

Shmanners 213: Mary Ellen Pleasant

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello internet. I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: Well. The world... there's a lot going on here in the US of A. Before we begin, I want to encourage everyone to, if you haven't already, or if you feel like you wanna do more, donating to causes that are supporting the protestors here in America that are protesting police violence in general, but more specifically police violence against black people. And if you have already donated, share those links, get out there and, you know, check out some education resources, share those education resources, anything you can do to help. I would recommend, if you're looking for places to donate, if you're looking for resources, you can go to blacklivesmatters.carrd.co. So blacklivesmatters.carrd.co, that's two Rs. So there you can sign petitions, text or make phone calls, there are donation links, there are more resources, there are resources for protestors, all kinds of things you can do.

And I also just wanna say thank you to everyone who is out there protesting. Thank you to people who are making donations and doing things to improve the lives of, as far as I'm concerned, all Americans, but specifically black Americans in our country. It is long past due. Thank you. And so specifically, we wanted to talk about, we're gonna do a biography this week. And this was your idea, so please explain.

Teresa: Yes. So, we're going to— our biography today is the biography of Mary Ellen Pleasant. And I was first introduced to her on a television program called Drunk History. [laughs]

Travis: Now here's— let me just stop you right there. Because I wanna say, one of the things that I love so much about pop culture, but specifically the way Teresa and I consume pop culture, is I learn a lot of things from what many people would consider comedy programs.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And that ranges from stuff like The Daily Show, Last Week Tonight, which I think is both wonderful and educational, but also just stuff like Supersizers Go, which we've talked about many times on this show, Drunk History, there's a great show called Horrible History, which is like—

Teresa: Yeah, that's a BBC show.

Travis: Yeah, which is ostensibly, like, perfect for showing middle schoolers in class. It seems like it was designed to be like, "Hey, today we're gonna watch a TV show while I, I dunno, take a nap because I'm a really hungover teacher in this scenario."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But it is also great. But Drunk History has taught me a lot about history.

Teresa: Absolutely, absolutely. And, you know, it's kinda sad that I had never heard of Mary Ellen Pleasant before this, because she was an awesome lady.

Travis: Well, that's a thing that I see a lot of people talking about too, which is we talk a lot about history, and a lot of times the biographies that we have done and like, the rules that we have focused on do tend to be pretty white-person centric. And one of the reasons for that, that a lot of people are talking about right now, as well they should, is that history books were, for the most part, written by white people.

Teresa: It's true.

Travis: And so a lot of amazing black innovators, black scientists, black inventors, black cultural figures were more or less written out of the history books because it didn't fit with the narrative that the white constructors of history were trying to create.

Teresa: Exactly. So, Mary Ellen Pleasant is often called the mother of civil rights in San Francisco. That's where—

Travis: This is our, I think, our second San Francisco biography in a month.

Teresa: It is. Interesting. I didn't do that on purpose but...

Travis: Is it because I've been baking a lot of sourdough bread? Is that it? We've got a lot of sourdough in our veins?

Teresa: Hmm... [laughs]

Travis: By the way, we should see a doctor. That is not where the bread is supposed to be.

Teresa: That's not where it's supposed to go.

Travis: No, no, no. I did name my sourdough starter Joshua. I don't know if that's, I named it after—

Teresa: After Joshua Norton.

Travis: After Joshua Norton, yes.

Teresa: Well that's, I mean, sourdough, San Francisco, Joshua rules, makes sense.

Travis: That's where it went, yes.

Teresa: Anyway. And not only was she a civil rights activist, and abolitionist, she was an entrepreneur. And that's, I mean, the mass business network is so fascinating to me, as far as her life goes. So. It's assumed that Mary Ellen was born in the 1800s in the month of August, but different sources have different years. Her own autobiography, she has three of them, by the way, you should check those out. Her own autobiographies have different days.

Travis: [laughs] Okay.

Teresa: And a lot of people say that she was born into slavery on a Georgia plantation, but she herself says in one of her autobiographies that she was born free in Philadelphia.

Travis: Okay. I'm gonna choose to trust her.

Teresa: Well, okay. We'll go back and forth between that.

Travis: And whether it's true or not— well, here's the thing. Here's the way I look at it. If that's the narrative she wants to create, I am going to trust her.

Teresa: Exactly. She creates several narratives, and none of these different stories of her origins do her justice as far as just the amount of, I'm gonna say, like, social structuring she did for black people.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, we'll never really know for sure. Maybe she was a young slave bought out of slavery, maybe, you know.

Travis: Maybe she was born free, it's one of these.

Teresa: Maybe she was born free. But we do know that she was separated from her family very young, she somehow wound up in Nantucket in her early teens and she was working as a servant for a white family. This is when she learned how to read and write, because she was working in the family shop. And it's also assumed that working for this family is where she began to become so deeply passionate about the abolitionist movement. Because this family was working for the abolitionist movement. So, I'm hesitant to say that she was part of the abolitionist network at this point, but she certainly has this white family... this position in the white family is where she started out her abolitionist ideals.

Travis: Okay. So this was her, at the very least, definitely made connections to the abolitionist network and like, to this kind of anti-slavery movement.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Though I imagine she was probably already pretty anti-slavery.

Teresa: Yes, yes.

Travis: So it was a good fit.

Teresa: She married her first husband, James Smith, also—

Travis: What a boring name!

Teresa: Well.

Travis: Listen, I don't mean— maybe he was a good guy, maybe he was a cool dude. But I bet at this point in America, there were 18 bajillion James Smiths. [laughs] It's one step above John Smith, which is another boring name. And listen— oh no. Now I've just realized. If you're listening to this and you're named James Smith, you're great. It's a cool name.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm so sorry. So sorry I said anything.

Teresa: [sings] Backpedalling, backpedalling...

Travis: I'm just saying it sounds like a made up name. It's the name I think The Doctor— no, The Doctor uses John Smith, whenever they need to give, like, a fake name or something. I think it's— whatever. None of this is germane. None of this is important.

Teresa: None of this is germane, because he was also an abolitionist and together they worked The Underground Railroad, possibly as slave stealers, possibly hiding people, but definitely helping them get all the way to Canada.

Travis: Nice!

Teresa: He died. Because people do.

Travis: Oh. Wow.

Teresa: Well, hey, they do.

Travis: I mean, so... what you mean is, so far. Everyone has died so far, that doesn't mean I'm going to. Please.

Teresa: Of course. But he did leave her a bunch of money, which was awesome, and told her to never abandon the cause. Which she absolutely never did. Good on you, Mary Ellen. Okay. We are now up to 1848, where she fell in love with John James Pleasant.

Travis: Okay. I'm just saying, that's a cool name. That's a cool name. Right?

Teresa: John James Pleasant?

Travis: John James Pleasant. That's, ooh, I like that name. It's a strong name.

Teresa: Well, from now on, you're gonna like every name. Because all names are good.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm just saying it's a fun name to say.

Teresa: Okay. And it's speculated that they got married, although no records of their marriage exist. But she did bear his name until she died. They were forced to move to New Orleans due to their activities on The Underground Railroad, and that is when the gold rush happened.

Travis: Okay, yes, I have heard of this.

Teresa: 1850, California—

Travis: We should do a whole episode on the gold rush, by the way.

Teresa: Sure, yeah. Let's do it. Are you gonna research it?

Travis: Er, yeah. Sure.

Teresa: You heard it here, folks. Hold him to it.

Travis: Yeah, cause I'll forget.

Teresa: [laughs] 1850 is when California joined the union, and joined as a free state. So, no matter who you were, you could go to California and find your fortune. More about that, probably you didn't.

Travis: Yeah. Listen, spoiler alert for when we do the gold rush episode: most of the people who made their money from the gold rush made it by selling supplies, by selling things to people who were trying to find gold.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: There were not many people who got rich from the gold rush by mining and panning for gold. Like, it's people like Levi Strauss and people, like, selling, you know, those kinds of goods and materials to people who were trying to mine.

Teresa: Okay, but spoilers.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, in April of 1852, that is when they moved to San Francisco and so here is the stroke of genius and the sad part about the society of the day. She was light-skinned enough to be able to pass as a white woman, and so she used her husband's surname and got a job as a cook and domestic servant in a San Francisco businessman's home. And this is something that was not available to black people of the day. This was not a job that was really something that the people could look forward to. There was a lot more manual labor jobs available, but domestic service was one thing that because she could pass as white she was able to take care of.

Travis: Got it.

Teresa: And here is where she met some of the city's most wealthy and powerful men. Right there, like, serving them soup.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: And here is the thing. Here's the thing: she was basically invisible to the men that she was serving. And that's not to say that because she was black she was invisible—

Travis: Because she was the working class, she was.

Teresa: Because she was working class, right? And we've talked about the idea that the servants should just kind of like, swoop in and be just out of, you know, just out of eyesight. And I think that we've even talked about hand signals and things like that, that the host and hostess usually would give to the servants and things like that. But what she did was, she was able to listen and pick up tips about investment opportunities, gossip, business advice, and one of her biographers said in an interview that it was probably almost a cover for Mary Ellen Pleasant to get insider tips from these powerful, powerful men. But, I mean, like I said, as a servant you were basically invisible anyway.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And not to say that she wasn't awesome at her job as well. She was an incredible chef, so she didn't have to seek out business tips. These businessmen were coming to her to basically be fed by her.

Travis: Yeah. And not only that, people like to brag, and say like, "Here's a cool thing that I know that'll impress you!"

Teresa: So people started, like, basically a bidding war to get her to come and be their personal chef, offering her more and more money while she was getting all these business tips by being in the room.

Travis: Uh huh?

Teresa: So at that point, she probably made about \$500 a month. And using that money plus the inheritance from her late husband, she invested in real estate, in gold, in silver mines, and so now she had investments that would pay for things for her to open her businesses. She opened laundry businesses, she opened restaurants and boarding houses. She became like a mogul.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's awesome!

Travis: Yeah, that's incredible, yeah.

Teresa: Okay. [laughs] Are you—

Travis: Sorry. I was just like, yeah. That rules. Like, statement of fact. That's awesome.

Teresa: [laughs] So, because of this, because of her innate business prowess and all of these tips that she got from these businessmen while they were eating her delicious, delicious food, she was actually invited into the upper social circles. And by the late 1850s, she was a super wealthy lady.

Travis: Nice.

Teresa: And here where it happens, right. She could have just, like...

Travis: Enjoyed all her money?

Teresa: Enjoyed her money and enjoyed her lifestyle and just kept on keeping on getting big bucks, right?

Travis: Uh huh.

Teresa: But instead, she really put her money where her mouth was into the abolitionist movement. So, she bought freedom for slaves. She would also offer them continuing financial support. She hired countless black people to work in her various businesses, which, like I said, was unheard of at the time. Because most of these, kind of, emerging middle class positions were still held by white people, and a lot of the manual labor was done by black people, even if they were free.

And she would help these people move up in society by using her clout and her money, and they would become some of the great black leaders of the city. And in 1857, that was when she was like, "How can I do more? I gotta do more." So she left San Francisco to go join John Brown. And if you haven't heard of John Brown, he is a very outspoken, famous abolitionist.

Travis: Yeah, I, from West Virginia, know of John Brown very well because of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Which, maybe that's a whole other thing we should talk about.

Teresa: We are getting ideas right and left. Love it. And together, they bought land in Canada. Remember how I talked about how they would help slaves get to Canada, which is where they could, you know, they could—

Travis: Not be slaves? [laughs]

Teresa: Not be slaves, but also in their social strata be more free. Right? Even if you weren't a slave in the US at the time, you were still bogged down socio-economically. And she actively supported his cause and sent him about \$30,000.

Travis: This is what, 1850?

Teresa: 1857.

Travis: Okay. I'm gonna look up how much that is.

Teresa: Oh, okay. And after this contribution, John Brown hoped that he would provoke a large armed slave uprising, but this is when he got caught. So, Mary Ellen went back to San Francisco to continue to run her businesses and help black people in her own city.

Travis: So, anyone who's wondering, \$30,000 in 1857 would be worth \$884,000 today.

Teresa: Wow.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: On December 2nd was when John Brown got caught and tried for murder and treason, and this is where... I don't wanna say that the poop hits the fan, but this was a real close shave for Mary Ellen, because in his pocket was a note from Mary Ellen. The note said, "The axe is laid at the foot of the tree. When the first blow is struck there, will be more money to help. M.E.P."

Travis: Ah. And were people like, "M.E.P.? It's 1857, that could be anyone."

Teresa: [laughs] "That could be anybody." No, but lucky for us, people are dumb, so they misread the letters and apparently the M looked like a W.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: So when this note was put in the newspapers as, like, kind of a, "Look out for this person, we know what they're doing, what they're up to," they were looking for W.E.P.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Whew, wipes the sweat off the brow.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And we really only know this because she admitted it shortly before her death. That's the only way we found out. Okay, back in San Francisco, 1860, she's got boarding houses, she's got laundry businesses, she's got restaurants.

Travis: She's got it all.

Teresa: She's everywhere. And helping black people at every turn, and she would often dress below her station so as not to draw attention to herself.

Travis: She's a genius.

Teresa: She is a genius.

Travis: She is a *genius*.

Teresa: All this time, she's still saying that she is a white woman.

Travis: Yeah. Well that's the thing, like, we've talked about— like, I say she's a genius, right, because that is a move. The wherewithal to be like, "If I dress too fancy, if I draw too much attention to myself, people are going to start looking into who is this person." Socially, like, especially in the mid-1800s, right, we've talked about this on the show so many times, so much of it was about society and about understanding where the money is and who has money and who's influential. And so, not even from a gossiping way, but just like, if there is new money, right, there are countless people who are gonna be like, "Well now I wanna know everything about them."

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And if they dig too far into her, like, past and being and stuff, her whole game is gonna be, you know, up. Right? So this idea of, like, "I'm gonna play it really cool and keep it low down and not live extravagantly and not draw a lot of attention to myself," is just genius.

Teresa: And she was still making that bank.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: She got involved with a young bank clerk named Thomas Bell, and he was already making a ton of money selling mercury, which was a big deal in the 1800s.

Travis: Well, that's a whole other thing.

Teresa: That's a whole other thing.

Travis: You can listen to the mercury episode of Sawbones if you wanna learn about mercury.

Teresa: Yeah. But teaming up with Mary Ellen is really where his business potential was unlocked. It's possible, possible that they had a romantic relationship, but probably not. There are different sources about that. But what is certain is they began to invest in a variety of businesses, with Pleasant leading the way. Except she was so savvy, oh man, she was so savvy, that always

looking over her shoulder, knowing that the whole thing could blow up in her face at any point, she starts putting a lot of her investments in his name.

Travis: Genius.

Teresa: Genius.

Travis: Genius!

Teresa: And all of that would help her in 1865, when the civil war was over and she went down to the San Francisco public directory and changed her racial designation from white to black.

Travis: Boom.

Teresa: Mic drop!

Travis: Okay, so, once again: genius. Because this is great for two reasons. Well, so, the investments in the dude's name, in Bell's name, is one. Once again, there are people— especially, even if she is passing as white at this point, she's still a woman. Right? And so if people are like, "She's making a lot of investments, what is this lady's deal?" Right? A lot of scrutiny there. And two, if, as you have said, the— I'm gonna say stuff, because saying "poop hits the fan" feels so wrong.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: [laughs] If the stuff hits the fan, then, like, the investments are in his name. So it's like, it's still covered.

Teresa: Right. And they're still cool.

Travis: And then for her, after the civil war, to be like, "Oh by the way, boom!" [laughs] It's just such a power move.

Teresa: It really is. It really is. In 1866, this is another one of her, like, milestones of her career. She and two other black ladies were kicked off of a city streetcar. Because at that point it was like, you know, we are all familiar with in the 60s—

Travis: Rosa Parks.

Teresa: Rosa Parks, and the bus boycott.

Travis: If we're gonna mention Rosa Parks, wanna also mention Claudette Colvin, another great Drunk History episode about Claudette Colvin.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: The person who was first kicked off the bus, and then Rosa Parks took up the kind of like, carried it from that point forward to get more notoriety for it, but it actually happened to Claudette Colvin first. She was the person who refused to get off and she did not get recognized for a long, long time. But it was Claudette Colvin who started the bus boycott story and then Rosa Parks became the face of it. But I wanted to mention that to make sure, because we're talking about history, and I wanna make sure that that is accurate.

Teresa: Yes, great. So, they were kicked off the city streetcar, and then, because she had money, because she was in society, she fronted a civil suit for racial discrimination.

Travis: In 18—

Teresa: In 1866!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Amazing. They went after two different cable car companies. One of the streetcars even announced that they would allow black people on their streetcars with no more forced removal.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So you win some, you lose some. Only one of the companies, but...

Travis: But still, 1866. It's huge for that point.

Teresa: Yeah. It went so far, it went all the way up to the California Supreme Court. And she led the way for the desegregation of the city streetcars.

Travis: This... Mary Ellen Pleasant is amazing.

Teresa: Okay. So. We've been talking about the money, right? We keep talking about how many businesses she had. How she had her hands in basically everything and was a mogul.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: I wanna talk about that money. The money that... [laughs] This number is so unfathomable to me. Her fortune, she was probably worth close to \$850 million.

Travis: Whoa! Wait, in today's money?

Teresa: In today's money.

Travis: Oh, okay. Cause if that was in 1860s money, that's so much money. [laughs] But even now, that's still so much money.

Teresa: Even now.

Travis: Don't get me wrong. Still so much money.

Teresa: That's so much money! That is so much money. And she had a beautiful Victorian-style home, probably worth about \$2.4 million today.

Travis: [whistles]

Teresa: Which, I mean, we're talking about California real estate so [laughs] there's a lot of millions in California real estate.

Travis: It's incredible.

Teresa: And they had a 1000-acre ranch in the Sonoma Valley. This is where, you know, you think about a life, you think about a career, and they go up, and they go up, and they go up. And sometimes they go down.

Travis: Is this where it goes down?

Teresa: This is where the downward turn begins.

Travis: Oh no, what happened?

Teresa: In the 1880s, San Francisco was a big port city for a lot of immigration and so, the racist sentiments were climbing and climbing at this point.

Travis: We talked about this in the Joshua Norton episode, too.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Rumors started circulating that she was Bell's mistress, which was frowned upon at that point. That her boarding houses were actually brothels. And that she was using a "voodoo spell" to control the wealthy whites.

Travis: Racist. That's so... ugh.

Teresa: Um....

Travis: Because it couldn't just be that she's good at business.

Teresa: Couldn't just be that.

Travis: Couldn't just be that she's a genius. [sighs]

Teresa: In 1883, this is where things turned from bad to worse, because it wasn't just the rumor mill and society turning against her. It was actual legal action.

Travis: Ugh, uh huh.

Teresa: I know. She got entangled in the trial of Nevada senator William Sharon. He was accused... [laughs]

[baby noises in background]

Travis: Yeah, baby Dot has joined us, she's singing.

Teresa: [laughs] He was accused of seducing and then abandoning a young woman named Sarah Hill, and just like today, there was a media circus all around it. And the entire United States was following these proceedings.

Travis: What does that have to do with Mary Ellen?

Teresa: Well, she was friends with Sarah Hill, and then William Sharon's lawyers claimed that Pleasant had used voodoo to manipulate Sarah.

Travis: Oh my God.

Teresa: It's ridiculous that any of this was allowed in court, right?

Travis: Yeah, I thought that was the court— ugh. [sighs]

Teresa: Yeah. They said that Pleasant had used dark voodoo forces to make Sarah trap the senator in a compromising position.

Travis: Ugh.

Teresa: Ugh. How messed up, right?

Travis: Yes. The fact that you could say that and anybody would be like, "Oh, okay." Like— ugh.

Teresa: Here is the weird thing about this trial, right? As a kind of... [laughs] I'm very distracted by her singing. As a subtle "screw you" to the trial, Mary Ellen actually brought a voodoo doll with her to court.

Travis: Okay. [laughs]

Teresa: And claimed before the jury that she would use it to kill the senator.

Travis: [laughs] Okay, I don't know how good a move that is, but I think that's a really cool thing to do. [laughs]

Teresa: And then the senator died.

Travis: [gasps] Oh boy. [laughs] Okay, that might have backfired a little bit.

Teresa: Yeah... so basically, this confirmed her as an evil, mythical, voodoo priestess.

Travis: She had to at that point be like, "Okay wait, hold on."

Teresa: "Uh, whoops."

Travis: "You all had to see that was a joke, right?" [groans] Oh boy.

Teresa: Yeah. Okay. Just around the same time, they were trying to paint her as a cruel and evil witch doctor. People in the press started giving her a racist nickname of “Mammy Pleasant”.

Travis: Ugh. [groans]

Teresa: I feel like— so, this woman, who had done her best to do right by everybody, because racism is terrible, did not deserve the defamation that comes with all of this.

Travis: No. No!

Teresa: Should she have brought a voodoo doll to court? Maybe not.

Travis: I stand by it’s a baller move. But [laughs] let’s just see.

Teresa: But, “Mammy Pleasant”?

Travis: No. This seems like— this strikes me as, like, the cowardice of the pile-on, of this person who very clearly, a lot of things, like, socially, were probably against her. You know, she’s a woman. She’s black, she is rich. Like, these things that people are already kind of gonna scoff at and turn their noses at, right? Where there were probably all of these racist cowards who wouldn’t say anything against her while public opinion is, like, “She’s great,” right? But as soon as they see any kind of opportunity of, like, oh now she’s associated with this court case, now these rumors are spreading about her, that they would pile on and be like, “Oh yeah, we don’t like her either.”

And it’s like... you cowards. You would never say anything, you would hide and wait for your opportunity to take a dig at this woman who has done nothing but use her prowess and genius to get to where she is, and to help people. And you’re gonna take this opportunity to dig at her because you are a tiny person who can’t see someone that you hate succeed. Ugh.

Teresa: Ugh. It gets a little worse.

Travis: Oh no! Usually the worst thing that happens to people is then they die.

Teresa: I know. But not yet. 1899—

Travis: And she died too? [laughs]

Teresa: I mean, everybody does.

Travis: So far.

Teresa: Yes, so far.

Travis: Please don't take this away from me, it's the only thing that lets me sleep at night.

Teresa: [laughs] 1899, Thomas Bell dies.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And his widow ran a full smear campaign in the San Francisco Chronicle.

Travis: Against Mary Ellen?

Teresa: yeah. She titled it, "The Queen of the Voodoos".

Travis: Oh no.

Teresa: Mrs. Bell painted her as a monster, accusing her of witchcraft, saying that she had murdered Bell. But these business partners were so entrenched in the whole thing, where basically his son sued her for half of her fortune, because they were so entrenched together. And because so much of the stuff was in Bell's name, which had protected her previously, ruined her in this. Right? So, so much of it was in Bell's name that she had no claim to it. She had to give it up.

Travis: Ugh.

Teresa: So. This is the end. [laughs] In 1904, at the age of 89, she died. She was kind of, I mean, for all intents and purposes, she was put out, you know? She was living on the kindness of her friends and I think that, you know, one good turn deserves another, right? She put a lot of people in jobs, she put a lot of people in the upper strats of society, and thankfully, these people took care of her when she was on the outs as well.

Travis: Yeah. And it's weird to suddenly feel the deep vein of feeling that I am feeling about someone who died 116 years ago. But it just feels like, like I was saying about the pile-on, that as we hear all of these stories about quote-unquote "self-made people" throughout history, and we talk about stuff like Rockefeller and, you know, Carnegie and these people, right, that like, they built these

fortunes. And they were seen as idols. As someone you would want to be, right? So the idea that not only did they get to keep their fortune and pass it on to their children and pass it on to their families, right, but that they somehow deserved it because they worked hard and because of who they were.

Teresa: Yeah, the bootstrap fallacy.

Travis: Right. And the thing is, is like... you hear those stories and you're like, these were the people that everyone was striving to be. And then you hear a story about a woman, a black woman, who literally pulled herself up. Who started from nothing and became a multimillionaire, and that as soon as there was any kind of— whether it be age, or opportunity of weakness, or whatever, everyone just wanted to take it away from her. And that that was not a thing, that she was not seen as this pillar of American, you know, hard-working ingenuity and bootstrap mentality, but rather an outsider, an other, that didn't deserve to keep what she had. And that is just so... I mean, it's one of those things where maybe—

Teresa: It's disgraceful, is what it is.

Travis: It is disgraceful and I also think that this is a moment where I have to acknowledge my own privilege, where I'm horrified that something like that would happen, and the fact that I'm surprised by it and horrified by it says a lot about the history that we have been taught. And it seems to me like, "But isn't a self-made person celebrated?" and it's like, "Yes, apparently if they are a white man".

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: And that is disgusting to me. I mean, and that's the thing: not to bring it back to this, but the fact that we are here and it is, you know, almost 120 years later, and we're still dealing with socio-economic injustice and racial injustice against minorities and specifically black people, is like, this is disgusting. That we're still here. And so, listen. Before we wrap up—

Teresa: Oh, I did want to say.

Travis: Yes?

Teresa: There is a small park dedicated to her in San Francisco, and oftentimes ghost tours go past the park saying that she haunts it and throws stuff at people, but in 2005—

Travis: Hey, ghost tours? Cut that out.

Teresa: Cut that out.

Travis: Don't do that, that's not helping. Okay.

Teresa: In 2005, San Francisco came together to create a holiday in her honor, as well as display her belongings so more citizens could learn about this forgotten mother of American civil rights.

Travis: Yes. I think Mary Ellen Pleasant sounds amazing, incredible. Thank you for telling me about her. Thank you everybody for listening. I want to encourage everybody one more time. Go to blacklivesmatters.carrd.co. You can find tips for protesters, including pro-bono lawyers, treatment for tear gas, protest first aid tips, safety while protesting, your rights, all kinds of things. And there's also places to donate, one of my favorites that is really a great idea. If you are saying, "Well, I don't have any money to donate," under places to donate, you can, one, there's donate with no money. Literally a link that says "donate with no money" and a playlist on YouTube that you can watch, and if you follow— there's instructions in the description, but if you follow that and just let it play, it will make money for black lives matter without you having to donate anything. It will just be through YouTube payment.

So, there are ways to help even if you aren't able to donate. Go and check it out, one more time, blacklivesmatters.carrd.co. So yeah, this is usually where we do all our other thank yous and stuff, but I think that that is the most important thing, so I wanna leave it there. Go check out that carrd. Thank you for listening. Join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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