Sawbones 325: The Black Panthers and Public Health

Published on June 5th, 2020

Listen here on TheMcElroy.family

Clint: Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

Justin: Hello everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin, I wanted us to continue on Sawbones this week to talk about things that are relevant to, you know, the issues of the day. To the protests that we're seeing, to the numbers, how many people are speaking out against police brutality, especially when it concerns the black community.

And in that effort, in addition to protesting and donating and all of the other things that you're encouraged to do to help, one thing that I as a white person have been trying to do more of is learn. Listen and learn.

And in that pursuit of knowledge, which, I will be the first to admit, I had not done enough of. I have not studied, not just black history, but all history, the truth, our history, enough to really understand all of the context for the events of the day.

You know, even if you feel like you do and you already are on the right side of this issue or the right side of history, I guarantee you, if you are not a person of color, you have more learning to do. There's more reading you can do. And one thing in particular—

Justin: Now, does it have to be reading? Is kinda where—you said more reading, does it have to be reading though? I'm in, for sure. The reading though… woof, you know?

Sydnee: I gotta say Justin, actually, in preparation for this episode not only have I done reading, but I did get to watch a movie. So…

Justin: That's kinda fun, like that one day in class when you have the substitute and he's like, "Anyway, here's Mr. Holland's Opus. I'll check back with you all in an hour and a half."

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, I thought you would appreciate that, that there's a movie you can watch to help learn this history.

Justin: Much better. Or a podcast you can listen to.

Sydnee: There you go.

Justin: Right now.

Sydnee: I wanna thank two people who alerted me to this. One, we got an email from Chloe who mentioned this as a potential topic. Thank you. And two, I saw a Twitter thread from Claire Willett, who alerted me to an area of history that I didn't have much understanding of, and I think my vague impressions were, to say the least, incomplete. And that's the history of the Black Panther Party, and specifically, the work that they did in the public health realm.

Justin: It's been interesting to—as we go back and re-examine stuff like this, at first, it's very scary to talk about something that you thought you understood about the world and how it works and your own history and have it completely dismantled in front of you. I'm now finding it kind of invigorating.

I find, like, the more of this I'm sort of trying to immerse myself and in and learn—like, when you mentioned the Black Panthers, like, "Justin, what do you think when I say Black Panthers?" you said when we first started this.

And the stuff that popped into my had was the stuff that I had been shown, told my entire life. Which is, you know, a militant group, a violent group of black people that were very angry and dangerous and etcetera. That's it.

Sydnee: You think of the image of the berets and the guns.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And to be fair, when I started to think, "What was I taught in school?" I don't know if I was taught anything.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know if this was discussed much, other than like, a side mention, probably in a chapter about civil rights, probably in relation to Martin Luther King.

Justin: Probably in February.

Sydnee: Probably in February. But I don't think—and I think that white people need to understand that knowing black history is knowing history. And if you think that is a subsection, something separate, no. You don't know your own history. You don't know the history of this country.

And only by understanding that, are you gonna have a really good context for what is wrong today and what needs to change today. And how much it needs to change. The extent of the change that needs to happen.

So, I had the same value impressions. If you have asked me, I would have pictured somebody with a beret and a gun, and I thought, well, they definitely were on the right side of the issues. Civil rights. I would agree with that. But they believed in violence, and I wouldn't. So, that was the whole impression I had. I knew almost nothing else.

And I don't want to say… it's like a lot of things. History is complicated. People are complicated. And at the same time that you have people wringing their hands over the protests right now, saying, "Well, but not the looting, but we shouldn't be looting," and you have to understand that

when people are angry, and they've been oppressed, and they're standing up for their freedoms and their rights… however they do that, I support that.

And I know that's complicated, and I know that's not so clear-cut as, "Well, but I don't believe in violence." Sometimes things aren't clear-cut, and we have to be comfortable with that. And I think the Black Panther Party is a good example of that.

Certainly, when they started—they were founded in October of 1966 in Oakland, California by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, and there definitely was, like, an edge of violence to the beginnings. An intention that—not an intention to do violence, but an understanding that if it is necessary, it is the action that will be taken.

Justin: A willingness.

Sydnee: Yes. And it was, to be fair, it was based on the idea that they were watching their friends, their family, their community, other people of color be beaten, killed, and unfairly incarcerated by the police. And they wanted to put a stop to it. And they knew at the time that the protests, the marches, the sit-ins, it wasn't changing. The system was so based in white supremacy that these actions, important and meaningful they may be, were not going far enough.

And so, the original, you know, intention was, "What we're going to do is go to places, we will patrol the streets, and when we see an arrest happening, we'll stop, we'll get out of our car, and we'll watch. And we will be an intimidating presence, because we'll have guns." That was very key to it, the being armed was very much part of it, because the message was, "We're watching you and we can do something about it, if you're not careful," to the police officers who were involved in the arrest.

And if there was no evidence of police brutality, things could proceed without any sort of confrontation. But if there was, the Black Panther Party was willing to step in. And there certainly were conflicts that ensued from this. I am not going to lead you to believe that there were never shoot-outs and shoot-ins and… all kinds of violent confrontations between various members of the Black Panther Party and law enforcement.

However, that is not the entire story of the Black Panthers. Which is, again, I think something a lot of people don't know. Within a few years of its inception, the party realized that it needed to do more than just protect people, than just be, sort of, the guardians.

They also needed to connect to the community, reach out to the community, and find ways of supporting the black community that their government wasn't doing. I mean, they saw that gap. One of the easy things that they said is, you know, research came out around this time that children do better in school, pay closer attention, and have less fatigue if they get breakfast in the morning. This study was released.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Simple idea, right?

Justin: Well known at this point, I think, everybody.

Sydnee: Yes. And so, the Black Panther Party said, "Well, we could feed kids breakfast. That's something we can do." Because in their community, a lot of children of color were not getting breakfast in the morning, usually related to socio-economic issues, and again, the systemic racism that we talk about in housing, in access to, you know, healthy food and clean water and all that.

For all those reasons, poverty as well, kids weren't getting breakfast. And they said, "You know what? We're going to fix this." So, they began to set up free breakfast programs. And it was very simple. They would buy all the ingredients, they had a place where they would advertise from these hours, bring you kids, breakfast is free. And they would serve breakfast to kids.

And this was a really impactful program. At their height, they were providing up to 20,000 meals a week at various locations. It started with one site, and then it spread throughout to different parts of the community, and as the Black Panther Party spread throughout the United States and there were different chapters in different areas of the country, this program followed.

So, this was a huge impact. Just feeding kids breakfast. And it was a very direct way of the party connecting to the community. You know, saying, like, "We're here, we're not just here to, you know, carry guns. We are here to serve our community." And it was a hugely impactful program they started.

And from that, it began to be clear, like, this is one aspect, but—and, you know, just like people are saying now, we had been focusing on the law enforcement, criminal justice angle of this, but here's another area where racism needs to be addressed. You know, black kids disproportionately weren't getting breakfast. Let's fix it. What other areas could we address?

Which is the same conversation, if people aren't having—if white people, I should say, aren't having, they should be having today. Which is, this problem goes beyond police officers. This problem goes to every institution, as we talked about last week. Healthcare, everything in this country.

And the Black Panthers said, well, if the whole system is broken, we need to start addressing every bit of it we can. And access to affordable healthcare, and specifically, a national health insurance plan, was a big part of that. They believed—now, part of that is the Black Panthers were very anti-capitalist, and so it is not surprising that a capitalist medical program, as we have in this country, a capitalist medical system, would be one target.

They very much saw that as broken. Many people living in the black community did not have insurance, or didn't have access to a doctor. There were no offices nearby, there wasn't a hospital that would serve them, and they couldn't afford the care. And so, they saw that there was a disproportionate amount of lack of preventive services, lack of chronic disease management, lack of screening programs, all kinds of things, for the communities of color.

And so, in 1972, as part of their ten point program, the Black Panthers also added health. "We want completely free healthcare for all black and oppressed people," was added in 1972. And if you notice, I think it's really interesting, it's not just for all black people. The Black Panthers were advocating for completely free healthcare for everyone who was oppressed. So, other communities of color, and even poor white people, at this point in history.

Justin: Well, it's one of those things that is so essential to us that no other part of the equation matters so much, if health is not addressed.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: It is the standard against which everything else has to be sort of judged.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And they believed that the government should be providing it, and there were lots of—I mean, again the idea… I think a lot of people have looked at, in the recent elections and debates among various politicians talking about the way to fix healthcare in this country, people look at socialized medicine, single-payer healthcare, as like a radical idea.

There's nothing radical about this idea. It's an old idea. People have been advocating for it for a long time; especially, people who are oppressed have been advocating for it for a long time. And throughout the world, it's not a radical idea.

And so, when the Black Panthers were looking to other places in the world where they had healthcare for all their citizens and saying, "We want the same thing here, that's a thing the government should do." This is not a radical idea, it's a good idea.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: We just still haven't done it. So, they did it. They began to establish free clinics in 1969.

Justin: Nice.

Sydnee: They were called the People's Free Health Clinic. The first one that they established was in Kansas City. And soon after that, they would mandate that every chapter throughout the country establish a free clinic. And a dozen were set up between then and 1973.

And a quote… I found a quote from The Black Panther Paper in 1970 that sort of outlines what most clinics were capable of providing. They were all

a little different, but this was kind of the basic idea. "A clinic will offer absolutely free the services of a family doctor, including check-ups, immunizations, blood tests and health education. A major emphasis of the clinic will be on preventive medicine. People will be encouraged to have regular check-ups and to come to the clinic at the first sign of medical troubles."

And they went a little bit even beyond… this sounds like kind of your routine primary care office, right?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Or urgent care plus primary care office, although primary care does urgent care too, but all combined. But beyond that, they had classes in first aid, in lab techniques, teaching people skills that they could use. And it was all staffed with volunteers. From hospitals in the area, from the community, people who wanted to be…

I mean, because if you think about this period of time, people who wanted to be part of the civil rights movement, part of changing things in this country in a real, fundamental way, but didn't know the best way their skills could serve that cause. If you were a medical student, if you were a physician, if you were a nurse, if you were a lab tech, if you were able to learn that stuff, if you were whoever, this was a way you could serve the community.

Justin: And I think that, like, the existence of a program like this—and, you know, this is still happening today. The existence of programs like this should be proof of the problem. Because there needs to be facilities like this, the gap is proven. It's there. You know what I mean? Like, the inequality and immorality of the medical system, I think, is proven out every day when you see the existence of places like this. That are attempting to, by hook or by crook, fill in the gaps.

Sydnee: I think that's a really important point you make, Justin. I've seen people say it before—

Justin: Mm! Say it again, slowerrr.

Sydnee: [laughs] I've seen people say it before—

Justin: You didn't say it again. Just one more time.

Sydnee: I think that's a really important point you make, Justin.

Justin: Can you do it one more time, but hit the really, like, phwar.

Sydnee: Justin, we have to move forward with this episode.

Justin: Okay. Yup, fair. Good.

Sydnee: Uh-huh. I think that when you see, and we all see this, constantly, a family set up a GoFundMe page, to pay for medical bills…

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: When you see a jar for donations at the counter at a convenience store for a local family—it's usually that, it's usually to help pay medical bills or surgical bills or cancer treatment bills or whatever.

When you see that, every time you see that, and I know you do, you see it on Facebook all the time, that is a failure of the American medical system every single time. Why? Why does that happen? And exactly, the Panthers saw there was a need, this was a failure, specifically with their community, with the black community, but… for all oppressed people, this was a failure. And they sought to correct it.

Justin: Uh, we wanted to do something a little bit different this week for the billing department, which we're about to head into briefly. We're gonna be donating all of our ad revenue this week to the Breonna Taylor Fund.

Breonna Taylor was a 26-year-old African American emergency room technician who, in March, police executing a search warrant incorrectly burst into her home and murdered her in her bed. Today as we're recording this, June 5th, would have been her 27th birthday.

Sydnee: And no arrests have been made at this point, in this case.

Justin: So, we're donating our ad revenue to a fund set up by her family. If you would like to donate to a fund at this time, or even if you can't do so with money, there's ways to donate even without money, or education, whatever resources, if you go to blacklivesmatters.carrd.co, you can find everything that you need. Anyway, to the billing department. Let's go.

[ad break]

Sydnee: So, as I was saying, the clinics were staffed by volunteers, they were supplied by donations. I was reading one article that was really interesting. One of the volunteers at the Boston clinic wrote about their experience, and they were saying that when they first started, like, "Okay, we're gonna set up a clinic here," they had to get… they got a trailer to service the building and then they had to, like, hook it up to electricity, and they used a streetlamp to feed the electricity off of.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: So, it was really, like, a grassroots effort to build these clinics, fill these clinics, staff these clinics. It was a really impressive—I mean, because that's a hard thing to do. That is a very difficult thing to do, and they were able to do it at multiple sites throughout the country, to serve a local community of the under-served.

In establishing these clinics, they also identified an under-researched area of medicine that they thought they could make a difference – sickle cell anemia. So, as you may already know, I don't think we've ever done a full show on sickle cell…

Justin: I don't think so.

Sydnee: But, this is a condition that primarily affects the black community, and although it had been first described, as in they saw these sickle-shaped cells underneath the microscope and talked about it back in 1910, there was very little effort to screen for it, to develop treatments for it.

Even to this day, I would say, it's an underfunded area of medicine, underdeveloped in terms of treatment. And so, the Panthers thought, you

know, the first thing if we're going to learn more about this, we need to figure out who has it and, like, help people get into medical care if they have this condition and don't know. And so, they developed a national screening program for sickle cell anemia.

They would recruit people like medical students from different communities to go into the community, to people's homes, or to a location within the community, and perform the test there. Initially they were getting kits donated for this purpose, but eventually they ran out—test kits, to perform the screening. And so, there was a Harvard graduate student in biology, Bill Wallace, who made his own.

Justin: Oh, wow.

Sydnee: Made his own screening test with his skills as a graduate student in biology. And they would use these tests—the night before the screening, the Panthers would basically go out into the community, put up a ton of flyers, let everybody know, "Hey look, tomorrow we're going to have this screening program. This is really important, you need to get checked for this."

And then they would, the next day send out the students, the doctors, whoever, in their white coats, would go out into the streets and find people who needed to be tested, who wanted to be tested, and screen them for sickle cell anemia. And they had a whole process in place once they located people who tested positive, to refer them to willing doctors within the community, to hospitals, for further treatment and for genetic counseling and everything. So, they did it from front to back.

Because that's always the concern, right? If you have a screening program, once you get those results, you better have people—I mean, these are the uninsured in many cases. You better have somebody who's willing to take care of these people, and the Black Panthers organized all of that, so that they got these people into treatment and to see doctors and all that, too.

So, it was an incredibly effective program. It led to, eventually, in 1972, the National Sickle Cell Anemia Control Act. This was, like, the one thing that eventually Nixon would get on board with.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Was the Sickle Cell program.

Justin: Maybe he wasn't such a bad guy, Syd.

Sydnee: No, he was.

Justin: Huh.

Sydnee: Bad guy. But this actually, the action of the Black Panther Party really increased the national focus on research, funding, and treatment for this at the time. Now, again, I would say this effort was, once it was handed off to the United States government and the powers that existed, was inadequate in the long run. Because there still has not been enough research or effort in this area. But the reason it started at all was this effort from the Black Panther Party.

In addition to all these services and their screening programs and everything else, they also, depending on which location, would provide things like drugs and alcohol rehabilitation. They gave away food, they gave away clothing, they would do things like, "We'll take you to your doctor's appointments if you're elderly and you need an escort."

They opened a school at one point that offered classes in things like first aid and economics. There were lots of other services that the Black Panther Party provided to the communities. These, like, survival programs that they would provide to say, "Your government is failing you and until they'll change, we're gonna try to fill that gap."

And so, they did a lot of these programs. Now, eventually, as we're going to get into, the Panthers, their party, would start to decline. And the clinics would close as the Black Panther Party had fewer members and less resources and everything.

Justin: Sure, right.

Sydnee: But—and it's hard. If you wanna say what impact, what lasting impact did that have on healthcare today… I don't think you can deny that when you look at something like a Federally Qualified Healthcare Center

today, something that is, like, funded by the government to provide care to the underserved, to provide care to the uninsured or to the underinsured, I don't think you can deny that there is at least some impact from these free health clinics, from these peoples' free health clinics, in these FQHCs that we see tons of in places like West Virginia today, serving underserved populations of all colors.

So, I definitely think that in addition to… as I was reading the accounts from some of the doctors and medical students and people who volunteered in this, this feeling that our healthcare system is so broken and the disparities that exist, part of it the fact that it is a free market healthcare system, which makes absolutely no sense, and these free clinics and a national healthcare system, I think that that spirit definitely exists even though it has not been able to become the status quo.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I think that those ideas, and the idea that universal healthcare is a social justice issue… I definitely think that you can find roots of that in these people's free health clinics, as well as—I mean, they were not the only ones with these ideas, certainly.

Justin: Sure, sure.

Sydnee: But I think you have to draw some parallels there. As just kind of an ending to this story… and I think that, again, this one of those areas where… I remember one time my grandfather gave me a book called "Lies My Teachers Told Me." And I thought it was a very daring book for my grandfather to give me when I was young. [laughs]

And it was based on the idea that the history you think you know is not the truth. There are lots of things that have been filtered, especially in this case, through the lens of white supremacy, and taught to you as if it is the only truth. And you don't know the whole story. And I think that in that spirit, learning more about the Black Panthers organization was part of what I wanted to do, to do this show.

The film that I watched in addition to reading was "The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution," which, if you're interested in learning more about the Black Panther Party, I would highly recommend you watch this

documentary. There are lots of interviews from some of the key players in the party at the time, to kind of give you a better understanding of, you know, not just the organization as an abstract, but the people who were in it and what they did and what they were able to accomplish and what their goals were. More on an individual, personal level. I would really highly recommend it.

As the Panthers grew and expanded their goals, as they were achieving all these things that the government was failing to achieve on community levels, they got more support from the public at large. They began to work with other liberation movements, there were international chapters, they spoke out against the Vietnam War.

It initially was a very male movement. It was a very, kind of, macho, typically male thing. But at its peak, the majority of members would be female. And so, even though that was still a struggle at the time, there were definitely the beginnings of some women's liberation within this movement as well.

Females taking some of the more, what you would consider, like, masculine roles. Carrying guns, you know, guarding the party, and men taking over some more traditionally female roles, feminine roles, of like, cooking breakfast for kids.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: You definitely saw those beginnings.

What would eventually lead to kind of the fall of the party, in part, was largely due to FBI interference. J Edgar Hoover, and then, eventually Nixon. They used something called—they used a counter-intelligence program that was called COINTELPRO, and this is something that any of our listeners of color probably already know all about, but I bet a lot of our white listeners do not know much about, and—

Justin: I mean, I obviously… fairly well-versed in what that is, but I would love a recap for the… listeners.

Sydnee: So, this counter-intelligence program was basically made up of FBI agents finding ways to dismantle the Black Panther Party from the

inside. Because they saw them, not necessarily as a violent threat; although, they may have said that. It was really a threat to the status quo and to white power. Their ideas were garnering widespread support and they didn't like that. And so, they found a number of ways to vilify the Black Panthers.

They would, in some communities, spread rumors that they were snitching to the police to turn public support against them. In some communities, they would accuse them of conspiracies. The documentary covers well that there were 21 leaders who were all arrested and accused of a fake bombing plot at one point.

They would, to the American public, to all the white people, they would paint the Black Panthers as scary and the very racially loaded, racist term "aggressive" was often used to make the average white person watching the news at home afraid of the Black Panthers and try to prevent them from supporting them.

They declared them at one point "the biggest threat to America," and of course, America was in a war at the time. So, to say the biggest threat American citizens is the Black Panther party was, again, another way the government was trying to turn public support against them.

They even did things like sent letters to prominent party members' spouses to say, "Hey, just so you know, your husband," or wife or whatever, "is cheating on you." And accusing them of infidelity and trying to create even, like, marital discord.

So, like, at a very personal level, they tried to destroy the party and the party members. There is a—and as Claire Willett points out in the Twitter thread that first led me to start investigating some of this, when you hear today, like, a lot of, again, pearl-clutching from politicians about like, "Ugh, it's not that I don't support peaceful protest, of course I do, but do you have to be so violent about it?"

When you hear that, that is the rotten fruit from the seeds of COINTELPRO. That's what you're hearing. You're hearing the—I mean, J Edgar Hoover would love that. Because that mentality, that idea, has permeated our power structures and the American public and our understanding of our history to this day.

And of course, the culmination of this movement was Fred Hampton. And I would encourage you, if you are a white person who doesn't know much about Fred Hampton, please, please read, please study, please search out more than just a podcast episode about Fred Hampton.

He was young, he was charismatic, he was the activist that the moment needed. Because not only was he an incredibly powerful speaker, and well-versed on the issues and able to, you know, kind of coalesce all of the frustration and anger into action, into, like, here are the things we want and need, and speak to the power structures that existed to try to get them to understand.

But he could built that coalition between the NAACP, between the Panthers, between the church community, between activists from the Latino community. There was a group even called the Young Patriots, who were a group of poor, Southern white people who had migrated to Chicago to look for work, and again, they were like, mainly from the Appalachian area, and he was able to build this coalition between all these disparate groups who really had common goals. To fight racism, to fight for civil rights, to fight for equality and then fight for all these other things that would help all oppressed people. And, I mean, he really, again, was the leader the moment needed.

But somebody who can change things like that is really dangerous. And the government knew that, the FBI knew that, the police knew that. And so, in early December 1969, the FBI, in conjunction with the local police charged the apartment where he was staying and murdered him and murdered another member of the Black Panthers who was there.

The criminal case against the police initially failed in 1970, but eventually a civil case would succeed in 1982 to benefit the families of those who were murdered. And its only, like, with the understanding in more recent years of the FBI's complicity in the COINTELPRO program do we really know—I mean, he was assassinated. The government had him assassinated because his ideas were too dangerous for the white status quo.

And if you don't know that history, again, I'm talking to fellow white people, this is a history you need to read. Because it is our history too

and it's the history of a country that could have, at many times, gone in a better direction, but chose to continue to oppress, chose to continue to pursue white supremacy instead of equity and, you know, justice.

After their peak in 1970, the Black Panther Party continually declined. They were targeted by police, there were lots of wrongful arrests and convictions, and so they ended up spending a lot of time and energy and money trying to win, like, court costs and lawyer fees and all this, to try to get people, you know, back into the movement.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: There was a lot of infighting, there were splits among the leadership, and eventually, the party disbanded in 1982. The things that they fought for, and I really advise you to watch this documentary, you can see a lot of the members talk about what we wanted was housing, healthcare, food, you know, clean water, education, jobs.

I mean, and I'm not, again, history is complex and people are complex, and this moment is complex. Yes, there was violence. Yes, there were guns. And I don't like guns. [laughs] Yes, there was shooting. That was part of it. But I think that—and we've seen a lot of it right now with the protests that are going on. If you are a white person, you need to be very careful about criticizing the right way to protest.

You don't get to decide the right way for a person to be angry, the right way for a person to demand justice. You don't get to decide that. Because the right way is the way that works. And I would be outraged about the reasons that people are protesting, not the protests. And I think the Black Panther Party is a good illustration of that idea.

Justin: I've been thinking a lot about racism, and I'm probably alone in that at this point in time, but I've been thinking a lot about it. And, you know, before all this started, and none of this brings me any joy to admit, but I would have considered myself a "non-racist" person, you know? "I'm not a racist", I would say that pretty confidently.

And then, as you and I have done these episodes and I've continued to, like, read and watch and listen, you think about, why haven't I been told

this story? Well, it's because my education was slanted towards the perspective of white people. I have a racist education.

Last week, we talked about how this medical system, which is such a big part of our lives, is, itself, racist. And we know that capitalism and especially American capitalism is unjust towards black people. It is a racist system.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And you have to start to wonder—or at least, I have started to wonder, and I hope to God that other people are having this same thought… if I grew up with a racist education, in a racist capitalist structure, benefitting from a racist medical system and all the other racist institutions, what are the odds, what are the chances that I, even through inaction or ineptitude or naivety, don't have racist thoughts, ideas, concepts, even through ignorance?

Which I believe a lot of racism is based in ignorance. If I've allowed myself to remain ignorant, then that, in itself, is racist. And like, it has not, again, these revelations do not bring me joy, but I… I don't know. I hope other white people are having the same, or you know, are willing to take that long look in the deep, dark, truthful mirror and see where some of these gaps are in their own, sort of, education and hearts.

Sydnee: It's uncomfortable. And, I mean, it should be. It is uncomfortable. If you are a person who felt like you are also not racist, and naturally on the right side of this issue, and right now, some of the things people are saying are to you about areas where you don't know enough, or aren't helping enough, aren't doing enough… if it's making you uncomfortable, that's good.

This is uncomfortable. It's something that we weren't doing enough of, or any of, obviously, because things would be different. So, I would encourage—again, I think, when I talk about these things I think to myself, people of color know this history. People of color know these truths. White people don't.

And when this history is put out there as black history, I think you need to understand, white people, that this is our history. It is the history of

our country, it is the history of grandfathers and grandmothers and great-grandfathers and great—they were involved in these stories. And we often would not like the roles they played. And so, it is our duty to learn this history and to make sure that the history that is taught 100 years, 200 years from now is different.

Justin: Thank you so much for listening to Sawbones. We hope you found the time well spent, I would say. Thank you to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you for listening. We appreciate you. And we hope you'll join us again next week for another episode of Sawbones. Until then, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays]