

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Tre’ve ll and Jarrett speak, then fades out.
00:00:19	Tre’ve ll Anderson	Host	Coming to you from our homes, it’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Tre’ve ll Anderson.
00:00:24	Jarrett Hill	Host	And I’m Jarrett Hill. We are co-hosts of a Maximum Fun show called <i>FANTI</i> .
00:00:29	Tre’ve ll	Host	Yes! That is a show. And it’s spelled, I love to say, F-A-N-T-I. It’s a show all about, kind of, those problematic faves. We love to have those complex and complicated conversations about the grey areas in our lives. But today, on <i>Bullseye</i> , Jarrett, you’re interviewing Norm Lewis. How was that?
00:00:47	Jarrett	Host	He was great! He’s an actor, a Broadway veteran, and he was nominated for a Tony for playing Porgy in <i>Porgy and Bess</i> . He was also the first Black man to play the role, on Broadway, of Phantom—in <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> . And now, he’s doing some of everything.
00:01:01	Tre’ve ll	Host	Yeah! I think I first kind of figured out who he was through <i>Scandal</i> —he played Senator Edison Davis, who Kerry Washington’s character was dating.
00:01:11	Jarrett	Host	Absolutely. And now he is in Spike Lee’s brand-new movie, <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> , which is on Netflix. It’s a movie about four Black Vietnam war veterans, and they’re going back to Vietnam. It’s kind of a buddy movie and it gets really complicated. It really touches on a lot of different themes: death and racism, trauma and bunch of gold bars that are buried in the jungle. Let’s start with a clip about the gold.
00:01:42	Sound Effect	Transition	The four friends are looking for a pile of gold they left behind during the war. In this scene, they’re talking about what they should do with it. Norm plays Eddie, and he’s the first voice you’ll hear. Music swells and fades.
00:01:44	Clip	Clip	<i>[The sounds of birds, bugs, and other small animals rustling about the jungle.]</i>

Eddie (*Da 5 Bloods*): That gold should go towards Black liberation.

Paul: *[Scoffs.]* Yeah. Our Black liberation. You do yourself.

Eddie: I’m talking about Black reparations, man!

Melvin: Well, I got mine’s.

Eddie: What about our people?

Melvin: What about my people? You do what you want with your share, and we’ll each decide for ourselves.

Otis: That’s what Norman said, now.

Eddie: Now, see! See! Otis knows. Norman want that gold to go towards the cause!

Paul: Yeah, that's easy for you to say that, Eddie. You're rich. Money don't mean *[censored]* to you.

Eddie: I am not rich.

Paul: *[Laughs.]* Yeah, right. Whatever.

Eddie: *[Angrily.]* I'm not rich!

Paul: *[Chuckling.]* Okay.

Eddie: I'm broke, man!

Paul: How the *[censored]* are you broke, Eddie?

Eddie: I... I lost it all.
Music swells and fades.

00:02:25 Sound Transition
 Effect

00:02:26 Jarrett Host Norm Lewis, welcome to *Bullseye*.
00:02:28 Norm Guest Thank you! Thank you for having me.

00:02:30 Jarrett Host So, we just heard this clip of you playing Eddie, and before I kind of jump into what this film is about and this character, I kind of wanna know—like—how did this role come to you? How did this—how did this begin for you, being a part of *Da 5 Bloods*?

00:02:47 Norm Guest It was seriously happenstance. I—Spike Lee and I know each other from being at certain events, and he's come to see certain shows that I've been in, on Broadway, things like that. And we built a relationship just based on that. Then I got a chance to do *She's Gotta Have It*—his TV show, on Netflix. And from that, we just stayed in touch. And one night he called me—it was around—I think around nine o'clock. But he called me. He said, "What are you doing?"

And I said, "Nothing!"

He's like, "Okay, I'm sending you a script. I want you to read it and tell me what you think about it." Click.

[They laugh.]

So, I'm like, "Oh—o-oh, okay." And I'm looking at the phone like, "Jesus Christ. Spike Lee just called me and hung up on me."

[Jarrett laughs.]

So, I read it. The next morning, he calls me. He said, "What do you think?"

And I said, "Oh my god, it's fantastic. It's—you know, it's amazing."

He said, "Okay, I want you to meet me for dinner."

Now, I—again, I’m not—knowing what this is all about, I’m thinking, “Spike Lee wants my opinion on a script that he wrote. So, o-okay! Sure! I’ll go along. I’ll play along.” And we—I go meet him, in Brooklyn, for dinner. We start talking about the script again. We start talking about, like, the characters.

And he said, “I want you to play Eddie.”

And I’m—you know, again, I’m thinking that might be why he called me out there but not for sure. And I’m jumping up and down inside my head like a little schoolboy. But then, you know, out—on the outward appearance, I’m thinking, “Wow, that’s cool. Thanks, Spike Lee. Thanks, dude.” *[Laughs.]*
Very cool! That’s amazing.

00:04:18 Jarrett Host

[Norm agrees.]

So, talk to us about Eddie and the context of this film—*Da 5 Bloods*. Obviously, we see these men—these Vietnam war veterans going back to Vietnam to commemorate their time there, to pick up a few pieces of gold, maybe, but also to get the remains of their friend.

[Norm chuckles.]

00:04:43 Norm Guest

Or their leader, who had died. Talk to me about Eddie and this cast. Eddie was one of those guys that, you know—‘cause they were all young, when they got there. They were around 17, 18, 19 years old. And so, they bonded. And so, they had been on so many different tours together—and that’s why these five were such a special unit. And that’s why we were sent on this special mission. So, they were like brothers. They really were—it was just an amazing connection there. And listening to Norman, in the show—in the movie—he got a lot about history, about Black history, things that he had never even heard of. So, he absorbed all of that. But after the war, when he got back home, he wanted to become successful and he fell into this world of the business world and having a used car—you know, being a used car salesman and having many different lots and things like that. But he also got caught up in that lifestyle and had twoooo—I think in the movie it said two or three wives. But was just a womanizer and just had a lot of fun, probably did a lot of drugs, things like that. But then he lost it all.

Some of it based on him just losing it, just partying so much, but also because he had these wives and had to pay alimony and things like that. But I think he went back into that little boy or that young man that he was when he first went over to Vietnam and started listening to what Norman was talking about and realized that success is not necessarily having money and all of this stuff, but success is helping others and being of service. And the idea of him being able to get this gold and take it back was gonna be his penance, if you will, to repay the world in a—in a—in a way. I’m curious about the preparation for this role. What do you do to find this character, to find this space? How do you get ready for that?

00:06:26 Jarrett Host

00:06:37	Norm	Guest	Well, you know, besides doing the research—we had a lot of dramaturgs. We had books, we had videos that were specifically about Black soldiers in Vietnam. And one of them is called <i>Bloods</i> , which this movie is based on, and it's written by different—it's different stories of the soldiers. They're little vignettes. So, we looked—read that. There's footage of these soldier who are doing—you remember the dap? Did you see the dap, in the movie? Where we were all dapping on each other?
00:07:05	Jarrett	Host	Yeah, early on. When you first get there.
00:07:08	Norm	Guest	Right. And then there's also footage within that where we were showing what the dap—how it originated. And so, the dap actually means “dignity and pride”. So, that was something—that was a communication that the Black soldiers put together, so they knew which unit they belonged to or which, you know, platoon they belonged to. And there were different daps for different platoons. So, we had to learn all of that. There was like a bootcamp, far as knowledge, you know, book learning. And also, physically. So, we had to make sure we were in shape. We had to—we had people that were onset to teach us how to hold guns and load guns and shoot guns and then some of the terminology and some of the—almost, like, choreography of what you had to do while you were in the field. Because you couldn't speak, while you were in the field. So, they would show us, like, hand signals and things like that.
			So, we—it took us about two or three weeks to kind of get that within us. And they kept on us, because, you know, you just never knew when Spike was gonna ask you, “Hey, give me some dap.” And <i>[chuckling]</i> he would want it in a certain scene.
			<i>[Jarrett chuckles.]</i>
			And, you know, you had to know which dap. We learned about five or six different daps. And they were authentic. Another interesting... tidbit about this whole thing was this was the first war that it wasn't a segregated army. There wasn't a Black army and there wasn't a White army. This was just one army. Now, they segregated themselves once they got there. Some people cross-pollinated, but this was not a Black and White army. And it was also the first war that was ever televised, as well. So, you would see a lot of the soldiers come home—whether alive or dead.
00:08:45	Jarrett	Host	I was watching this and thinking that I would imagine that you've gotten a lot of feedback from Black veterans who were probably excited to see this movie. But I'm curious, what kind of feedback have you gotten from veterans and Black veterans, specifically?
00:09:00	Norm	Guest	Well, <i>[clears throat]</i> that's an interesting question. We—because of COVID, we haven't really had a chance to go out into the field and do those kinds of—those kinds of talks. But I will say, before COVID hit, this film was seen, specially, for Black veterans. And I think there were three showings of this, and they—the results were varied. It's—a lot of people couldn't watch the whole thing. Some people had to walk out and then come back in, because it brought back so many memories. You know, these guys really did suffer from PTSD, also agent orange, and also the abuse that they got for being Black over in Vietnam—not from the Vietnamese, but from a lot of the White soldiers.

			<p>The dap, let me go back to the dap for a second—a lot of officers, White officers, did not like the fact that these guys would communicate that way and they would threaten them, sometimes, if they did get—they did see them do it again, they would get thrown in jail, what they called the brig. So, some people were, you know, mistreated. So, they were fighting many different wars other than just the Vietnamese.</p>
00:10:08	Jarrett	Host	<p>So, in <i>Da 5 Bloods</i>, there's this scene where you all are on a boat and you're approached by this man that is trying to sell Delroy Lindo's character a chicken.</p>
00:10:17	Sound Effect	Transition	<p><i>[Norm affirms.]</i> Music swells and fades.</p>
00:10:18	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Sounds of a crowd speaking and chickens bawking.]</i></p>
			<p>Paul: Okay, due respect: no. Không, không. No. Okay, all due respect, no. Vinh, talk to your—talk to this man. Come on, no means no in any <i>[censored]</i> language, right? Come on, man. Come talk to him, man.</p>
			<p>Speaker: <i>[In Vietnamese.]</i> Here, this one is fat.</p>
			<p>Paul: No! Không! Không! Vinh, come talk to him! <i>[Angrily.]</i> NO, man! Back up! Okay, just back up. Back up. Please.</p>
			<p>Vinh: <i>[In Vietnamese.]</i> He won't eat it.</p>
00:10:45	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Paul: Shut the <i>[censored]</i> up. Don't wanna hear that— Music swells and fades.</p>
00:10:46	Jarrett	Host	<p>And it really becomes a conversation about PTSD and your character is trying to—Eddie is really trying to, you know, control the situation, calm it down, bring it down. Can you talk about that specific scene? 'Cause it definitely is one of the highlights in the film where you—it really makes you ask questions and think.</p>
00:11:05	Norm	Guest	<p>Man, yeah. That one was—that was a really interesting one, because we were going down this—what was, like, the market in Vietnam, and you know, you saw—they actually, that was a live snake that they chopped and so <i>[laughing]</i>—you know—</p>
00:11:20	Jarrett	Host	<p><i>[Quietly.]</i> Oh my god.</p>
00:11:21	Norm	Guest	<p>We saw all this stuff <i>[chuckling]</i>—we saw all this stuff in this authentic, Asian culture. You know. And it was interesting for us, as actors, because that was the first time we had seen that, live! But what was—what was supposed to be... not a calm scene, but it was supposed to be Delroy getting mad at the guy and then just storming off to the other side of the—of the boat—escalated into this guy saying, "You killed my mother."</p>
			<p>And Spike kept throwing in—he said, "Yeah! Tell him, 'You killed my mother'. Say that! Say that!" You know, things like that. So, those were the improved things that Spike would see and go, "Okay, we need to add more to this." And yeah, it definitely highlighted Delroy's PTSD and just how real those things are to people and people not being able to—especially if you don't have therapy or anything—not being able to deal with it. And that was kind of our</p>

first—we knew that he had kind of, you know—in the—throughout the beginning of the film, and stuff, we knew that he was kind of on edge, but that was kind of a turning point for all of us, that we saw how deep it would go. And then his son would come in—Jonathan Majors—would throw in his line saying this has happened to him several times.

And so, this was a moment for us to kind of—kind of bond again and bring him back. And that’s when you saw us put our fists in the middle and say, “Bloods, Bloods, Bloods.” And then he said, “Norm,” at the end. In fact, he knew that in as an improv, because he wanted to make sure that we were there—to show the audience that we were there on that one mission to go get Norm.

00:12:54 Jarrett Host

Moving from talking about being a Black, you know, veteran in this film, I wanna talk to you about being a Black veteran actor.

[Norm chuckles.]

00:13:05 Norm Guest
00:13:07 Jarrett Host

I feel like it’s an interesting time to be an actor right now. You’re calling me old! You just called me old!
I—see, I did not do that, Norm.

[Norm laughs.]

Don’t do that to me. Don’t do that to me. *[Laughs.]* But, I mean, if you—if you—if you think about veteran Broadway actors, like, there’s no way that we can’t include your name in, like, the iconic actors that are among the Broadway stage. And Broadway’s in a really difficult time, right now.

[Norm agrees.]

00:13:38 Norm Guest

There are some people who have no idea when Broadway’s coming back, right? We know that it’s been “postponed”—air quotes—until 2021, but talk to me about being an actor, right now. What is it like, in the time of COVID, with the uncertainty?

That’s an interesting question. And the difficulty in answering that is that I think a lot of people are finding themselves, within this. They are doing a lot of soul searching. They’re doing, you know, all kinds of stuff. What I know that some people are doing, is they’re being very creative by doing concerts at home or singing at home or finding some space that they can dance and keep practicing their dancing. Some people are Zooming a lot and doing plays on Zoom. Some people are learning how to be filmograph—uh, filmograph—I can’t even say the word. But they’re learning how to do film.

[They chuckle.]

And just kind of developing new skills. And then there’s some people who are saying, “You know what? This is just too much for me. I’m gonna give up my apartment, I’m gonna leave New York or LA and go back home and be with my family and try to figure out what I can do next.” Because we just don’t know what’s gonna happen. It’s a new, interesting world. I know that... the theatre—the big-wigs are trying to think of, “Maybe there should be a shield up against the stage. Or, like—you know, in the audience, so—that will

separate the aeration of coming into the audience, somehow.” I don’t know. We’re—everybody’s trying to think of new ways to do this kind of thing, and... they’re just trying to make it, man.

I—it’s crazy. I’m doing a concert this coming week online, and either that’s—there’s a new platform that I can sing on, so I’m gonna be making some money that way. But, you know, I’m also starting a new business, working with my sister creating a real estate company where we buy and sell homes. So, everybody’s just trying to figure things out right now.

00:15:21 Jarrett Host

You’re—sounds like you’re diversifying yourself and trying to figure out other ways to make this happen, ‘cause we don’t know how long this is gonna be.

00:15:28 Norm Guest

Yeah, we don’t. We don’t. And the thing about it—I’ve always been an entrepreneur, and I’ve always, you know, been into certain things, even while I was acting. I came into this business from the business world. I worked a 9-to-5 for about five years, working in advertising for a newspaper. And I’ve always had that kind of, like, “Okay, I need to keep, you know, having multiple streams of income.” And what I like to do is actually teach that to some actors, as well. Because we are a business. We are entrepreneurs.

00:15:57 Jarrett Host

Well, you didn’t realize this, but you were giving me a perfect setup to what I wanted to ask you next. You said that you came from the business world and you kind of, like, came into acting. And if I understand correctly, you were entering contests and then ended up on a cruise ship. How did that get started? Like, can you kind of walk us through how you began, in that—in this world? Yeah.

00:16:18 Norm Guest

Yeah. I’ll try to make it brief, because—I’ll start back at the beginning. So, I sang in church. My grandfather was a preacher, my dad was the chairman of the deacon board, so I lived in church. And the rite of passage was to follow your friends. And so, I said, “Okay, I’ll join the choir. That’s what everybody else did.” We weren’t known for being, like, the baddest choir in the land, but we made a joyful noise—no matter if it was joyful to anybody else.

[Jarrett chuckles.]

And—but I sang, and no one ever said to me that I had a nice voice. So, I just sang. That was just something I—it was like a duty. Uh, did that for years. Did that for years. I got into high school, and in my junior year—halfway through my junior year—I was looking at my credits and I needed to have another elective. And so, I knew that—I went to my counselor and my counselor had just automatically put me in home economics. And I’m like—there’s nothing wrong with cooking or sewing, I just didn’t wanna do it at that time. And so, I figured, “Let me go to the choir. Because that seemed like an easy thing to do. “I already sing in choir, at church. So, let’s see if this will work.”

And I got in and that’s when I found my love of diverse music. I started singing in different languages and Broadway music and things like that. And from that, it just kept going. And even in college, majoring in business, I still sang in the choir—‘cause I just loved doing it. I didn’t quite—I didn’t finish school. I didn’t finish college, per se. But I got—I left the school because I got a job in

advertising, and they were gonna send me back to school. ‘Cause I was already working for the newspaper.

[Jarrett affirms.]

And they were gonna send me back and finish out my last year of school. But in that timeframe, I started singing in different contests, at bars around town. And you would win, like, \$200, \$500, or—you know, you’d lose some, I’d win some. But one in particular that I won, one of the judges was a producer for a cruise ship. Now, I didn’t know this, but after I won, he came up to me and said, “Hey, how would you like to sing on my cruise?” And “I need to replace this guy who got sick.” And I’m thinking, wow, wait a minute, hold on. You know, you’re interrupting my life, right now. Because I’m already on the trajectory of having, you know—getting married, having my 3.2 kids and my BMW. But, yet you’re throwing a wrench in that.

00:18:30	Norm	Guest	And he told me how much I’d make and, you know, blah, blah, blah. And I decided to do it! And from there, I met people who were in the show that were professional performers, and they had been on Broadway and they’d been working actors and they were like, “Wow, and you have the chops. You should really think about going to New York.” And, again, it was on blind faith, and I jumped on the plane and went to New York, auditioned for things, and haven’t looked back since. And it’s been over 30 years.
00:19:01	Jarrett	Host	We’ll finish up with Norm Lewis after a quick break. Stay with us. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:19:08	Promo	Clip	Music: Light music with brassy accents.

Speaker: From Miss Anne to Becky to Karen, our very own Karen—

Karen Grigsby Bates: Not that Karen.

Speaker: Karen Grigsby Bates shares the evolution of the nickname for a certain kind of White woman.

Karen: I’m looking forward to the next iteration. I want my name back!

Speaker: That’s coming up on NPR’s *Code Switch*.

[Music ends.]

00:19:29	Jarrett	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jarrett Hill.
00:19:30	Tre’ve	Host	And I am Tre’ve Anderson. Jesse’s out this week and the MaxFun podcast <i>FANTI</i> is taking over. We’re listening to Jarrett’s interview right now with Norm Lewis, the Broadway veteran, Tony nominee, who stars in Spike Lee’s latest project: <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> . Let’s get back to the interview.
00:19:48	Jarrett	Host	Yes! Let’s!
00:19:52	Music	Transition	<i>[Tre’ve giggles.]</i> Percussive, calm music.
00:19:57	Jarrett	Host	I mean, I know that Broadway is notoriously, overwhelmingly White and I know that television is as well. And I’m wondering, like, what

00:20:13	Norm	Guest	<p>are the distinctions that you've noticed or what are the similarities, even, as a—that are difficulties, as a Black man in acting? Well, I think the opportunities. I mean, you know, again—I've been lucky to play the roles that I played, but I think the opportunities that come along, you know. I've been seen from everything from a pimp to a lawyer. So—and a doctor and things like that. So, I've covered the gambit. But there are fewer opportunities than there are for a White kind of parts. Now, that's changed a little bit over the last couple of years or so, because of the awareness of that. And I think that that will keep going, especially now with <i>[chuckles]</i>—with what has been happening in our society, lately. But I think, just knowing that there aren't as many opportunities for Black or people of color out there, in order to get these jobs. There's few and far between. And few and far between the ones who do get these roles.</p>
00:21:09	Jarrett	Host	<p>So, you know, there's not, like, a competition. I'm happy when I see my brothers or my sisters get a role, but there's not as many roles out there.</p>
00:21:31	Norm	Guest	<p>I'm sure that there are a lot of new actors that are new in the business or that are just kind of coming into the business that probably have questions for you, about what they should be doing. What kind of advice are you giving actors, right now, and folks in the business about what to do right now? And I'm sure, like, you've never been through this kind of moment before, like, what is the feedback and advice that you're giving them?</p> <p>The main thing is to find yourself. Like, find some sort of spirituality. My main focus has been: do not let your art validate who you are. Validate your art. So, just in case I can never sing again or I can never do it—you know, never get another show or whatever the case may be, I'll be devastated... but I know that I'm a person and that's just a part of who I am. I have—there might—there's, like, some other maybe hidden talents or just other talents that I just haven't tapped into, yet, to express myself. And some of that might be service to others—maybe going back to school and learning a trade. Things like that. And especially because of—we're forced to stay at home right now. This is the perfect time to learn something new.</p> <p>And in fact, I encourage—going back to the entrepreneurial situation, I encourage people to learn how to code. I encourage people to learn how to do eCommerce or affiliate marketing. Things that you can normally do from home anyway, to supplement your income while you're pursuing your dream. So, find a sense of self, because this business is—no matter what happens, you can give your best performance that you have ever given, like in an audition, and someone might come back and give you a critique like that was the worst thing they've ever seen in their lives. You have to be strong enough to go, "Well, okay. That's your opinion. I'm gonna keep going on my trajectory." Or maybe you can learn from them. Maybe you can say, "Well, what is it that is missing that you're not getting?" Instead of being devastated.</p> <p>I've seen a lot of actors get devastated, need a lot of therapy. They'll think about quitting the business and things like that, because they got a particular critique from a casting director or somebody, you know, that was able to hire them. So, saying all</p>

that, just basically getting a sense of self: whether that be from a religion or whether you believe in science or just finding some sort of hobby. Knitting! You know, *[laughing]* finding some sort of solace and meditating and just know that you are enough. I have a really good friend by the name of Sierra Boggess—what I've worked with a lot. And she's such a spiritual person. And she always goes around—she tells people, "You are enough. You are so enough, it's incredible how enough you are."

00:23:51 Jarrett Host

I just published a piece where I was talking to Black journalists about how they've been coping with and covering the news. And a lot of the pieces—a lot of the piece, we're kind of unpacking how we've been feeling and what we've been learning about ourselves and kind of what you're talking about is finding your own spirituality, finding your sense of self. What have you learned about yourself since we've been, you know, locked in the house for so long?

00:24:16 Norm Guest

Well, *[sighs]* I kind of knew a lot of these things already, but I have patience. I do have—I'm disorganized, but I'm a—I'm a *[laughs]*—but I'm an organized disorganizer. I try to, like, get things done, but I just gotta find that piece of paper that I wrote that note on. You know what I mean? Things like that.

[Jarrett chuckles.]

And so, it takes me a little longer. But! Yeah, I'm just—I'm one of those people who wants to just kind of be of service. I wanna—I'm part of a group called Black Theatre United. And—which was started after the George Floyd, because we wanted to have a voice from the Black Broadway community. And we are a faction—there's many different factions that are out there that are expressing themselves in a way, saying that they have either been wronged or they see the, you know, the injustices that are happening within the Broadway community, things like that. But it's me and some of the veterans, as you would say, that are—that got together. There's about 19 of us that are the founders. And we wanted to come at it from a different perspective.

We're definitely gonna deal with what Broadway has not dealt with for many years, but we definitely wanna deal with societal issues, right now. We just had Sherrilyn Ifill from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund—have a town hall and we sponsored that and talked about what we need to do, moving forward, as a—as a community. We're getting ready to have someone else. I can't mention the name right now, but on the 24th, we're gonna have someone else that you know very well do another town hall, and we're gonna talk about things like the census and making sure you sign up for the census and being counted. We're also gonna have rallies dealing with voter registration. So, we wanna get everybody involved in that. And so, we wanted to have that voice from the Black Broadway community. And we're gonna be unified with other factions that are saying the things that they're saying, and we're gonna deal with those kinds of things as well and have mentorships and scholarships and just be unified.

00:26:34 Jarrett Host

I kinda wanna hangout here, in the Black Theatre United thing for a little bit longer. I'm curious—the conversations that start something like this are usually conversations about frustration and not feeling

00:26:52	Norm	Guest	<p>heard or seen or valued. How did this begin, for you? How did—how did you get pulled into Black Theatre United?</p> <p>I got a phone call. LaChanze wrote a letter on Facebook saying, “Okay, it’s been long enough, producers of Broadway. It’s been long enough, leaders of Broadway. Are you gonna say anything about this?” Because no one was saying anything. I think everybody was too scared. Then Audra McDonald saw it and they talked, and they were like, “We need to do something. We to—” You know, ‘cause, like I said, the Pandora’s box had been opened and a lot of the younger kids that were on Broadway or, you know, in the Broadway community—the theatre community—were talking about their experiences and how they felt disenfranchised and were, you know, just going in, just saying things. And we understood that, and we respect that, and we want to support that. But those two, Audra and LaChanze, called a bunch of us and decided to have a Zoom and said, “What can we do? What can we do? What can we do, what can we do?” And we just mulled over a lot of ideas.</p> <p>We decided to become a corporation. A not for profit. And we wanted to kind of just be like the NAACP of Black Broadway. And if anybody feels like they are wronged or need some help or whatever, we wanna be those people that they come to that they can—we can at least—if we can’t help them, we can guide them and put them in the right direction. And so, the way we’re starting off is by doing those things that I mentioned before and talking about social reform and then dealing with theatre reform, from there. And just making sure people are accountable, in with theatre. You know. I have some experiences—I’ve—I can share. I mean, there’s so many stories out there, but people need to be aware. And I think that that—I think that this—the—again, I’m gonna go back. I always call it the George Floyd incident, because I think he was the straw that broke the camel’s back, that made people realize that this is—there’s something wrong.</p>
00:28:59	Jarrett	Host	<p>And now, people are willing to have conversations. So, we wanna be able to help be that voice in having these kinds of conversations. I—you guys have a lot of heavy-hitters working with you, from LaChanze and Kenny Leon, Audra McDonald—as you mentioned—Wendell Pierce, Billy Porter, Phylicia Rashad, Vanessa Williams. So many, like—Anna Deavere Smith—like, a lot of names that people recognize. And it seems like there is this moment, in America, where Black folks have the ear of the country and have the opportunity to kind of really shift the conversation and shift the culture. In, hopefully, a way that is lasting and impactful. What are some of the changes you would like to see come about, in Broadway, through Black Theatre United and just more from—you know, seeing people raising their voices and speaking up?</p>
00:29:40	Norm	Guest	<p>Well, I think—from a macro level, I would say we want people to be—we want representation and diversity. Not only onstage, but in the producer arena and the general manager arena, in the casting arena, in the PR arena. Just so there can be a voice that can support those people who are onstage. You know, it’s great, you know, because I—you know, I’m honored because I got to play certain roles that are not necessarily Black roles, or race-specific. Playing the Phantom was definitely not a race-specific role, but</p>

that's great to have that sort of representation, onstage. But we need more equity offstage.

And it's all about equity. I mean, I think I'm gonna—I'm not gonna quote anybody, but I know Martin Luther King talked about that. I know Louis Farrakhan talks about having equity. It's not about just equality, it's about equity. And building that sort of stuff. You know, we need to have people who have money. 'Cause, you know, I learned something interesting recently—which I did not know about, but I always questioned, but I didn't know this—the fundamentals of it. But people like Oprah, who's a billionaire—you know, she wanted to put on *The Color Purple*, right? On Broadway. She had to get permission from the people who own the theater in order to put it in there. So, she had to go through them in order to get the permission to put that show onstage. Does that make sense?

[Jarrett confirms.]

Because they're leasing—they're leasing the land to her. Instead of her—I mean, she could buy the building, but she—

[Jarrett agrees with a laugh.]

You know what I mean? But she had to go through them in order for that to happen, and a lot of that power—that equity—is—it becomes a little bit more—it becomes like a monopoly. And you go, "So, wow." And that's just—and that's not—that's for everybody. It doesn't matter Black, White, or indifferent. But we wanna have more people in power to be able to say that we can put these shows on. You know? And not have to go jump through so many hoops. So, yeah. That's—and we're trying to cultivate that sort of landscape, in the future. Because there are people who are going to school who are learning how to dance, act, and sing, but probably won't get to the point of being, you know, onstage and probably won't get to the point of being on Broadway. They might do local theatre or something like that.

00:32:19 Norm Guest

But! There are other ways to express themselves, staying within the business. And if they're good, administratively, they can go into—you know—that part of what theatre is. And then there's some people who actually just wanna be backstage. There's some people who love theatre so much, but they wanna be in the business area of the—or the technical part of the—the thing. I mean, there's not a lot of Black women that are backstage, in the technical thing. I think there's one or two. There's some stage managers, but there's—we can only—I can only think of one, as a sound designer, and that's all of Broadway. You know what I mean?

00:32:59 Jarrett Host

So, that's... we wanna open that door, for them.
Norm Lewis is in the new film *Da 5 Bloods*. It's directed by Spike Lee and stars, obviously, Norm, but also Delroy Lindo, Chadwick Boseman, Isaiah Whitlock, and a fantastic cast of actors that are telling this really, really unique story. And so, I'm just really grateful for you spending some time with me and talking about it.

00:33:17 Norm Guest

Well, I'm honored. Thank you for having a conversation with me and, you know, all the best to you. I'm a big fan, by the way. And so, this is great! This was really great.

00:33:26	Jarrett	Host	That was Norm Lewis, one of the stars of the new Spike Lee Netflix film, <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> . It's streaming right now. Norm was such a fun interview. I really had a great time chatting with him. If you have any opportunity to go see him perform anywhere online, you can get his music on Apple Music. He's a fantastic artist and really, really great. Again, check out <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> , streaming right now, on Netflix.
00:33:48	Music	Transition	Bright, relaxing music.
00:33:50	Jarrett	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jarrett Hill.
00:33:54	Tre'vell	Host	I'm Tre'vell Anderson. <i>Bullseye</i> is produced out of the homes of each of us, and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles.
00:34:02	Jarrett	Host	Where there are children playing outside in a pool all day long, next door to me.
<i>[Tre'vell chuckles.]</i>			
I don't know what you've been experiencing as you're recording from home, but I'm—there's always children's laughter and screaming, outside.			
00:34:13	Tre'vell	Host	Well, my upstairs neighbors—they love to move furniture at all hours of the night for some... reason.
00:34:19	Jarrett	Host	<i>[Laughing.]</i> What?!
00:34:20	Tre'vell	Host	Um, so shout out to them! This show is produced by speaking into microphones, obviously.
00:34:26	Jarrett	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We also get help from Casey O'Brien.
00:34:33	Tre'vell	Host	Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW.
00:34:38	Jarrett	Host	Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.
00:34:44	Tre'vell	Host	And you can always keep up with the show on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> .
00:34:50	Jarrett	Host	Aaand, you can check out our show, called <i>FANTI</i> . F-A-N-T-I, which—as we said—is a portmanteau of “fan” and “anti”—basically, the things that we love but have some challenges around. New episodes of the podcast come out every Thursday wherever you get your podcasts.
And, as Jesse might remind us: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.			
00:35:09	Tre'vell	Host	But we don't! So, byeee! <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:35:11	Jarrett	Host	Byeee! <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:35:14	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
<i>[Music fades out.]</i>			