

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.
00:00:13	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 Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. My first guest this week is W. Kamau Bell. He’s a longtime friend of our show. He co-hosted with me once, back when I was just out of college. He’s a terrific standup comic. He hosts the CNN show, <i>United Shades of America</i> —for which he’s won several Emmys. And before that, he hosted the very funny late night talk show <i>Totally Biased</i> . All of Kamau’s work is great. You should check out all the stuff I just talked about. But we’re not gonna talk about any of it today. And here, I want to mention that the interview you’re about to hear has extensive discussions of and some relatively specific descriptions of sexual assault. So, please be forewarned.

W. Kamau Bell directed a new documentary series. It’s called *We Need to Talk About Cosby*. It just screened at Sundance. It comes out on Showtime Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup>. As you might guess, it’s about Bill Cosby: who he is, what he’s done, and how we deal with that. Cosby is one of the most successful TV and standup comedy stars of all time. He’s also been accused by more than 60 women of sexual assault. He was convicted of sexual assault in 2018, though he was released from jail last year when his conviction was overturned on technical grounds.

The documentary includes firsthand testimony from women describing Cosby drugging and raping them. But it isn’t a true crime film. It’s about what Cosby means and how we—all Americans, but especially Black Americans like Kamau—can deal with what he did. Kamau talks about what Cosby meant to him as a kid and as a comic. He talks with others about the ways Cosby shaped their lives, about Cosby’s pioneering work in civil rights and in television and film, about Cosby’s image as a father, a philanthropist, and a moral authority, and about how we struggle to square all of that with the person we now know Cosby to be. It’s a complicated and difficult conversation, one that intersects with the fabric of the American entertainment system with race, with the justice system, the Me Too movement, and much more. But Bell says it’s a conversation we need to have.

*[Music fades in.]*

So, again, we’re gonna get into some painful areas here, especially around sexual assault. So, please be forewarned. Here’s my interview with W. Kamau Bell.

00:03:00	Music	Transition	Thoughtful piano.
00:03:05	Jesse	Host	W. Kamau Bell, welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . It’s nice to talk to you, buddy.
00:03:08	W. Kamau Bell	Guest	It’s been a while! It’s good to talk to you.

00:03:10	Jesse	Host	So, <i>[chuckles]</i> I read this piece from five or ten years ago where you were quoted about Bill Cosby and one of the things that you were quoted as saying was that you were contractually obliged never to talk to White people about Bill Cosby. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:03:27	Kamau	Guest	Yeah, that was from TMZ! I think that was my first TMZing. Like I got— <i>[chuckles]</i> that was a—TMZ hit me up in Nashville, Tennessee after a gig and I was so confused about like why would TMZ stalk me in Nashville, Tennessee. And Yeah. I thought I handled that pretty well, at the time.
00:03:45	Jesse	Host	I mean, you know, what are you gonna say? I am a White person, though. Why did that matter, then?
00:03:51	Kamau	Guest	I mean, that was really like a way to maneuver my way through the weirdness of being stopped by TMZ outside of a Nashville, Tennessee nightclub. And I was like—I was certainly not prepared to have the conversation. And also, really didn't trust TMZ to staple me into the right <i>[laughing]</i> —into like the—into the right context for that conversation. And it was also at a time where like—I mean, we're still at that time, but it was just like—I was like, "This is not the format for this." And I wanted to figure—and that was my—I was really proud of myself for figuring out a way to do it in a way that I came off funny, but also didn't really give them what they wanted. So.
00:04:25	Jesse	Host	Yeah. I mean, I imagine that part of what was scary—besides just never having had TMZ point one of their weird cameras in your face or whatever—is that you realize immediately that what they are asking you to do is speak on behalf of if not all Black men, then Black male comedians, at least.
00:04:45	Kamau	Guest	Yeah. And I think I was very aware that like—I mean, it's funny. I just went through this with asking people to do this documentary. We had way more no's than yeses. And I think there's a little bit of like, "I know what I feel comfortable to say. I don't know what you're gonna do with it." And also, I don't know—and maybe people did the same thing when they said no to me—I don't know that this is the format for me to weigh in in any sort of real way. Like this is—TMZ is not—you know, it's funny. I've been on TMZ a lot now as a guest. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> So, it's funny. When I do it as a guest, it just feels like fun, intelligent conversations with the guys who run TMZ. But camera outside of the airport is not my way to do—is not where I do my best, nuanced talking.
00:05:26	Jesse	Host	What did Bill Cosby mean to you, as a kid?
00:05:29	Kamau	Guest	I mean, I sort of think—you know, I'm 48 years old. I kind of feel like I'm the perfect age to have sort of—to have sort of like been caught up in the biggest wave of—the waves of his career. So, you know, I'm too young—which is not something I say about myself too often, these days—but I'm too young to have watched him on <i>I Spy</i> . But I'm at the perfect age to have been caught up by <i>Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids</i> . So, my first dealing with Bill Cosby in my life was as the host of a cartoon that I thought was great. And not even really understanding that he was the driving creative force behind the cartoon or that he did the voices. Just like, "Oh, that guy who's on my cartoon is—he's good too." <i>[Laughs.]</i> Like, not like really sort of like—

And I think there's—and I think Bill Cosby was aware of that. Like, it's called *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*. He was sort of like—it was a—he was the trojan horse into the lives—into the hearts of many of

America's kids. So, I think by the time I actually—so, *Bill Cosby: Himself* comes out in early—in the early '80s. At that point, I was like—I knew he was a comedian, but I hadn't really reckoned with the albums. I wasn't listening to the albums; I was too young. But I was like, "Oh! Bill Cosby from the—from *Fat Albert!* He's got a comedy special out! I should watch this."

And it's one of the first times I remember being blown away by standup, was watching *Bill Cosby: Himself*. Many people have talked about it since, even before we knew all these—the allegations. It's—you know, it's—it's—for a comedian, you go, "Oh yes, Richard Pryor's great. Yes, George Carlin's great. That's right there with it. It just doesn't have all the four-letter words and explosions of those specials." And I think that special really made me go, "Huh. Standup comedy, you say?" You know?

And then *The Cosby Show* comes out in '84. I'm 11. So, I'm like the same age as like—as some of the kids on that show. I feel—I'm younger than Theo but I sort of identify with Theo. And as I say in the doc, I was there week after week. It was appointment television. And the way I've sort of come to understand it now, working on this project—I don't think Black folks realized it at the time, but it was like a half-hour break from the regular rigors of America and 30 minutes of just Black excellence.

00:07:42 Jesse Host  
00:07:44 Kamau Guest

And conceived to be such.

Yes. And—yeah, I can see—yeah, certainly conceived to be such. And from—and from what I learned from making this doc, it was that way behind the scenes. They had a lot of Black people who worked on the show at all levels behind the scenes.

00:07:54 Jesse Host

It was in a way like the last of the great examples of that kind of Blackness in popular culture, which is to say Blackness where it is specifically, explicitly conceived to demonstrate great Blackness to world without—without weakness.

[*They both laugh.*]

You know what I mean? Like [*chuckling*], the kind of—the kind of representations of Blackness that you describe emerging in the 1960s in the documentary—*Cosby on I Spy* and then Sidney Poitier and so on and so forth, that kind of unimpeachability.

[*Kamau agrees.*]

You know, *The Cosby Show* was the greatest of those things! Like, *The Cosby Show* is a—is basically as good as a television sitcom could be, and that was its ethos.

00:08:51 Kamau Guest

Yeah. And I think that really like it was Black—you know, the idea of being Black without apology. And also, being—like, Cliff and Clair as parents, as a married couple on the show, they weren't—it wasn't about how they always fought or how they always had tension. And you know, down to like it wasn't a show about how do we pay the rent this week, which I think is an important part of it. When you talk about many of the classic Black sitcoms [*chuckles*] end up being about the rent this week. And on top of that, it wasn't—this is the thing I think that people don't even give it enough credit for as a sitcom when we talk about it. And it's—again, we

only—I feel like we can only talk about it ‘cause we’re gonna talk about the other stuff—is that—

*[Sighs.]* It was not even about him being like the dad who gets—who his kids are always like sort of getting one over on, which most sitcoms—Black, White, Latino, Asian—are about how the parents are sort of always under attack from the kids and the kids are smarter. It’s not that at all. Cliff and Clair run that house and call those kids out when they’re wrong and the kids respect them, which is just like—it’s not even a—it’s not a funny position to be in, and yet they figured out how to make it funny.

00:10:00 Jesse Host

When you became a standup comic—which you did, you know, early in your adulthood—what, by then, did you think about Bill Cosby as—exclusively as an artist?

00:10:14 Kamau Guest

I mean, I think by then I would’ve—you know, if—you know, I started when I was 21. I would’ve not named Bill—I wouldn’t have named Bill Cosby as one of my favorite standup comics by that point, because at that point you’re like, “I like Bill Hicks!” *[Laughing.]* You know? Like, which I still like Bill Hicks, but I was like—you know, you’re sort of looking for—you know, edgier, younger, more relevant people. And at that point, he wasn’t really a standup comic. I mean, he was still doing standup comedy, but he was not in the public consciousness as a standup comic. But if we’d had a Bill Cosby conversation, I would’ve been able to go deep into like what I liked about Bill Cosby.

I mean, I recognized—I always thought like, you know, when I—like, the other comic—the other Black comedian that I felt a connection to was Eddie Murphy, ‘cause that’s—I’m at the same age where like when Eddie Murphy was on SNL, I was—you know. I don’t know. I don’t—I was 9 or 10, but it was like I felt like we were the same age, ‘cause he was like 19. You know what I mean? *[Chuckles.]* So. I felt like somewhere between the brashness of Eddie Murphy and—the explosive brashness of Eddie Murphy and the sort of like intelligent, silliness of Bill Cosby. I can—I can exist somewhere between these two tentpoles. Like, somewhere is my identity. Because neither one of them is doing Blackness the way that White people have told them to do Blackness. And I feel like, as a Black person who has also felt like my whole life I wasn’t doing it right, I can exist somewhere between these two.

So. But certainly by the time I started, I was aware of Bill Cosby’s influence on me, but I wasn’t like directly like studying his albums as a way to sort of become a better comedian. I think—I say this in the doc and it’s true, that like I just remember when I first started doing standup and open mics in Chicago. It’s almost like comics start to talk—sit you down and tell you about the secrets of comedy. And the two secrets I remember is, “Robin Williams steals material and Bill Cosby cheats on his wife a lot.” Like, you just see sort of like, “Now that you’re—now that you’ve done one open mic for five minutes, here’s what’s going on behind the scenes.” And you know, you just sort of go okay!

And you know, I’m not—nobody was—we’re not really judging his infidelity. It’s like, “Well, he’s a famous guy. So, that’s what it is.” But it’s just interesting to me to think that like that—this sort of “Bill

00:12:26	Jesse	Host	<p>Cosby's not who he appears to be" had boiled down to the open mic level in Chicago.</p> <p>We've got more to get into with W. Kamau Bell. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.</p>
00:12:34	Music	Transition	Thumpy rock music.
00:12:39	Jesse	Host	<p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with W. Kamau Bell. Kamau is a standup comic and the host of the CNN show <i>United Shades of America</i>. He directed the new documentary series <i>We Need to Talk About Cosby</i>, which premieres on showtime Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup>. In this interview, as in the documentary, you'll hear some descriptions of sexual assault, so if that is a sensitive subject for you, we wanted to let you know. Let's get back into the rest of our conversation.</p>
00:13:19	Kamau	Guest	<p>When did you first hear about the allegations that Bill Cosby had sexually assaulted women?</p> <p>I mean, this is what—you know, I was thinking about this a lot as we made the—as we made the project. Like, I can't pinpoint a moment where I like, "Oh, that's when I first heard about it." It was—it sort of—you know, 2004 is when Andrea Constand's case goes public. I don't believe I heard about anything before then. But at that point, you know, media was so different. It's sort of like a thing that you sort of like, "Huh." You know. It's also, at that point I think I thought so differently about sexual assault and rape and celebrity. It was sort of this thing about like, "Oh, some woman is accusing Bill Cosby of raping her." And at that point, it's like I think there's a sense of being trained in the culture—especially as a Black person—to be suspicious of these things. Especially as it pertains to a Black celebrity.</p>
			<p>And you know, I fully understand that there have been—you know, if you look at the—you know, the Emmett Till case, which we reference in the doc, is a clear example of like Black people have it in our cultural DNA to not trust accusations from White people. So, I don't think I took it all that seriously. You know, like a lot of people. I was also more focused on my own life and career at that point, where you go, "Ooh, that's—" And there was also at that point—the thing I remember most is like when he was—when Autumn Jackson said that he was her father and there was—that he had had an affair with the mom and he had a paternity test and the paternity test said he wasn't the dad. It was just sort of like—it felt more celebrity gossip than like a thing to really take in. You know?</p>
			<p>And I don't look back on that—and I'm not proud of that, but I think that's just where I was at, at that point. So—but it's—so, it's like—so, I remember me and a comic from San Francisco went to see Bill Cosby probably sometime around that time of the Autumn Jackson stuff. And I remember thinking like, "Is he gonna address this Autumn Jackson thing? Is he gonna talk about this?" We went. He did two hours. He never brought it up. Nobody ever heckled. It was just Bill Cosby's space to do whatever he wants to do. So, I think that there was really—like many people in the culture, I was engaged in a cognitive dissonance of like this is what I'm—there's these stories of sexual assault but Bill Cosby still took up so much space in my mind as a cultural icon that I wasn't really connecting the two. And we address that in the doc.</p>

00:15:25 Jesse Host Yeah. I have to say that in watching your film, one of the hardest things for me was that—you know, a lot of folks attribute the dam breaking, so to speak, on the allegations against Cosby to Hannibal Buress's set in 2014. And I was thinking back to when Hannibal's set went viral, and I knew. A lot of people found out that way.

*[Kamau agrees.]*

I knew, but you know, I think that in 2012, if you had asked me, "Bill Cosby wants to come on your show, what do you say?" I might have said yes. And I don't know how or if I would've addressed that.

*[Kamau affirms.]*

00:16:37 Kamau Guest And I'm ashamed of that fact; I wanna be very clear. But I think one of the complicating factors in this entire story is the way that he and we got engaged in, you know—he engaged us, and we engaged ourselves in complicity. You know. From people who knew him in real life to people who knew him as the most abstract of figures. Yeah, and I think this is true across—you know, up until the Me Too movement sort of like, you know, shook Hollywood, it was what we did with everybody. It's the same thing we did with R Kelly for a long time. Like, it just sort of like—you were able to compartmentalize, "Yeah, there's that weird story." And then also, if you dealt with it, you were like, "Aw, showbiz is crazy! They do—they live ways we don't live." And Bill Cosby had bought so much good will in most—in many of us that it was almost like he had credit to spend with us. Like, we were like, "Well. He did that one bad thing, but he also did all these good things." And I think that's the way in which we haven't looked at it effectively. You're acting like there's a tally that you're adding up when really it's like, "No, you've got to sort of look at all of it equally."

I remember, I think it was 2013. I was at South by Southwest and Bill Cosby performed in one of those like weird houses—the backyard of a house. And it was like he was there to promote his new Instagram account, which just seems so like 2013. And I remember at the time feeling like everybody—mostly people here are White. They're younger than me. Do they have a relationship with Bill Cosby? I was like almost worried he was gonna bomb in front of these White—he destroyed. He did—I don't know. He did a full set. He destroyed. Afterwards, I took a picture of him onstage and I posted it on Facebook. This is 2013, so this is like a year before Hannibal. So, I certainly knew these stories. But I just didn't think about it! And then—and so—and half my Facebook feed or a portion of my Facebook feed was people going like, "Yaaay! That's amazing! You saw Bill Cosby in a backyard in South by Southwest!"

And then people were like, "Why would you post this picture of this rapist?" And I was like oh my god, I forgot. Like, it just sort of like—I realized in that moment that I had forgotten. Again, it's that cognitive dissonance that we were all engaged in. Like, I'm gonna just focus on this part over here and not really—and not cross these streams. And Hannibal's joke crossed the streams.

00:18:24 Jesse Host Who did you invite on the show?

*[Kamau chuckles.]*

00:18:31 Kamau Guest And how did you decide who to invite?  
I mean, so I was—I—you know, this is a question I'm getting a lot right now. We have—I would just say in general, we have way more no's than yeses. Way more. It's not even close. If you stacked them next to each other, you would—they would be like—the no pile would overwhelm the yes pile.

00:18:46 Jesse Host And you're calling from Showtime. Like, you have a bunch of Emmys. This isn't nothing, reaching out.

*[Kamau affirms.]*

00:18:55 Kamau Guest You have a track record.  
Yes. And I have—and with some of the people, I had a personal relationships of some level. Like, you know, Hannibal. Like, not like these are my best friends, but I have—you know. It's a lot of comedians that I know and have come across and have their phone numbers so I can call them directly. And so, I think—it's like so many people said no that it's easier just to say *[laughing]* like who's not in it is really the question. Like—and there were lots of different reasons for "no" that I—that I sort of quickly understood. And I think one of the big reasons that I sort of framed it the way I framed it in my head was like 'cause some of the people are very public about their feelings about this and they're clear that they believe the survivors. But they're like, "But if I—if I sit down with you for two hours, I don't know how you're gonna cut that together."

And it's not like I'm like the world's most greatest documentary filmmaker. So, it's like, "I don't know that you can pull this off," is part of it. And it's also, "Maybe I've said my piece about it and it's easier to move on." Because every time you bring it up—and this is what I heard from people—it just—there's—it feels like there's no winning. There's no like—there's no way you can say these things in a way that—especially if you're a Black performer—that the majority of Black people will be like, "Oh, I'm glad you brought this up." You know?

So—and then, we were—and just to be clear, we were—when we started this project, Bill Cosby was still in prison. So, people said no when he was in prison. As soon as he got out, I was like, oh, all those people are like, "Oh, thank god I said no." *[Laughs.]* Like, I was like—I was like almost like—you know, breathing a sigh of relief for them for saying no, 'cause I didn't know what we were gonna do.

*[Kamau agrees at regular intervals as Jesse speaks.]*

00:20:25 Jesse Host I found myself wishing I could see Hannibal talk about that moment in your film and—you know, like you, I like know him well enough to have his email address. You know him a little better than I do. But I *[chuckles]*—I also thought to myself, if I was Hannibal Bures, would I want to appear in this film? This was me doing a standup set that I didn't even know someone was taping, just trying to do something—like it's not material, it's just him talking—getting something off his chest. You know what I mean? And it has become the defining moment in the career of—Hannibal's a great comic. I'm

sure that every day of his life, he has to deal with the consequences of that, whether it's people who only want to talk to him about that or people who consider him—you know, a traitor to his race, or his gender, or whatever else.

And I just thought how hard it is for anyone to decide to put themselves into this stream of BS and how that stream of BS was sort of knowingly and willfully manipulated and weaponized by Bill Cosby and Bill Cosby's team.

00:21:52 Kamau Guest

And also, just the legend of Bill Cosby is weaponizing it without anybody having to do anything.

*[Jesse agrees.]*

The memories of Bill Cosby is also stopping it. So, I think—I don't—you know, I do wanna be clear. I don't blame anybody who said no. I talked to people who were very connected to Bill Cosby through *The Cosby Show*. I talked to people—I talked to comics who have worked with him, or I talked to comics who certainly have been in—have been in more personal contact with him than I have. I've never met Bill Cosby. But I wish more people said yes, but I don't blame them for saying no. Like, I—the more no's I got, the more I realized, "Oh, this isn't their problem. This is my problem." Like, *[chuckles]*—like, the—you know, it would be easy to go, "You people aren't brave enough! Wait—all of you are saying no. Huh. Did I make the bad call? Am I doing the wrong thing?"

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

00:22:40 Jesse Host

"Maybe I've made a mistake."

I mean, I went onto YouTube and watched the trailer for the show the other day.

00:22:48 Kamau Guest

Yuh-oh.

00:22:49 Jesse Host

There's almost—you know, there's very few comments. It's on—it's on the Sundance channel.

*[Kamau affirms.]*

Not the television Sundance channel, but the channel of the Sundance Institute. There's only a couple of comments on there. And... *[sighs]* you know, maybe I knew better, but like the first top-level comment with the most votes says, "I hope Kamau will have the courage to explore all or at least most of the issues around Cosby. It would be sad if he just parades women and repeats the same, old, tired narrative of rape. It would be disappointing if it's another piece that ignores some of the issues around lack of evidence, false memory, borderline women relationship, Cosby's own personality disorders if any, consent, hedonistic party culture." Then it—and it goes on and on and on from there.

*[Kamau chuckles.]*

And then the first—the reply to that is—from another user is, "Well, this docuseries itself isn't interested in hearing Bill Cosby's side of the story. This is more than likely a hit-piece." Eye-roll emoji.



[Kamau laughs.]

00:24:40	Kamau	Guest	<p>And it could be, if one were not you or me having looked at it—or one were you before you made this—easy to assume that this was a settled matter in people’s minds and opinions, because at this point, 60-ish women have accused Bill Cosby of rape and sexual assault. At what point did you have to engage with the fact that it wasn’t a settled matter in the minds of many, many people? Well, I mean I knew from watching <i>Surviving R. Kelly</i>, Dream Hampton’s incredible series, that these things aren’t ever settled matters for some people. So, I—and I—you know, I mean, and that—I don’t know what will happen with me going forward or what will happen with the film, but like—you know, they had death threats and they had to like shut screenings down, I believe, because of people who were that fervent in their defense of R. Kelly. So, I knew—I knew there’s a—there is a percentage of people, a percentage of Black folks, who—as I said, I understand where it comes from—want to protect Black men at all costs.</p>
			<p>So, that’s—I sort of knew that. I don’t know how many people it is. I don’t know what the percentage is. I think it—I think the Bill Cosby percentage is probably different than the R. Kelly percentage, but I certainly understood that. I think I thought like—you know, and this is where I—I think I thought, “Well, once I get all these—if I get a chorus of these famous people to talk about it, it will help drown out some of those—some of those voices.” Well, once we didn’t get those people, it’s like, “Okay, now I—now it’s just about how good this thing is.” [Laughs.] Like, it’s not about—it’s not gonna—it’s not gonna win because a famous person’s sitting in a chair. It’s gonna win—it’s gonna—it’s gonna be effective—and when I say “win”, I don’t mean win an award. I mean, it’s not gonna make it’s point unless by famous people. It’s gonna make it’s point by the argument it makes and how it makes it.</p>
			<p>So—and it was also very clear that like some people are going to hate it and never watch it. And I just have to be prepared for the fact that like some people are gonna—are gonna say all sorts of things about it and never watch it. And that’s sort of something you just have to sort of like—and I’ve known that from <i>United Shades</i>. Like, you know, it’s just like—[stammering] the fact that I’m a Black man married to a White woman, that’s already enough for some people to go, “Nothing this guy does is good.”</p>
00:26:19	Jesse	Host	<p>Before you made this film, had you ever asked a woman directly about an experience of sexual assault?</p>
00:26:26	Kamau	Guest	<p>I—my mom has told me about a time that she was sexually assaulted. My—I talked to my wife about experiences she’s had around—you know—men and their inappropriate behavior. Through the work of <i>United Shades</i>, I’ve had these conversations before, talking about—you know, sexual assault through many different issues. So, I’ve had these conversations before, but I wouldn’t—so, I maybe have had more than most, but that doesn’t mean I’ve had enough of them. And it doesn’t—and I certainly—I haven’t had the kind of long tail conversation I had with the women who sat down for the interviews for this project.</p>
00:27:01	Jesse	Host	<p>These women are extraordinarily brave to share these stories with you. Were you scared to talk to them about these things that are so</p>

hard to talk about and were you scared to have the responsibility of representing them?

00:27:14 Kamau Guest I mean, yeah. The short answer is yes. *[Chuckles.]* Uh. The first person—the first—we had done a bunch of interviews and then the first survivor we talked to was Victoria Valentino, who was in the first episode. And I remember we were—all the crew, we had like a talk about how to handle this, how to deal with her. We had a lot of talks about like—you know, even about like how to address her, how to give her space. And then she walked in just like full of light and love and was just like happy to be there and like really like very—very friendly and effusive in a way that none of us were expecting. And so, the conversation really was a much easier conversation than I expected, even when we got into the part about the sexual assault.

And as we show in the first episode, the most harrowing part of the conversation is her talking about her son drowning. And none of us knew that story. We just sort of knew we were talking to her as a Cosby survivor. But then it became clear like the most effective way to tell this story is to try to hear as much of this woman’s story outside of her experience with Bill Cosby as possible.

00:28:13 Jesse Host She had lost her son—her six-year-old son in a drowning accident just a few weeks before she met Bill Cosby and was like actively in mourning at the time that—um.

*[Kamau confirms.]*

—the evens she described took place.

00:28:28 Kamau Guest And that’s another thing that’s like why would you lie about this? Like what is the—like, you know, again—why would you—why would she lie about this? What is the—where does the—what is the gain? Where does that put you?

00:28:40 Jesse Host What did you not expect to hear from anyone that you—that you heard?

00:28:45 Kamau Guest So, all the survivors are certainly individuals and while they are—while they are bound together by Bill Cosby, they are all very—you know, some of them you can—they’re all handling this in different ways. I talked to Lise-Lotte Lubin and—I’m now realizing—I’m like, “Is her name Loo-bin?” Anyway. We talked to a woman named Lise-Lotte, who met Cosby through her being a model in Vegas. She, even though she was drugged and doesn’t remember what happened and woke up at home and can’t remember anything, and then later realized, “Oh, I was—I was sexually assaulted.” She still can talk about Cosby and the good things he did. And does it—and seems like, “This is a thing that happened to me, but it does not define me.”

But she has also—her and her husband have become activists to turn over the statute of limitation laws around the country around rape. In some states, they were—I think they were only four years. You had four—a victim had—a survivor had four years to report. And they have worked hard to expand the statute of limitation laws and get some of them repealed completely. And so, to me, the idea that one, you could still hold some—she appears in this series before you hear her story—you can still hold some joy for the good things you got from Bill Cosby. You can still talk about the

experience and then you can also become an activist for other—for other survivors, is like—I just was like—it was very clear to me that like we need to include this activism.

00:30:16 Jesse Host 'Cause again, this is not about Bill Cosby for many of these women. It's about making—creating a safer world. You had to decide in apportioning the—you know—four-ish hours of time that you have in the series, how to talk about Bill Cosby being good at entertainment, great at entertainment, and being an important figure and trailblazing figure specifically in the history of African Americans in entertainment. Not just because it was important to the story of Bill Cosby, the person about whom the film—who is sort of the subject of the film. Sort of. But also, because that context is so essential to the way that we understood Cosby and understood the things—the horrible things that he did.

00:31:29 Kamau Guest Who did you talk to about how to balance those things? And how did you—you know, what lodestar did you find about to talk about good things Bill Cosby did? I mean, for me, a lot of this starts as an idea that sort of emerges in my head when, after these women started to come forward—I don't know what number we were at, but when it was clear that like a dam had been broken and there was just all these women coming forward—every day, it felt like there were more women coming forward to say they had been assaulted or raped by Bill Cosby. In that, a story came out that said that a documentary filmmaker—a Black woman—was working on—named Noni Robinson—was working on a documentary about the work that Bill Cosby had done to integrate the stunt industry for Black performers.

Before *I Spy*, if a Black actor needed a stunt performer, they would take a White stunt man and literally paint him black, 'cause we're talking about the days of like—you know, black and white television, but also in color television. Not paint him brown. They wouldn't match the Black man's skin tone. They would—they would call painting down. And Bill Cosby saw this on *I Spy* about to happen, and he said, "I—" And from all accounts, said, "I refuse to be on this show unless you find a Black stunt performer for my stunts. I won't be on the show."

And this is like, he's a young comedian. It's his big shot. The first season of the show. And he says, "I won't—you have to go find a Black stunt performer." And the stunt industry points to that moment for being when things changed. Not like—and there—you know, there may have been other moments, but people say that was the moment that things shifted. And I remember reading that story in *Hollywood Reporter* about how they had stopped—shut down production on the documentary and they were gonna remove—they had gotten an interview of Bill Cosby for the doc, but they were gonna remove it from the film and try to figure out what was gonna happen next.

But then I was like, "Well, how do you tell the story of the stunt industry and Black stunt performers without that part of it?" And so, I couldn't help but go, "There's something in this story that is worthy, but I don't know that you can tell this story without telling the

			<p>story of the other things—without telling the stories of the assaults.” So, that was the thing that made me go, “There’s gotta be a way to tell this whole thing.” And so, when I think about projects that I looked at that I felt like had done a version of that—and I’m not comparing myself to this, but like Ezra Edelman’s <i>O.J. Simpson: Made in America</i> managed to in one moment get you to go, “Oh my god, O.J. Simpson is not a good person.” And in the next moment go, “He <u>was</u> really good at football.”</p>
00:33:49	Kamau	Guest	<p>And it’s sort of—and because of the way that doc was put together, you were able to, in some sense, enjoy the football highlights while also then going, “He also killed—he—I believe he killed Ron Goldman and Nicole Brown Simpson.” And because of the way it was put together, I just always remembered like that’s how you’d have to do it if you’re gonna tell Bill Cosby’s story. You’d have to be able to put these things in one basket together. And then, ultimately, it becomes like—I have to say that the crew of people I worked with, the producers, the editors, associate editors, <i>[chuckling]</i> like the archival producer—it became an all-hands-on-deck situation where we would watch cuts and it would be like, “Is that too far? Is that too much? Do we need to figure this out?” Like and so it was like a constant like sort of like tweaking the mix.</p>
00:34:39	Jesse	Host	<p>And you know, I still am like—I don’t know if—we will find out if we got it right once it hits—once it gets to the general public.</p>
00:34:48	Promo	Clip	<p>We’ll finish up my interview with W. Kamau Bell after a quick break. Stay with us. It’s <i>Bullseye</i>, from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.</p> <p><b>Music:</b> Bright, cheerful music.</p>
			<p><b>Ellen Weatherford:</b> Hey, there! I’m Ellen Weatherford.</p>
			<p><b>Christian Weatherford:</b> And I’m Christian Weatherford.</p>
			<p><b>Ellen:</b> And we’ve got big feelings about animals that we just gotta share.</p>
			<p><b>Christian:</b> On <i>Just the Zoo of Us</i>, your new favorite animal review podcast, we’re here to critically evaluate how each animal excels and how it doesn’t, rating them out of 10 on their effectiveness, ingenuity, and aesthetics.</p>
			<p><b>Ellen:</b> Guest experts give you their takes informed by actual, real-life experiences studying and working with very cool animals, like sharks, cheetahs, and sea turtles.</p>
			<p><b>Christian:</b> It’s a fieldtrip to the zoo for your ears.</p>
			<p><b>Ellen:</b> So, if you or your kids have ever wondered if a pigeon can count, why sloths move so slow, or how a spider sees the world, find out with us every Wednesday on <i>Just the Zoo of Us</i>, which can now be found in its natural habitat, on <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a>.</p>
			<p><b>Christian:</b> Listen and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.</p>
00:35:40	Music	Transition	<p><i>[Music ends, punctuated with an undulating wild animal call.]</i> Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.</p>

00:35:45	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, W. Kamau Bell, hosts <i>The United Shades of America</i> on CNN, for which he's won several Emmys. He directed a new docuseries called <i>We Need to Talk About Cosby</i> .
			There's a really intense scene that is raw footage of a journalist in 2014 at a junket for Bill and Camille Cosby having an exhibition of African American art from their personal collection. And this is after Hannibal's bit has gone viral. This is after there are many allegations against Cosby, though not as many as there have been since. What turned my stomach about this clip is Cosby says he's not gonna talk about it. He's asked about it. He's asked about the allegations. He says he's not gonna talk about it. Then, at the end of the interview, he looks at the journalist and says, "I want your assurance that you're not going to run that."
00:36:51	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:36:52	Clip	Clip	<b>Bill Cosby:</b> Now, can I get something from you?
			<b>Reporter:</b> What's that?
			<b>Bill:</b> That none of that will be shown.
			<b>Reporter:</b> I... [ <i>sighs</i> ] I can't promise that, myself. But you didn't say anything—
			<b>Bill:</b> I know I didn't say anything. But I'm asking your integrity that since I didn't wanna say anything, but I did answer you—in terms of I don't wanna say anything, of what value will it have—
			<b>Reporter:</b> I don't think it will—
			<i>[Someone else speaks off microphone.]</i>
			<b>Bill:</b> Ma'am? What'd you say?
			<b>Reporter:</b> Sorry?
			<b>Bill:</b> What did you say?
			<b>Speaker:</b> I don't think it has any value, either.
			<b>Bill:</b> Yeah. And I would appreciate it if it was skuttled.
			<b>Reporter:</b> I hear you. I—I will tell that to my editors and—and... and I think that they will understand.
			<b>Bill:</b> Well, I think if you wanna consider yourself to be serious, that it will not appear anywhere.
00:37:48	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:37:50	Jesse	Host	It reminded me of the intensity of Cosby's defenses of himself, which I think are relatively unusual in these circumstances. I think in these circumstances, typically people leave the defense to others and withdraw.

[Kamau agrees.]

00:38:25 Kamau Guest What was it like for you—somebody who was making a film about Cosby—to watch directly what happened when he was directly engaged about this?  
Well, it's funny, 'cause that comes out of a similar interview that I heard on NPR—I believe it was Scott Simon—about the same press junket, on *Morning Edition*, where he asks Bill and Camille about the art. And at the end, it's the same exact thing where you could tell that like either Scott Simon or his editor was like, "You have to ask."

[Jesse affirms.]

00:38:55 Jesse Host And at this point, it was after Hannibal's bit had come up, so the questions were all about the comedian who did the joke, not about women who he had assaulted.  
Let me play Scott.

[Kamau agrees.]

00:39:18 Sound Effect Transition I say Scott by first name like I've met him more than one time in my life. The one time I did meet him, he was very nice to me, and I was 19 years old, so he didn't have to be. But this is Scott Simon, and this is audio that was played on NPR. This isn't—you know—cut from the interview. This is—this is what was heard on the air.  
Music swells and fades.

00:39:19 Clip Clip **Scott Simon:** This, uh—this question gives me no pleasure, Mr. Cosby, but there have been, uh, serious allegations raised about you in recent days. [Beat.] You're shaking your head "no". Uh. I'm in the news business; I have to ask the question. Do you—do you have any response to those charges? [Beat.] Shaking your head "no". Uh. There are people who love you who might like to hear from you about this. I want to give you the chance. [Beat.] Alright. Um. Camille and Bill Cosby, they have lent 62 pieces from their collection of African and African American artists to create an exhibit called *Conversations: African and African American Artworks in Dialogue*. It's now on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art through early 2016. Thank you both for joining us.

00:40:16 Sound Effect Transition **Camille Cosby:** Thank you! Thank you.  
Music swells and fades.

00:40:17 Jesse Host Now, I think you could—a journalist could quibble with the tone of Scott Simon's questions there, but I think it's very much to his credit that he—I think that tone was in the hopes of getting an actual response and it's very much to his credit and his producer's credit that they—that they ran that as it was.

00:40:37 Kamau Guest Yeah, I mean, that's actually the interview that I—that I remember hearing at the time and just being blown away by. 'Cause you can hear so many things in there. It's—I mean, in that silence. And I really—I've always appreciated Scott Simon saying, "You're shaking your head 'no'," because he knows he's on the radio.  
[Chuckles.] Like, he's like—and I really appreciate the fact that he's

			like, “My—there’s nobody watching this, so I have to—I have to narrate this for them.”
00:40:59	Jesse	Host	And because Cosby knows he’s on the radio.
00:41:02	Kamau	Guest	Yes. And Cosby knows he’s on the radio. But even Scott Simon saying, “You’re shaking your head ‘no,’” means that basically it’s Cosby’s answer. It’s like it really is like—it’s a delicate dance that Scott’s doing there. And again, I feel the same way. I feel—I give those journalists credit for asking. Like, ‘cause they could’ve just— ‘cause it’s also—like if you hear the whole interview, it’s after a whole interview of them talking about how lovely the art is. So, it’s not an easy thing at the end of an interview to be like, “Thanks! That was so great. One more question that you absolutely don’t wanna hear.”
			And so—and then they—and then they wrap it up with the art. Which again, it’s just like—and you hear Camille say, “Thank you!” Like, it’s just sort of like—it’s a really surreal moment and I think the thing to me that’s stuck with me about that is that like embedded in there is Bill Cosby’s power, that you can hear the way that Scott Simon’s addressing him, he’s really giving Bill Cosby as much sort of like gentle touch as possible, because he—because I don’t know how old Scott Simon is, but in some sense it’s like you’re sitting with somebody who’s your senior, who’s a senior member of showbusiness, who you also feel lucky sat down for the interview, and so you’re excited to be there. And in this moment, you go—you just wanna talk about, “Man, I love <i>The Cosby Show</i> ,” and, “Man, you’re doing such good work. But I have to ask this question.”
			So, that interview particularly has always stuck with me. And so, whenever we talked about putting this—whenever we talked about putting this together, I was always sure that that kind of moment had to be in the film. And the one we had that ended up in the film goes on even longer, ‘cause you see Bill Cosby like actually like talking to the journalist and talking to the other person in the room who’s with the journalist and talking to his own person about, “You have to call his—” Basically saying you have to call his boss.
00:42:41	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:42:42	Clip	Clip	<b>Bill:</b> And I think you need to get on the phone with his person. <b>Speaker:</b> I will, yeah. <b>Bill:</b> <u>Immediately.</u>
00:42:49	Sound Effect	Transition	<b>Speaker:</b> Okay. Music swells and fades.
00:42:50	Kamau	Guest	And then we have Annette John-Hall, who’s a Philly reporter, talk about how that kind of thing was pretty usual for Cosby, to like call and threaten people’s jobs and call the media. Marc Lamont Hill talks about how his boss at Temple got called because Bill Cosby wasn’t happy with an article he wrote. And that’s one of those things that like your average person I don’t think understands—knows that. So, to me, that’s something that felt like this is new information to most of us.
00:43:12	Jesse	Host	Did you invite Bill Cosby to be interviewed for the film?

00:43:15 Kamau Guest No, we did not. I mean, as I said—first of all, when we started he was in prison. And it was very—we talked about it, and I mean certainly it seems like if you’re gonna do something and get buzz, that would be a good way to get buzz. But it just became very clear to me—especially once we got the survivors involved—this is not really—this is about how do we deal with all this. It’s not about sitting Bill Cosby in a chair and having him deny it again. It’s about how do those of us who believe these survivors and how do those of us who feel connected to Bill Cosby and feel inspired by Bill Cosby and still know that inside of us somewhere we connect to Bill Cosby’s work—how do we deal with it? And how do we actively then engage in a way to create a safer world?

Like, so, for me—like, it [*sighs*]*—it just never was about like the splashy interview with Bill Cosby. And to be quite honest, he can get the cameras whenever he wants to. I don’t think he needs us. Whereas these survivors and these conversations are not in the same position.*

00:44:18 Jesse Host As we talk about this now, the series hasn’t started being seen by the public. [*Beat.*] Are you comfortable with where you sit and, you know, what you know you’re gonna catch?

00:44:39 Kamau Guest No. [*Beat. Kamau laughs.*] I laugh ‘cause it’s like, you know, all day long it’s basically the conversation I have with my wife. It’s the conversation I have with the people I work with. It’s the last thing I think about as I go to bed. It’s the first thing I think about in the morning. I’m having dreams about it. Like, you know. I—you know. And I don’t think I’m gonna deal with the kind of pushback that Dream Hampton got for *Surviving R. Kelly*, ‘cause I think there’s an embedded way in which women get more attacks because they’re women.

I like that people feel like the work I do is important, and it also is somehow nourishing. And it also is exposing who the bad people are. And I know some of those people who see me in the world and like to see me are gonna feel differently because they don’t see Bill Cosby the way I see Bill Cosby. So—and I also know that I can’t recognize those people from across the street. So, you know. I sort of had this sense of like feeling like this is going to shift things for me and not necessarily in a way that is like—it’s not necessarily gonna make me more popular. [*Laughs.*] And so, I don’t—I don’t know—I don’t know what the net—there’s gonna be a math equation at some point. You know. I—I—you know.

Because of COVID, I haven’t really done a lot of standup. I haven’t done—I haven’t done any standup in COVID. And also, it was after our third daughter was born. I sort of slowed down ‘cause I wanted to be—I was already traveling a lot. And I sort of feel like in some sense, maybe this is—maybe I’ve written—maybe this film retires me from standup comedy. I don’t know. There’s some sort of math in my head that like [*laughing*] I don’t know how you standup in front of people after this film and just go, “Man. Airports. Huh. That food on the planes. That’s weird.”

[*Jesse laughs.*]

“It’s not good.”



00:46:11	Jesse	Host	Well, Kamau, I'm grateful to you for taking all this time to be on <i>Bullseye</i> . It's always nice to get to talk to you. I hope I'll get to see you in person sometime soon.
00:46:18	Kamau	Guest	It is really great, through the craziness of this business, to have people that you were with back in the day who are also still in this business and still doing good things.
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
00:46:29	Jesse	Host	So, I'm always happy to talk to you. Well, I'm—it's a—it's really good work that you've done and I'm proud to know you.
00:46:33	Kamau	Guest	Same here, sir. Thank you for—thank you for having me.
00:46:36	Music	Transition	Thoughtful piano.
00:46:39	Jesse	Host	W. Kamau Bell. His new documentary series is called <i>We Need to Talk About Cosby</i> . It premieres this Sunday, January 30 <sup>th</sup> , on Showtime.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:46:51	Music	Transition	Upbeat, fun synth with soft vocalizations.
00:46:54	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created out of the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I was lucky enough to get a visit from the head honcho over there at York Lock & Key. He was nice enough to rebuild the barrel lock on my treasure cabinet. He said he needed to, uh, machine a new... hook? Barb, maybe? He couldn't get parts for the lock, and he couldn't get a one-to-one replacement. Anyway. The best part was at the end he said, "Aw, thanks for having me do this. It was really fun." He's a nice guy.
			The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producer is Jesus Ambrosio. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation" recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us. I know you've probably heard me say that 1000 times, but man, The Go! Team are so great. Go check out their records.
			You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all of our interviews in all those places. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:48:19	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.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>