#) available purchase. I'm like, oh, there you go. That's the name of the company, [Black Austin Tours](#). I'm like, oh, wait, I need a shirt because they put me on tv. I'm like, I need them to see something.

So, I'm like, oh, what can I do? I went to a black college. We always use the Martin letters. Like, we always do that anyway. So let me just go on Teespring and design [Black Austin Tours](#). using the Martin letters. And I'm not going to pay for them because they're coming next week. I don't got time for them to send it to me. I like screenshot. I went to big frog to print the t shirt. I'm like, I need you to make this. Give me a shirt. They hooked it up. They did it exactly like I did. And they printed it out. Put my shirt. I'm like, oh, shit. I need people to book. I'm googling. Booking platform. Booking platform. Go book your codes. I'm like, \$140 a month. We can do that. Buy. I buy it and then I go on GoDaddy and I'm like, I don't know how to build no website.

So, I'm doing the building blocks and I'm just, boom, putting everything together. And then by the time the news comes and they're like, well, tell us about yourself. I'm Javier Wallace. I'm the founder of [Black Austin Tours](#). And I'm out here, and that's how it exists. I didn't think about it. I didn't have no marketing plan. I didn't have no color scheme. It was just these people are coming, and I'm not going to keep giving Airbnb

20%. Forget that. And it just organically emerges Black Austin tours. And then I start taking it a bit more serious, and then it just becomes what it does. Now.

Matt Bowles: For people that come on one of the [Black Austin Tours](#), what will they experience and what are some of the stories and some of the history to learn about?

Javier Wallace: Yes, of course. So [Black Austin Tours](#) is very unique now because we have different ways of engagement with people. We started out primarily as, and we still offer leisure travelers, what we would call heritage travelers who are interested in heritage-based experiences. And so, they're the leisure travelers where we are giving them the history of the space. For somebody who's visited Austin who might not know about the city, or many Austinites who just want to learn more. And so we go to these different places, and I'll talk about some of those stories in a second here for the leisure traveler.

But now, as Black Austin Tours has uniquely emerged as a heritage educational travel company, we also have different levels of engagement where we can go deep into subjects in space, in place where we have ERGs employee resource groups, we have university groups coming out that want very specific topics, but all of them are place based educational experiences. But on our leisure side, for the day travelers that are coming in, you're going to come understand a couple different parts of Austin, east Austin. You learn about, through storytelling and engaging with the actual sites, the history of Black people, in particular, creating a community in spite of institutionalized segregation that creates official segregated district for Black people in Austin.

Like the community that these people build inside, which are churches that we go to, which are nightclubs that are on the chitlin circuit that we go by, which are these libraries, these schools that these people tell the city they want to rename and give them black names in the 1920's and the 1930's. This idea that black people advocating for representation is not something in the 2020's that happened. We were doing this in 1890. These people were doing this in 1910. And so, we show people that, and we engage like we have music on that tour, because Austin is a live music capital of the world.

So, we carry our speakers, and we show the trajectory, like, I'll give it to y'all if you come on the tour. I'm sorry I ruined it. But there's a very popular song, Kanye, *Gold Digger*, that's out of Austin, Texas. At its core, it's out of Austin, and people don't know that. What becomes Kanye's *Gold Digger* hit is a gospel song that originates in Austin in the 1950's, which is the first gospel song in the country to sell over 1 million copies. And if you don't believe me, the name of the song is, *Let's Talk About Jesus*. That's it. And you listen. I've heard this before. Oh, Ray Charles *I Got a Woman* like you listen to. I got a woman like. Hold on. That's that. Yeah. And so, we talk about that. And then downtown on that tour, we go to the Capitol building, talk about convict leasing, because that's a big part of how the Capitol building, Austin, even comes into existence, and it's not talked about. So downtown, we always challenging people to look beyond, pass through, in.

In between the signs and saying they're not telling the whole story. So, we try to give them a different way of viewing what they're looking at from a different set of lens and experiences. Going to places like Wool Ridge square, where Black people have some of our earliest communities, post emancipation, in Austin, which are just a public park now. So, our storytelling is trying to paint a picture in your head in the absence of the built environment. And that's something that [Black Austin Tours](#) we've been awarded for in this landscape around heritage, history, and preservation, because for so long, a lot of people have valued the built environment like architecture.

And in many cases, some of these structures don't exist for African Americans for many reasons. And so, I didn't know I was doing this. I was just trying to paint a picture for people that I was seeing in my mind. And it caused some of our preservation boards to have a different look at what was [Black Austin Tours](#) doing and saying, like, they're taking people to this park. It's nothing there. But people are raving about going to this park that's just a green space. And I'm. No, it's not just a green space. This is a piece of land that. This has been commodified in the United States, taken from indigenous people. It had been placed on the same line that Black people are commodified as and placed on the same budget line as well, too.

And so, when these people arrive out of slavery and are having resources to purchase land, the same thing they have been once reduced to as a commodity, they go out and buy this piece of land, and then they start building around it. And so, yes, the structures aren't there anymore, but you have to see that this is not just a green space. This is an extension of the people who have been once commodified to what this land had been commodified to and saying, we need a piece of this thing for our own independence in this space. Because if the larger society won't give it to us after the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendment happens, if y'all won't give it to us, we have to find a way to give it to ourselves. And so that's what we do in [Black Austin Tours](#) is take the scene in the unseen and make it visible enough for people to engage with.

Matt Bowles: Since you are the master storyteller, I feel like I have to ask you about the craft. Can you explain why narrative storytelling is so important? What makes a great storyteller? And how can all of us, the listeners, become better storytellers in our own lives?

Javier Wallace: I just heard this recently on a podcast, and I think it's what I have endeavored to do, and it helped me articulate some of the approaches that I've taken is people don't always remember what they hear. People remember how they feel and how you make them feel. And so, my approach to storytelling is talking to people's heads to give them facts, but then talking to their hearts to make them feel that fact.

So, an example of it is a story that I usually tell in Austin. I give it to you now to give you this example of how I approach storytelling. I often tell the story of Mary Armstrong, who was enslaved in Missouri by this family, and she is separated from her mother. Her mother is sold south to Texas. Over the course of her mother being sold south to Texas, as an enslaved person marries enslavers, they manumit her. That means, and I give you this fact, because manumission and emancipation are two factually different things. She's manumitted.

That means that during the time of legal enslavement, manumission gives people freedom on an individual basis, not on a large, emancipatory basis like what happens at the passing of the 13th amendment, but she's manumitted while people are still enslaved. And so, Mary decides she wants to go find her mother, who she'd been separated from. And so, what she does, she embarks on this journey to Texas in search of her mother. She says that she gets on a boat in Missouri, in St. Louis, and she goes all the way down to New Orleans. And from New Orleans, she gets on the boat to Texas, she gets to Galveston, she gets to Houston, and she starts hearing from the people around that her mother is in Austin area.

And so, what Mary does, she finds her way to Austin. But when Mary gets to Austin and she's looking for her mother, she runs into trouble. And I usually tell this story at the Texas governor's mansion because there are some nice steps behind me because Mary tells us in the story that when she gets to Austin that the people think that she's enslaved, and she tells them she's not. She says she is a free woman, and they say, prove it. But Mary knows that she can't show these people her papers because she thinks if she does that, they could rip them up.

So, she says she needs a public environment for this to happen. And so, she says, they start the auction. I said, people, I don't know if these are the steps behind me where they actually auction married, but it doesn't matter. This is a public space where a lot of people pass, and they put Mary on the auction block, and she let them bid on her until the highest bidder won this auction. And at that moment, she reaches into her bosom and pulls out her manumission papers in front of this crowd. And the person looks at her papers and said, this woman is a free woman, and they have to let her go. And they do. And then what she does, she goes and finds her mother. And Mary finds her mother.

She moves to Houston with her mother. She marries somebody, and she has a life in her nineties. She's interviewed in the 1930s, and that was her story, and we have the testimony to that story. But then what I do there, because I think it's such a heart wrenching story. I asked the people the question because I want you to remember this. What do you think compelled Mary to embark on that journey and go through all that to find her mother? I think it's called love. I think it's that same thing that you have for the person who might have birthed you. I think it's the same thing that you share for your children. I think it's the same thing that you feel when you're in a community. It makes you do things that you wouldn't otherwise do. It makes you confront challenges that you otherwise wouldn't do because you love that person.

Mary must have loved her mother. And so instead of thinking as enslaved people, as just a commodity which they have been commodified to, let's think about these people as full, holistic human beings who have the ability to love, who have the ability to dislike, who have the ability to go to the extreme and look for the person that they love, in this case, her mother. And so, I feel like in that storytelling, I'm giving you facts. I'm telling you slavery happened in Missouri manumission happens. People are being sold south into Texas. Slavery is expanding in Texas. There is slavery in Austin. People don't think we have slavery in Austin.

I'm giving you these facts, and I'm giving you facts on how Black people navigate, because she's doing this as a free woman, navigating this slave territories. But then I'm talking to your heart, because I want you to remember. I want you to be like, wait, hold on. I am Marry because I love somebody, and I'm willing to do things that people will consider crazy because I love that person, and I don't care what they think or call me or try to persuade me not to do because my love commands me to do it.

And so, I think that's a big part of storytelling, is talk to people's heads. Give them the facts but make them feel it here because you feel it here. And I usually get people crying there. I'm like, oh, shit, here we go. Then that's a whole another thing. Cause it's like, who's crying? Why are they crying? Cause it might be, like, a Black person who's really feeling it, and I've had that happen. And sometimes, like, a white person who just feels guilty, and I'm like, I can't do nothing with those tears right now. People have to find a way to deal with that on our own time. Cause we can't stop for that.

But at the end of the day, I know why. I feel like I know why. Because they feel it. They are in this thing. And while it's violent, I'm always thinking, like the Black people. I'm like, I don't want this whole thing to be about oppression. I want you to know, in spite of these violent things, we still found it at our core to love somebody, and we were going to do it. So, it's not just oppression, especially in. I think it was good for storytelling, like inheritance tourism. Black heritage tourism is you have to strike that balance when talking about oppression, because in many cases, you cannot not talk about it because it literally gives us the stories in the framing of why these things exist. But I'm always thinking about, I don't want anybody to walk away from here feeling defeated and feeling, this is all our stories are ever about. And I have to be intentional with the crafting of the narrative, where I can give you the facts, but be attuned to your humanity and your person and always craft that.

Matt Bowles: How can people learn more about black Austin tours and sign up to come on one of your [Black Austin Tours](#).

Javier Wallace: Yeah, hit us up blackaustintours.com. All the information that you want, and need is there. Come on, Black Austin Tours IG. We also have a lot of information that we post on there. You can sign up for a tour, you can learn more. We invite you to learn just about Austin and our amazing contributions of black people there. And then when you're in Austin, we encourage you to come take a tour. And so, all the information is on our social media channels and on our website. And you can sign up for our newsletter to get more up to date information on the things that we work on.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part two. For direct links to everything we have discussed in this episode, including how you can learn more and sign up for one of the [Black Austin Tours](#). Just go to [the show notes](#) for this episode and there you are going to find direct links to everything, including how to find, follow and connect with Javier. And if you would like to hang out in person with me and Javier and a bunch of other Maverick Show guests, we are all going to be at Black Travel Summit October 10 to 13th in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and you can get a special discount. To join us, just go to themaverickshow.com/bts, that stands for *Black Travel Summit*. There you can buy your ticket and enter the code **maverick** at checkout for a 10% discount. And when you do, send me a direct message on [Instagram](#) at [mattbowlesmaverick](https://www.instagram.com/mattbowlesmaverick) and let me know that you are coming so we can plan to link up in person. That link, that discount code and everything else we have discussed in this episode will be at one place. Just go to themaverickshow.com and go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. And remember to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Dr. Javier Wallace.

Good night, everybody.