

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Linda speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Linda Holmes	Host	Coming to you from my home office, it’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Linda Holmes, in for Jesse Thorn. Giancarlo Esposito was born in Copenhagen. The son of an Italian stagehand and an American singer. He and his family moved to New York City when he was six years old. And before long, he took up acting, performing on Broadway at first, then—as he grew up—movies. He appeared in many of Spike Lee’s early films. And if you remember him for one role, back then, it’s probably as Buggin Out—the guy who organizes a boycott of Sal’s pizzeria in <i>Do the Right Thing</i> . He’s appeared in dozens of other movies and TV shows. Recently, he’s gotten a lot of acclaim for playing Gus Fring.
			Gus first appeared in <i>Breaking Bad</i> —a mild-mannered but intense owner of a restaurant franchise who moonlights as a massively influential drug kingpin. Giancarlo reprises his role in <i>Better Call Saul</i> , which just wrapped up its 5 <sup>th</sup> season on AMC. The role has earned Giancarlo two Emmy nominations. And you’re about to hear why. This is an iconic moment from <i>Breaking Bad</i> . Gus has just met Walter White—the protagonist of the show, played by Brian Cranston—and in this scene, Gus is trying to convince Walter to work for him, no matter the cost.
00:01:31	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:32	Clip	Clip	<b>Gus Fring:</b> Why did you make these decisions?
			<b>Walter White:</b> For the good of my family?
			<b>Gus:</b> Then they weren’t bad decisions. What does a man do, Walter? A man provides for his family.
			<b>Walter:</b> This costs me my family.
			<b>Gus:</b> When you have children, you always have family. They will always be your priority, your responsibility. And a man... a man provides. And he does it even when he’s not appreciated or respected. Or even loved. He simply bears up. And he does it. Because he’s a man.
00:02:23	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:24	Linda	Host	Giancarlo Esposito, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> !
00:02:27	Giancarlo Esposito	Guest	Thank you! What a pleasure to be here.
00:02:29	Linda	Host	You know, people are gonna hear me greet you and they’re gonna think that’s it not Jersey enough. I’m not giving you the John-Carlo Esposito. But we talked about this!
00:02:38	Giancarlo	Guest	Well—we did! And you say my name absolutely perfectly and I still hear some Jersey in there. It’s all right.

00:02:46 Linda Host *[Laughs.]* So, we were just hearing Gus Fring. Gus Fring is one of the scariest men probably on television ever. Talk to me a little bit about how you see Gus Fring?

00:03:00 Giancarlo Guest Well, I loved hearing this particular clip from the show, because “a man provides” is such a very wonderful speech and I was listening and what was resonating, for me, was—at that particular time and even now—I feel that way, myself. So, there were so many parts of Gus in our first episode that I ever did, in—that was written into the stage direction that really inspired me. And inspires me, to this day. I felt as if this particular “a man provides” speech was so important to my life, because I have four children and because—as a man, I realize the value of being a hunter-gatherer, a storyteller who goes into the world to bring home the bacon, to bring home the stories from the world that teaches his family and illuminates their journey as to where he’s been and how much loves and cares for them, that he does whatever it takes.

Gustavo Fring, for me, is a man who has a very high moral standard. And someone who does care about his family of workers, in his businesses, no matter what he does. His businesses are—he is trying to build as if he’s building a million-dollar, billion-dollar corporation. Which he is. He just happens to be dealing in illicit drugs. And so, it was important for me to find a way to play this character where he did have some regard for our social norms and he did have a feeling about community and he did feel as if people mattered, even above and beyond some of the reprehensible things that he’s done to people, within the show. So, I was committed to playing a different kind of quote/unquote, “villain”, and didn’t want to play anything that was stereotypical. And in my conversations with Vince Gilligan, after I did one episode as a guest star and another episode a guest star, and he wanted me to consider being a part of the show—I wanted to tell a different story. And I explained to him that that story of Gustavo Fring, his integrity and who he really is, was... was really cued by stage direction he wrote in the very first episode. And that was hiding in plain sight.

And when I think about the number of people who hide even from themselves, but who are hiding from their neighbors and their communities—doing illicit things—but they look to be stand-up human beings and you find out that they aren’t, that was intriguing to me. And I wanted to create a character built on some of those building blocks.

00:05:52 Linda Host And you played Gustavo Fring on *Breaking Bad* for several years, and then came over to—have come over to play him again, on *Better Call Saul*, which takes place a number of years before the events of *Breaking Bad*. Is it—when you take a character who you’ve already built and you’ve constructed, is it a different experience to go back and find him—you know, lots of people will play characters kind of progressively later in their lives. What was it like kind of excavating him earlier in his life than you had already built and kind of encountered him?

00:06:28 Giancarlo Guest Working backwards is an interesting thing, because of course, we—as actors, in playing a role—always look for the nuance of something new to play. And this was my biggest concern in going back into Gustavo’s history, was to be able to really explore his history. Although, in my conversation with Vince Gilligan, the—and

also in my knowledge of character—we want to keep certain things secret, because that is the titillation of the character: that people want to see more, they want to know more that they don't know. They wanna surmise. They wanna think about what—who is he, really? So, I knew that we'd have a very particular journey in going backwards.

For me, it was modulating and thinking about what this man would have been like when he was trying to create his empire. Would he have been as congenial? Would he have been as compassionate to human beings and as a front, looking more compassionate and less agitated or aggravated or intense as we've seen him in *Breaking Bad*? So, it was a challenge for me to work backwards and play a younger, less formulated Gus, but someone that we do recognize so that when we're able to put these building blocks together, that they would be perfection. And so, for me [*chuckles*] I went through great toil to find little things and little ways to create Gus as yet a uniquely different character than that of who we saw in *Breaking Bad*.

00:08:11 Linda Host

And Gus—and this is a little bit of a spoiler for people who haven't already watched *Breaking Bad*, so just be aware, take your little skip button if you need it. But you played a very famous and kind of iconic death scene for Gus, on *Breaking Bad*, which revolved around—you know—Gus being grievously injured, to say the least, and walking out of a room such that he was in profile, but he was—from—we were looking at his left side of his face. And as the camera pans around, it's the right side of his face that's destroyed. And I've always been curious about how you interpreted that very unusual—comes out of the room, straightens his tie—what the way that was constructed meant for you?

00:09:02 Giancarlo Guest

It meant that you really saw a man who was true to himself. You know. Gus is very meticulous and the conversations that went on between myself and Vince, in regard to his death, were really important to me. Because Vince did say, "The town's not big enough for both you and Walter." And so, I fully expected and knew that he was gonna get to the sentence where, you know, "We've got to find a way to kill you off." And what are—and for him to consult with me... just in that alone, was quite a great honor.

And I said, "Well, look, Gus walked into a hail of bullets. And he knew he was a made man and he knew that he was respected, even though he was despised by the cartel. He was respected, because you could count that Gus was honest, that Gus was true, that Gus did have the integrity to build the business without cheating. Did have the integrity to take care of the folks who stood in the way of that. So, for me, this particular last scene was—brought everything together. You know, it was my suggestion to Vince. I said, "Well—"

So, Vince said, "How might he go out?"

And I said, "Look, you've been inspired by my performance, but I was initially inspired by your initial writing of who this character is. We came together. We figured out how it would be done."

And Vince goes, “Oh, no! You created the character! You did all that! You did all that!”

I said, “Okay, all well and good, but in the end, how would it be done? Well, look. You know, when I get up as a gentleman, I button my jacket closed, in deference to whatever business I might be doing or in deference to myself. I straighten my tie, because ties do loosen up as we speak more and move more, and it’s always been irritating to me to see someone’s tie not where it should actually be—their neck.”

*[Linda laughs.]*

00:10:59 Giancarlo Guest

And so, Vince got very excited and went, “Straightening your tie!”

I said, “Well, if you notice, in all the dailies, I’m constantly doing that. Making sure that I’m presentable.” And for me, in my life, it’s very important to be presentable. I’m very aware of it. I’m very aware of showing respect to the company I’m in by dressing properly, by dressing respectfully, because firstly—I wanna respect myself. So, that is the whole clue to who Gus really is. No matter what he’s doing, he’s been raised properly. He had a good mom. *[Laughs.]* You know?! He had someone to guide him really well.

*[Linda hums in agreement.]*

And so, no matter how much anger—how angry he is, how much he wants to be the hothead that’s underneath there, somewhere, in all that anxious, very, very subtle performance—eye work and physical work that I do that just takes things in and you can tell Gus is not happy. But he is able to be in control of himself. Because that’s what he puts out to the world. So, that last scene, to me? He’s putting out, “I’m ready to go! This is the way it turned out. Complete respect. Let’s move on.” And to me, that’s just a wonderful moment, a wonderful television moment that will live on forever.

00:12:15 Linda Host

And I have to say, as an—as an audience member, I also think it’s such an interesting turn, because—if you’re watching—it’s a really good test of where you are, at that moment, in terms of watching these characters. Because when you see him come out of the room and he appears to be—he appears to be okay, for the first few seconds. Are you hoping he’s okay? Are you hoping that he has escaped? Are you, in any way, hoping that he will somehow survive this attack? Or are you relieved when they swing around and, no. You know, Walt got him.

00:12:49 Giancarlo Guest

Well, what I particularly love about the writing of this show being as dramatic and encompassing such really wonderful balance of, kind of, real life comedy that happens in our lives. These writers and Vince Gilligan, he’s masterful at that. Because it really reflects real humanity, and that’s what I respect about being able to grow a character in a world that’s so complete. Somewhere in season four, the audience began to like Gus. Somewhere in season four, they started to pull for Gus. Because I think they could see and start to realize that no one is black or white. We all would have a question. Look, I read an article—sorry to digress—about an art dealer in New Mexico who hid two million dollars’ worth of gold and jewelry in the mountains, ten years ago, to get people to hike more. To get people into nature more.

[Linda cackles.]

00:13:55	Linda	Host	You're laughing! This is—this is on your newsfeed, baby! And it was found!
00:13:58	Giancarlo	Guest	No, I believe you! I just think it's an amazing idea. It's an amazing idea, took ten years but the money was finally found by someone. Someone's a billion—a millionaire, because they finally found it. But so, this reminded me a lot of Gus. Gus really cares about people. He wants his business to grow, and you can have—and your idea that it's an illicit business is just a judgement, to Gus. He could be selling toothpaste; he'd be good at it. But I think about that, because I think about the complete character that Gus became, in season four, where people started to realize nothing's black and white. So, I start—I mention this art dealer and this money and that it was finally found because I realized that if someone came in my house, right now, and put a million dollars on my desk, I would have to search for my moral mind. I would have to search myself for a second, to say, "Wow, that could all make it easier, but do I want it easier?"  Like, I'm very aware of when people give me gifts, in my life. Because I realize, oh, I walk around as Giancarlo Esposito, just me. I'm just a person. A human being. I don't carry my fame, my glory of that in front of me, because I'm confronted so many times by the public as being Gus. And I realize that's powerful enough. But would I be able to hold on to my moral turpitude, my moral mind, my integrity, my judgment, my intention, if someone offered to buy me out? And it's the true test of your character when you can say, "No, that goes against principles." And so, what I think people started to realize was Gus had principles. And yes, people have black and white, dark and light, and sometimes we have to struggle to stay on the right side of that line. And, you know, to me it is the delusion—the deluded aspect of what's happening in our society, with our great politicians and great religious leaders that has—that—the line gets blurred and then we start to trade on what we really believe and then we've lost it. Because we can be bought.  And so, for me, there is a real moral lesson in Gus's journey. You'll hear the rest of my conversation with Giancarlo Esposito, in just a minute. Did you, like me, watch <i>The Electric Company</i> , back in the day? Did you know Giancarlo worked on that, too? More on that after the break. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR. <b>Music:</b> Mellow, solemn piano music.  <b>Sam Sanders:</b> For James McBride, racism in this country has been a disease.  <b>James McBride:</b> It's been the cancer that has just been killing us. And now we wanna address the problem. I mean, you can't address the cancer until you know you have it. And these people are seeing the cancer.  <b>Sam:</b> Author James McBride on protests, a pandemic, and his new book. Listen to <i>It's Been a Minute</i> , from NPR. [A quick, energetic drumroll.]
00:16:21	Linda	Host	
00:16:35	Promo	Promo	
00:16:56	Promo	Promo	

**Music:** Exciting techno music plays.

**Jarrett Hill:** Hey, I'm Jarrett Hill, co-host of the brand-new Maximum Fun podcast, *FANTI!*

**Tre'vell Anderson:** And Tre'vell Anderson. I'm the other, more fabulous, co-host, and the reason you really should be tuning in!

**Jarrett:** I feel the nausea rising.

**Tre'vell:** To be *FANTI* is to be a big fan of something, but also have some challenging or "anti" feelings toward it.

**Jarrett:** Kind of like Kanye.

**Tre'vell:** We're all fans of Kanye. He's a musical genius, but, like, you know...

**Jarrett:** He thinks slavery's a choice.

**Tre'vell:** Or, like, *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Like, I love the drama, but do I wanna see black women fighting each other on screen? [*Singing.*] Hell, to the naaaaw. To the naw-naw-naaaw.

**Jarrett:** We're tackling all of those complex and complicated conversations about the people, places, and things that we love.

**Tre'vell:** Even though they may not love us back.

**Jarrett:** *FANTI!* Maximum Fun! Podcast!

**Tre'vell:** Yeah!

[*Music fades out.*]

00:17:44 Linda Host

Welcome back *Bullseye*. I'm Linda Holmes, in for Jesse Thorn. My guest is Giancarlo Esposito. He plays Gus Fring on *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*. He's appeared in dozens of other movies and TV shows, including Spike Lee's legendary *Do the Right Thing*. Let's get back into our interview.

You know, it's interesting that you would mention the importance of holding to your principles, 'cause I do also wanna talk to you about *Do the Right Thing*. This is a film—you play—Spike Lee plays Mookie, who is a pizza delivery guy in Bed-Stuy. He works at an Italian pizzeria. And the guy you play, Buggin Out, is one of his buddies. And probably the most famous—I'm gonna say the most famous Buggin Out scene is a scene in which he's walking down the street with a fresh pair of white Jordans on. A white guy in a Larry Bird jersey bumps into him, messes up his sneakers, and Buggin Out confronts the guy. We're gonna listen to this clip. Music swells and fades.

00:18:47 Sound Effect Transition

00:18:48 Clip Clip

[*The sound of a busy sidewalk.*]

**Buggin Out:** *[Getting more worked up as he goes.]* Who told you to step on my sneakers? Who told you talk on my side of the block? Who told you to be in my neighborhood?

**Speaker 1:** Bust his ass, man.

**Clifton:** I own this brownstone!

**Buggin Out:** Who told you buy a brownstone on my block, in my neighborhood, on my side of the street?! What you wanna live in a Black neighborhood for, anyway, man? Mother *[censored]* gentrification! *[Censored.]*

**Speaker 2:** Well?

**Clifton:** As I understand it, this is a free country. A man can live wherever he wants.

**Speaker 3:** *[Scoffing.]* A free country!

**Buggin Out:** Free country!?! Man, I should *[censored]* for saying that stupid *[censored]!*

**Clifton:** Woah!  
Music swells and fades.

00:19:10 Sound Effect Transition  
00:19:12 Linda Host

*[Giancarlo chuckles.]*

When that guy says, “free country”, I just—it’s so—it’s sooo blech! The way he does it? How did you—how did you build Buggin Out? He’s a really interesting—I wanna say “kid”, but he’s a really interesting guy. He’s got, you know, glasses and, you know, he sort of goes around trying to rise up—trying to get a boycott going against the pizzeria. How did you develop Buggin Out?

00:19:38 Giancarlo Guest

You know, I loved this script when I first laid eyes on it. And when we started to actually rehearse for a week beforehand, we had the film that was made by St. Clair Goren, which takes us through the rehearsal process of *Do the Right Thing*, which I think is really quite brilliant. I wanted Buggin Out to be someone who had a taste of what it might be like to be at a protest or rally and feel like they were listened to. Who had very little bit of knowledge about Black history but knew that he was a victim of injustice over and over again, just by virtue of the color of his skin and the way he looked.

But yet, I wanted him—and you mentioned the glasses, so it made me think, because Spike was like—all through the rehearsal process, you know *[gruffly]*, “What you gonna do? What you gotta do with your hair? What you gonna do here?” ‘Cause every Spike Lee movie, I would do something different with my hair, with my look, because I wanted to completely transform myself into what the character dictated that the look and the feel should be. And Spike was so hesitant when I said I’m wearing glasses. And I did that partly as an homage to Spike! Because Spike felt, to me, like he had a large dose of *[chuckling]* the Buggin Out within him! And so, Spike was like, *[gruffly]* “I don’t know. I don’t know, man. I don’t know.” And so, I got these big bifocals and I wore contact lenses to

reverse the prescription. It was a whole ordeal. I went to my optometrist. I had them made. And he said, *[gruffly]* “Why do you want glasses? Why do you want glasses?”

I said, “Because I wanted him to be—to appear to be someone who had a chink in his armor. A weakness. He couldn’t really see as well as he wanted to.” And that was, for me, a tactic to allow myself to not be able to see as much as I wanted to. So, Buggin Out’s not a—he’s not a, you know, he’s not a senator or a congressman, a spokesperson for the people. He’s the person who’s lived it, who gets excite by a small piece of information that he may have gotten about Malcolm X that incited him to find his voice. But he’s a little off the rails, because he doesn’t have a platform, yet. So, I wanted to encompass all of those things within this character. Someone who was searching to find his own Blackness, within the world that we call—as John Savage said in this beautiful scene—wonderful actor—a “free country”.

I often call—say, we’re in this place called America. Yes, I respect the flag. Yes—and I was raised Roman Catholic, First Baptist then Roman Catholic. Became an altar boy, almost a priest. Went to military school, almost went into the military. Very, very, very... I felt as if I belonged to something, because I could call myself an American. Very nationalistic way of thinking. But I realized that people call themselves American, but they don’t act like they’re Americans! ‘Cause they don’t act like human beings! So, I’m really, really happy that you moved on to this movie. I didn’t expect to you to, nor did I realize you were going to. A week ago, I was sitting in my living room thinking, “What do I tell my children?” I am a mixed-race human being with a dear friend of Spike Lee.

00:23:01 Giancarlo Guest

We’ve had, over and over, disagreements about White, Black, White, Black until he finally looked at me and said, “Well, if we have a revolution, what side are you gonna go to? Are you gonna be with your father? Or are you gonna be with your mother?”

I said, “Spike, how can you ask me that question?”

He said, “Well then you’re an Afro-European.” *[Laughs.]* And we’d argue about that for an hour! And then we’d hug and kiss and go, “Okay. We agree to disagree on certain things.” But I was in my living room, thinking, “What do I tell my children?” Watching a clip of the civil unrest and the protests in front of the Minneapolis police station. I saw a clip, in the afternoon, with Minneapolis police on the roof, and the first thought that came into my mind—they were setting up barricades on the roof of the building—was, “That’s not gonna last long. I hope it does. But that’s not gonna last long.”

The next clip I saw, at 11 o’clock at night, I had tears in my eyes, and I got shudders, because they were chanting, “No justice, no peace,” same chants as were in *Do the Right Thing*. The clip that they showed of the building burning, just like Sal’s pizzeria burning. And I was taken back to 1989! And I cried, because I thought, “What do I tell my children? Because nothing’s really changed! And how do we have it change?!” And I—the deplorable scene made me cry, because I saw, then, the days after that—people destroying their own neighborhoods, their own local groceries which will never



reopen—to be able, you know—all the looting and all that and I said, “I can’t get behind this.”

And here we are, five days after that, and a new dimension of transformation has happened with the world. Forget just the African American community in Brooklyn. Forget just the African American community in Watts. It’s—the whole world, now, says, “Enough is enough.” And now I feel like we have the beginnings of a conversation that can change legislation, can change systematic—systemic racism within our organizations that look at people who come to the door as being troubled or being bad.

00:25:03 Giancarlo Guest

I had a Jewish buddy, growing up. His name was Paul Budish. I’ll never forget it. He could never say my name right. He’d say, *[garbled]* “John-Carlo Esposito, malo!” He would say it really fast, because he couldn’t say it right in the beginning. And he put a “malo” afterwards, which means bad, in Spanish. “Malo! Malo! Malo!”

And I said, “Paul, why do you do that?”

He said, “Because you’re Black! You’re bad!” That’s the reference we get, is that—you know, you got something—your intentions aren’t good. *[Laughing.]* And so, I had to start laughing. So, I’ve lived with this kind of feeling for years and years and years. And the only way for me to heal my own anger and resentment was to become an actor, to be able to be the best that I could be—to have meritocracy play in my life. That I’m not gonna play into the race card, and I’m not gonna play into the “they”s. “They won’t allow this; they won’t allow that.”

So personally, for me, this movie is very strong and very powerful. The nugget of sweetness and gold is that it still holds up, today, and that it inspires people from our recent and local and nuanced, peaceful protests that come out of all the violence that happened last week—is that positive change is possible, because now we’re all human. So, I encourage people to get human. And that’s been my whole thing with Spike, who I—totally understands this, now. And his anger—he’s still angry. He still protests. He still does all the things he needs to do. But he’s become an advocate for humanity. And it begins with his African American humanity, and it extends to the world’s humanity that is being shown today, in light of all that’s come about since George Floyd’s murder.

00:26:40 Linda Host

Well, and one of the—when I went back to watch—when I did go back to watch *Do the Right Thing*, one of the things that really stuck out to me that I—that I don’t know if it gets as much attention as, you know, there’s a fire. There’s unrest. There’s the—there’s the death of Radio Raheem and the ensuing, kind of, destruction. But I don’t hear as much about the fact that the police officers who kill him put his body in the back of the car and drive away! And so, the idea that there is supposed to be a protective function—which is what they are, you know—which is what they’re basically there for, theoretically—it always seemed very emphatic and intentional, to me, that they—that they leave. And they leave the neighborhood on its own and Sal and his sons on their own, if you are concerned about the pizzeria at that point.

00:27:40 Giancarlo Guest That always has struck me as one of the major decisions of the ending of that film. Yes, indeed. And, you know... Spike, obviously, made a decision to have the film end that way, within the last five minutes of the film, because the police are afraid for their lives. Because of what they have represented in the past, to human beings. Since they—especially the African American community. And to take that, you know, as a general response is what many people have done. Look, I had two children go to the march. One of my gals went, in New York City, last week. She went to two marches a day for five days. And she and her two, White friends she went with were approached by an African American police officer. And they immediately took three steps back. My girl's Black, her two friends are White, because they were afraid. They didn't know what to expect from this human being, who then took a step closer to them—which made them even more frightened, but they stood their ground—and this Black officer said, "Thank you. Thank you for being here, today."

00:29:11 Linda Host So, I've heard those stories from my children. Two of my other daughters went to a different march and they were also greeted by African American police officers who couldn't look them in the eye, they were so ashamed to be part of a battalion that were—that—they—I guess they call it huddling or barreling. They were moving this crowd of peaceful—

00:29:12 Giancarlo Guest Kettling. Kettling! Moving this crowd of protestors into an unfortunate physical situation where they knew something would happen. So, they were forcing the situation. But what we haven't talked about, here, Linda—at all... is guns. We don't talk about that! We got all this going on, talking about police injustice and all this stuff, but no one has talked about the fact that we are a gun-loving nation, out of our amendment right that allows us to do—to be—to carry guns and have them. And what about the countries—London, for one, has bobbies, for years. They don't carry guns.

00:31:00 Linda Host So, is that tool or that weapon of protection—is that tool—should that tool be in the hands of police, anymore? Now, we have the tool is the knee, right? The knee, the chokehold, the way that people have been trained. But when do we get to the point where we talk about gun violence, in our society, as equal to the violence that is systemic racism? Because it's—in a way, it moves together hand-in-hand. Because if I feel threatened, whether I'm a police officer or an African American in my community that's a really rough neighborhood, I'm gonna feel consoled by having a gun. I have a way to protect myself, if no one else will. So, that has to eventually enter the conversation, as well. Because it all boils down to: are we going to be a peaceful, humanitarian, understanding, compassionate society? Or are we gonna be a society, when all the words are gone, I can go get my 9 and put a hole in you?

00:31:00 Linda Host And I think, when you asked earlier about—kind of—what it means when people talk about defunding or abolishing police, I think one of the things that some of those folks are talking about—the argument is, if you had police with different equipment, right? You don't necessarily need to send people who look like they are outfitted for war for everything that people currently call the police for. They

00:31:40	Giancarlo	Guest	don't—they currently—people are calling the police because, you know, they're worried that the next-door neighbor is sick or hurt. You know, the need for—the need for everybody to come in with guns, as you say, you know. Armed to the teeth, as they say—
00:31:41	Linda	Host	It sends a message!
00:31:43	Giancarlo	Guest	—is presumably a little bit different. Mm-hm. It is. It sends a different kind of message. I remember being on the Brooklyn Bridge, in a 1964 Plymouth Valliant, on my way to have dinner with Paul Auster and Siri Hustvedt, two wonderful authors. Paul, I've done a couple of films with. Wonderful, wonderful writer. I remember, on that bridge, changing lanes and I remember putting my blinker on. I remember seeing the lights of the police car flash behind me, and I went, "What did I do wrong? I put my blinker on." Well, certainly I was pulled over. I remember the mother of my children—who is white—being with me. And I immediately rolled my window down, told her to roll hers down.

"Why?"

"Roll it down." Right? I just wanted to say, "Look, you know you're married to a Black man." I stopped the car, put my hands on the dashboard, and looked in my rearview mirror, and these police officers came out of their car with guns trained on me. Out of the holster. On me. And I went, "Oh. Okay. Even if I didn't have my blinker on, why would they come to my car with their guns drawn? Would they have done that if I was white?" And they kept their guns drawn on me and my former wife until they got a sense of who I was and that I wasn't gonna be, maybe, combatted. So, the mindset is everything. You know, my intention was, "Diffuse it all. Don't get angry. Don't accuse them of any wrongdoing. Stay within the line so you don't get shot." My former wife, Joy, was beside herself that I was—I could accept that treatment and that that would be just the way it works for a Black man, in our time.

This is going back many years, but nothing's changed. So, that's one story. I worked at the Atlantic Theatre Company, doing a play by John Patrick Shanley, called *Storefront Church*. We were in our final rehearsals before our first preview. We finished our rehearsal—our tech rehearsal. That's right. 12-hour tech. At 11:30, 12 o'clock at night. I walked out of the theater to go to my car, which was parked in front, to get a change of clothes. And on my way—and I hear sirens maybe a block away. I finish getting my clothes, my belongings. I walk back into the courtyard of the theater, and there are six police officers who pulled up to the theater, three cars, six cops, aaall with their guns drawn. And told me to stop where I was and drop the bag. Screaming at me! "Drop the bag! Drop the bag!" I dropped the bag with my clothes on it. "What are you doing here?"

00:34:26	Giancarlo	Guest	And I'm dressed in character, in a suit for the play! And I said, "I'm rehearsing a play. We're doing our tech. They're inside." My hands are up in the air.
----------	-----------	-------	--

They told me, "Get on the ground." I got on the ground; they searched my bag.

I said, "Why am I being stopped?"

“Well, there was an assault a block from here.” And one of the cops—and another cop chimed in and said, “It was some Black man in a hoodie.”

And I said—I started laughing. I’m on the ground in a suit. I said, “Well, do I fit the description [*chuckling*] of the black man in the hoodie, that you’re looking for?” No answer. They get me off the ground, still don’t believe me or wanna let me go, because the front of the theater was under construction. So, they figured maybe I was there doing some ruffraff. Until we got inside, the director, the cast—everyone’s shocked! They’re guiding me into the theater with guns drawn on me, to corroborate and—who I am.

And they finally let it all go, I mentioned it to a reporter. Al Sharpton called me the next day. “You gotta stand up for this. You gotta go on TV. You gotta do this and that.”

I said, “Al, that’s just not where I’m at, with this today.” And that was going back about ten years. So, all of these have come back to me, watching the clip of *Do the Right Thing* and protests, because I feel like I’ve never shared these stories. You’re the first I’ve shared both of these stories with, ever. But I realize that lends to my pain. That boosts and substantiates my suspicion of the police. That boosts and substantiate my suspicion that I have to act a certain way, because otherwise I’ll—you know, I’ve gotta act a certain way, today, so that I can still be here tomorrow! And that’s... BS! That’s horrible! So, when I realized the pain I have inside that I don’t access and I cover up every day and I don’t share with my children about feeling unsafe in our “free country”, it does make me angry. It makes me angry and sad and anxious. And it makes me feel like, “What the hell am I doing here? I’m only half—you know—American! I’m Italian! I should go back to Italy!”

00:36:36 Giancarlo Guest

You know, all those things come up, for me, because I feel like no one will ever know me! And this may be the cry and the call and the shout and the pleading, because if you only know my color of my skin, then you don’t really know me. And we all wanna be seen. We all wanna be recognized. We all wanna be—have—be seen in a light that is truly who we are. So, these are important issues, for me. And this is why I choose the roles I do in a specific way.

I chose the role of Gus Fring partly because I wanted people to know the scourge of crystal meth—that our country is... we are part of that. That this is a horrible drug that takes people’s lives, has people working off of greed. It’s a horrible thing that it’s done to our country. We’ve allowed it in because, economically, it does help a certain way. I think our government has made—has just become sort of complacent with the fact that there are—this is a channel for some kind of economy. I don’t know what it is that doesn’t stop that.

I chose *Do the Right Thing* because I felt like the message was important to me. And I choose projects because if I’m able to finally tell you these two stories, I’m willing to release my anger. I’m willing to forgive. I’m willing to be more understanding of who I am. I’m willing to stand up and have my voice be heard. Not in a way that

			says, "All are bad." But in a way that says, "Don't you see we need reform? Now is the time."
00:38:16	Linda	Guest	Before I let you go, I wanna play one more thing. It's strictly personal, on my part, this is the first work of yours that I remember. I love it so much. I had to play it. Go ahead. Roll the clip.
00:38:29	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:38:30	Music	Music	"The Electric Company Theme" from the show <i>The Electric Company</i> .
			<i>... brightest day in a whole new way We're gonna turn it on We're gonna bring you the power It's coming down the lines, strong as they can be Through the courtesy of The Electric Company</i>
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:38:52	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:38:53	Giancarlo	Guest	<i>[Singing in delight.]</i> Brightest daaaaay in a whole new waaaay!
			<i>[Laughs.]</i> Oh, wow, I love it!
00:38:58	Linda	Host	That is the theme song to <i>The Electric Company</i> , if you're not lucky enough to have been born in 1970, like I was, and grow up watching <i>The Electric Company</i> . You sang on that track!
00:39:09	Giancarlo	Guest	I sure did! I sure did. You bring me back. Gerry Graf, wonderful man, who was connected to <i>The Electric Company</i> , thought that I would be a great fit for that show. I remember getting this offer and being head over heels about having the ability to be singing on this track, introducing this particular show. Which led me to—years later—be Big Bird's camp counselor on a two-week stint at Bear Mountain, on <i>Sesame Street</i> . So, for me, this was the first time that I really belonged. I belonged to a family of young people in a show that was revelatory about education and emotions and saying how you feel and being a kid and that being alright.
			<i>[Delighted.]</i> Oh, I'm so glad you saw that show! That was just! Oh! It's like yesterday, to me, because I feel like that was my opportunity to be a part of the whole. And I fit. And it felt good. Honestly, I loved <i>Sesame Street</i> . I loved <i>Mr. Rogers</i> . But <i>Electric Company</i> was the one that my, like, kind of loud, playful kid was most excited by <i>Electric Company</i> . So, I appreciate it very, very much.
00:40:06	Linda	Host	
00:40:20	Giancarlo	Guest	Wow. I so appreciate that you were moved by that, because it was a very special time, for me. I then, like my children now are struggling to find out where they lie within their Blackness and where does their Blackness lie within the community and where does the community lie within the country and the world—and I want them to become individuals with a very distinct point of view. And <i>The Electric Company</i> allowed me to feel a part of a whole, which gave me back the gift of being an individual, because I felt like I had talent. And I knew that, through my talent, I could uplift people. Make people laugh, make people cry, have people look deeper into who they really are, and have people—young people—look to see who they wanna be. Because I believe you can be

whoever you want to be. Your integrity and intention has to be sincere and it has to be passionate.

Because my one blessing is—and you blessed me with all these clips and you take me through parts of my life that I haven't been to in a long time and it helps me to realize and understand that the reason why I feel as if I am still so deeply in love with what I do, is because I'm still excited by it! I still feel like it's a viable way for us to share. And the fact that I have so many things to be able to share, in my career, really humbles me. And allows me to know I'm one of the lucky ones. So, my advice to my children and all young people—and even people who are, you know, more in my age range, you know, over 50—you know, if you've not happy with what you're doing in your life, change it. You don't—you don't know have to—you know, often times in the old days of my parents, you know, they couldn't change because they felt like they committed and that was it. But I've reinvented myself over and over again. And I believe that we have the ability to do that. We should be doing what makes us happy and what makes us proud and makes us smile and gives us that little tingle inside. And if we don't have that, move on. Find something else. Find the tingle.

'Cause the tingle is the energy of life. And the tingle is the energy of service. And the tingle is the energy of being fulfilled in the skin that you were given, in the talent that you were given, in the creativity that you were given. I don't care what you do. I'm talking in business. I'm talking whatever it is, find the juice. 'Cause the juice and the electricity that will allow you to be original, authentic, and so very, very real and human.

00:42:59	Linda	Host	Giancarlo Esposito, thank you so much for talking to me. This was really, really fun.
00:43:04	Giancarlo	Guest	I had so much fun with you! You're a joy to speak to and thanks for covering so much territory, in this short conversation.
00:43:11	Linda	Guest	Giancarlo Esposito. You can rent or stream the latest season of <i>Better Call Saul</i> , now. He's very scary, in it. The show's been picked up for sixth and final season, set to premiere sometime next year.
00:43:23	Music	Transition	Jazzy, upbeat music.
00:43:26	Linda	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is produced out of the homes of me and the staff of MaximumFun, in and around various parts of the country. It's hot! Our colleague, Stacy Molski started a garden, a few months ago, and this week received a complimentary Thai basil plant. It came from the owner of Jitlada, one of LA's most popular restaurants. She's found that it prospers better indoors, when it's hot.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien and Jordan Kauwling. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song's by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.

You can keep up with the show on Facebook, on Twitter, on YouTube. Search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. And I think that's

00:44:23 Promo Promo

about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off. Mine is, "Thanks, Jesse."

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*