

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 276 ASHLEY DE LA ROSA AND JARED DIXON PART 1 TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Hi, I'm stage and stage's Lin-Manuel Miranda, and you're listening to the Hamilcast.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:18] Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Hamilcast, I am Gillian. Tonight I am joined by Ashley De La Rosa and Jared Dixon. Hello, friends.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:00:27] Hey, what's up?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:28] Well, before we get started, can you both tell me your pronouns, please?

Ashley De La Rosa [00:00:32] Yes, I'm Ashley de la Rosa and I use she her pronouns.

Jared Dixon [00:00:36] I'm Jared Dixon and I identify as he/him.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:40] Thank you. So I'm sure the listeners are like, wait, what is this a repeat? No, it's not. But Ashley and Jared were both recently on the pod. Jared, your episodes are two thirty six to thirty seven and two thirty eight. Ashley, your eps are two fifty four and two fifty five. Ashley you play Peggy Mariah on the And Peggy tour. Jared, Aaron Burr on the Phillip tour. So if you want to hear the life stories, all the fun like Hamilton heavy stuff and also not because it's the Hamilcast and we talk about whatever, but listen to those episodes because we're not talking about your life stories today. But that might come up. We are talking about Ham4Progress and the task force.

Jared Dixon [00:01:19] Yes.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:21] Yes. So before we dive in, I have a lot of questions. I want to learn all about it. We have a cocktail mocktail here named by Jared. Jared, tell tell everyone what we're drinking.

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Jared Dixon [00:01:31] You know, everything that we're doing these days for the people is for the culture. So right now we're doing a little mojito for the people.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:38] That's right.

Jared Dixon [00:01:38] Appropriately named.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:41] Yeah. Mocktail thing, actually. Ashley, you were like something lemon lime, refreshing. And Jared was like I'm on it like my work here is done so. Yeah. Let's dive into it. You know, this is I want to talk for as long as you both have. I think there's a lot to say. I think there's a lot of questions, a lot of things that people want to know. So just tell tell us all what Ham4Progress is. And I guess it's a.k.a. like the Racial Justice Task Force, just like tell me everything about it.

Jared Dixon [00:02:10] Ashley, take it away.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:02:12] Um, so yeah. The so it was originally called the Racial Justice Task Force. It was created after the murder of George Floyd. We had a big company meeting and this is all of the Hamilton so Hamilton proper meaning, you know, all the companies in one. We had a meeting with our producers and creative team just to talk about how we were feeling and what's going on in the world and how honestly disappointed we were in the you know, our our leaders, our, you know, the people who who are responsible for Hamilton. In their silence regarding Black Lives Matter, Hamilton waited a really, really long time before they publicly said anything and then followed up with they emailed us actors personally with their apology and then followed up and released that a public apology publicly.

Lin-Manuel Mirana [00:03:14] We spoke out on the day of the police shooting. We spoke out when Vice President Mike Pence came to our show ten days after the election that we have not yet firmly spoken. The inarguable truth that Black Lives Matter and denounced systemic racism and white supremacy from our official Hamilton channels is a moral failure on our part. As the writer of the show, I take responsibility and apologize for my part in this moral failure. I'm sorry for not pushing harder and faster for us to speak the self-evident truth under the Hamilton banner, which has come to mean

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so much to so many of you. Hamilton doesn't exist without the black and brown artists who created and revolutionized and changed the world through the culture, music and language of hip hop. Literally, the idea of the show, you know, it doesn't exist. It doesn't exist without the brilliant black and brown artists in our cast, crew and production team who breathe life into this story every time it's performed. And while we live in a country where black people are under attack from emboldened white supremacy, police brutality and centuries of systemic anti black racism, it's up to us in words and deeds to stand up for our fellow citizens. It's up to us to do the work, to be better allies and have each other's backs attached to this. Post our list of resources and organizations doing hard necessary work in this fight. Thank you to all the alumni and company members and fans for holding us accountable. Thank you for everyone who stands on the side of justice. History has eyes on all of us. Gnight.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:04:49] And along with their apology, there was a letter that had a couple of action items in it, and one of them was saying that they wanted to create a racial justice task force comprised of two company members from each company, and then a subcommittee with like five or six people from each company. And we would meet with our producers and every two weeks or so and sort of create initiatives and ways to tackle the... Sorry.... If you....

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:30] So Ashley is in a greenhouse right now on a roof in Harlem. So it's amazing we can get into it. You're growing like kale and tomatoes.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:05:37] Yes, sorry. It's just I'm like, do you hear the sirens?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:43] I wouldn't worry about it. This is we're having a real conversation.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:05:46] OK, ok, cool. I just don't want to screw anything up. So the task force was created to first tackle workplace culture internally, and then we wanted a social justice arm to be built into that so that we could work alongside various organizations like Color Change and Vote Riders and really rally Hamilton around the election, our last election and then beyond, and really get into

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the community, because with Hamilton, we felt that not only do they have the funds to do it and the platform to do it, but there's also that huge sense of responsibility to the community of black and brown people and people of color in general to really give back because we are responsible for putting that show on every single night. And and it's our faces and our bodies that you see on that stage. So that's kind of how it was created. And then, Jared, if you want to take it from here.

Jared Dixon [00:06:55] Yeah, the the the task force is in response to a multitude of things and and adequately a multitude of things. Um, I think what we're culturally experiencing is that as theater becomes more corporate and as America continually becomes more capitalist and more corporate over time, you know, the separation that that the higher ups and all these corporations and theater companies have from the people who do the actual work and then the lives that they're affecting, the separation becomes more and more deep. And it has created some distance from issues that actually matter. You know, it's an especially the crossroads of the things that Hamilton talks about. Right? If we're if we're using our casting divisively to talk about black and brown people or to highlight black and brown bodies as being just as American as white bodies, then why are we not supporting black and brown bodies with our platform? Why are we not supporting it? And Hamilton in the past had done a really good job. But I think I think what what had gotten lost along the way was the consistency. And and that's just natural. And so the I think the most I think the most beautiful thing that happened was that it really started from just what can we do place? Because usually a lot of these corporations will turn around and just respond. They'll put out a statement and then they won't go a step further. Right. And I often say, you know, it's easy to address racism. It's easy to to to to dispel racism and hate. And it's easy to say you hate it. Right, personally. But then what are you doing? It's hard to take the next step. And I think it's even harder to have the kind of conversations that we had in that first meeting with our creatives where they really asked us how we were feeling. And anybody who knows me, you put me in a space where somebody asked me how I feel. I'ma tell you straight up. I don't hold any punches and in an our cast did a really good job. Our companies did a really good job of of just speaking up and saying how they felt and what they wanted to be done in response. And Hamilton was gracious enough to to allow us more autonomy with

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the platform to to speak to those things, because it's in line with the things that the people who created the show believe. So why not?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:28] Yeah, I'm just I'm so we dove right in so fast that I really forgot. I wanted to thank you both so much for coming back to talk about this, because the three of us independently and now together got close after our respective recordings. And we've we've talked about some of these things. Privately or, you know, heavy things like actually you and I have talked about trigger getting triggered by certain true crime documentaries, you know, we've gotten really real together and a lot of ways, all three of us. And I'm very grateful that you're here to talk about this very important thing that is so meaningful to so many people. So I wanted to say thank you so much for coming back on the podcast and giving this thing of mine more of your time. So I appreciate that very much. And if I ask you, I don't want to breach any kind of privacy or personal things. So when I ask certain questions, whatever they may be. I'm not like I'm not asking for quotes. These are these are safe spaces. These are important conversations that have nothing to do with me. So I just want to make that clear. If I'm never pressing or fishing for anything, I'm just trying to like, I don't know, pull back the curtain the tiniest bit so people know what's going on, you know, definitely so. So what are your respective roles here? Because you're on different tours.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:10:49] Yeah. So I am the I guess the ambassador for the And Peggy Company.

Jared Dixon [00:10:55] And I'm I'm an ambassador for the Philip company or one of the ambassadors. I'm joined by Blaine Krauss and Ashley, joined by Rebecca.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:11:05] I'm joined by Rebecca. Yeah.

Jared Dixon [00:11:06] Yeah. It's a very like it's more of, um, a parlamental group, I guess in some way. Like we don't we don't have specific role, like there's no president or Treasury or anything like that. We all have equal footing and voices in the in the group

Ashley De La Rosa [00:11:20] Right. And then our subcommittees are composed of not just actors, but like I've got someone from stage

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management on my subcommittee and then our sound engineer and then the rest are actors. So we really opened up the subcommittees for anyone in our company. But I think that the the task force proper was originally intended for this first time, just for the for the actors to like sort of be that conduit and that connection between us and the producers.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:11:55] Right. Because, you know, Krystal Joy Brown was just on and I was editing her today and she was telling me about, you know, having sort of a like a mediator of sorts for some of these conversations because it gets I don't want to use the word uncomfortable, but it can get kind of tense and you finally feel like you can say something. She was explaining how the producers can have a you know, you sometimes live in fear of them as the actor and the producers think you're just a player in this thing that I create. And so to have a mediator there, I was like, that sounds like the best couples therapy ever. Just having a third party there to really, like, get real.

Jared Dixon [00:12:30] Absolutely.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:12:30] She also said, you know, there's now an H.R. rep who's a black woman, which is also like a really big deal. And, you know, it's like it's just it's like what you were saying. It sounds so easy. But to put it into practice seems to be not as easy as you might think.

Jared Dixon [00:12:44] Yeah, well, we it's funny. What we find is the hard work is not it's not addressing any of the like the societal issues that we're we're fighting against or advocating for. The hard thing is having the conversations about why we should you know, it's funny, like in workspace culture and I talked about this in one of our recent meetings, like in workspace and workspace culture. They get very sensitive about the very sensitive things, like the, you know, the personal things that happen. And it becomes a bit like a closed door conversation. And so that thing gets handled between the parties involved. Right. It gets handled with H.R. and it gets handled with the part, the victim and the offender. And it's just handled between that small group. And then it's like it never happened. Right. But what we're actually trying to do is, like you said, pull back the curtain and get more aggressive about those

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sensitive things and still handle them with sensitive with sensitivity and say, you know, there is a person behind the victim, there's a person behind the offender, like, let's have a conversation that deals with why this happened and then let's have a conversation that deals with making sure that it doesn't happen again to these two people and then the rest of the company as well. So, you know, we just like you get into the like these legal conversations about things that are not legal. It's life, you know, so we're trying to put life back into put life and culture back into our practices with with this intimate thing that we do called theater. And that's kind of how anything should run. You know, like people run things, not businesses and corporations, you know.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:14:33] Yeah. Do you run into any complications with that? Because I hear what you're saying. I think it's so important. But I can also see the other side of it where maybe I don't want the whole company to know about this.

Jared Dixon [00:14:43] Yeah, absolutely. No.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:14:45] Yeah, I was going to say, I think that. At least in my experience, up until whenever we go back to work, I I'm sure we'll run into that more like when we're in the building and interacting with each other on a day to day basis. As of right now, like there have been at least the things that individuals have made public, like public on their platforms that we've tried to address, like as Hamilton. That's, you know, I'm sure been uncomfortable for them. And just like because, I mean, really before before this before the task force and before the pandemic, like, it's like I'm not I'm not sure how else you would have been able to reach these people, reach the people who can actually make a difference and actually improve your work situation. Because if you have a problem, if the person who is perpetuating that harm or inflicting that harm is someone that you report to and someone who would be in charge of taking that up the ladder, then how do you how do you bypass that person? And that's usually where our union would step in. And our union has honestly failed time and time again to keep the actors safe. And they're really trying to make up for all the lost ground now. But a lot of people feel like, well, it's you know, it's almost too little, too late, like we have to take matters into our own hands. And and this pause in theater because of the pandemic has and

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then coupled with the reigniting the racial like the racial reckoning of a lot of people, stuff that we've always experienced and seen. But now other people are forced to see it because because of the pandemic, because they're just like sitting at home. It's it's really made for just like an interesting like almost like a like a storm like for all of this to happen. And that access to the people that can actually make our jobs safer has been granted for some people. And I think with the task force, that's what that's what it it did it's doing. It's giving us access to the people who actually can change workplace culture and implement policies, because I'm all for, you know, believing on the individual level that, like how we treat each other is extremely important and we're responsible for the day to day work, like on the ground in the theater. But if none of that gets tossed up the ladder and if the people at the at the top or even in the middle are like complicit in this horrible, horrible behavior, even unknowingly, then like, there's only so much that we can do to make it better, like on the ground. So I do think that those conversations are going to continue to be. And and when you said, oh, I don't want to use the word uncomfortable, it is though, like that is it like it is uncomfortable

Gillian Pensavalle [00:18:08] is I just don't want to minimize it, you know, because it's other things, too. But, you know, that's that's all I meant by that.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:18:15] Yeah. Yeah. And I get like it's uncomfortable and it's also but I've, I've just during this time to like I've really been trying to discern the difference between discomfort and like lack of safety and like if it's uncomfortable to have these conversations and if it's going to make that producer uncomfortable or if it's going to make you uncomfortable to bring it up. But if you're if we've created an environment where you feel safe as the person with less power, then that's like, honestly, that could be that could be a very enriching thing because like they're going to have to get uncomfortable, like listening to us, listening to to people who are marginalized. Disenfranchized like that's uncomfortable for people who benefit from that, from do benefit from, you know, marginalizing these folks or ignoring these folks even. And and so like, yeah, I want them to be uncomfortable. But the minute that it becomes unsafe, which is what it has traditionally felt like, you know, I fear of losing my job or fear of, you know, even worse

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like that is what we're trying to do with other things, among many other things, too. But I'm we're really trying to, like, eliminate that because no one should feel unsafe.

Jared Dixon [00:19:35] Yeah. It's like the traditional method is the union and the the the the union and the boss. Right. Or the union and the board or whatever. And then they make decisions together and they bargain with each other, and you can only as a as a worker go to the union to get to the board and the union is the representative, right.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:19:56] So when you say the board, you mean like the producers

Jared Dixon [00:19:58] or the producers, the CEOs, the CEO, the the the suite, the C Suite, like, that's the traditional method as you're going through a channel. But by the time you fill out papers on AEA have it sent to whoever and have it sent to your rep and then they send it to the office and then the office calls the producer or the producer's rep, and then by the time you do that, the feelings out of it. Right. So our the proposal is come down and get in the trenches with us. Like, have the you don't know what it's like to be on the road. Come visit us, talk about it, call, you know, call don't just call the company manager or call a couple of cast members, call a couple of crew members, call the you know, and see what the culture of your of your decisions is. Because what I think a lot of businesses are reckoning with now is seeing firsthand the decisions that they make and how they're intersectional with with the actual lives of people outside of their workspace and inside of their workspace. And, you know, it's you know, we say often like we're doing something that doesn't exist in our industry. It just doesn't like there is, I'm sure, in other companies and, um, like shows that are built from the ground up, like maybe like rent. You know, years ago, the actors, I'm sure, had some voicing with their with their producers and things of that nature, because there was there was a social aspect to what they were doing. But those shows don't come around often. What happens to shows like Frozen or shows like Mean Girls or whatever, show where there's no there's no we're not having very specific commentary in the show that leads to community. Right. Or we're not creating a lot of cases. We're not creating the show like me and Ashley are both reprising roles. So I'm not in the trenches with the Lin -Manuel, in a Alex Lacamoire, in a Tommy Kail

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to say this is what your show is doing to people. But now we're not Xing that. They're the third party out. We're not Xing the union out. We're just getting more involved with our own voices and trying to create some sense of empowerment on and in our party and taking responsibility for, um, for speaking up to the people who can make decisions, both in the union and in our in our in our show.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:22:32] And if I can add just one more thing on that, like I was listening to a podcast and she's a relationship coach and she said, like, there are three things that you need to have that whoever you establish with in a partnership when you have a conversation about like anything big or small, and it's timing, tone and turf. And if you can establish whoever can establish those things, I'm I'm sure I'm butchering it. But it's all about power play and dynamic and how you feel when you come into a conversation, because if you immediately feel like you're not on an equal playing field with the person you're talking to, it could flare up old defenses or habits or something. And you're not like leading you're not leading that conversation, but you're not present in that conversation in a collaborative way. And it can turn into a confrontation. And I think historically, like timing, tone and turf have been established by producers, by creatives, by stage managers. So when Jared was saying, like, by the time you fill out your paperwork and send it up and all around it, they either don't get back to you. And so you're left feeling again, small as hell, or it's out of the blue and it's just like, OK, cool. Like you actually have a meeting with the stage manager next tomorrow, like to talk about this or whatever or like with the other actor or whatever,

Jared Dixon [00:23:58] or the decision has been made already.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:24:00] Exactly. Like without you, without your involvement or they've talked to that actor without you. If it's the actor, the actor, they talk to that person and you don't get to have a conversation. So then when you come into the show the next day, this person's looking at you with a stank face and you're like, what did they know? Did they tell like and it's just all handled by people above you or in and around you. And that just reinforces the whole you know, you're replaceable. You're at the lowest rung as an actor and you don't really matter. And it really it kind of like like makes you almost feel like a child again. You know, it's like it's like

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because you've got you lose your autonomy. And so this is is giving people that power, too, and. Agency to establish some of those things and establish, you know, maybe the turf or the tone or the timing, honestly, because no one wants to just go into work and be like, oh, OK. Like, my my shit was just put on blast.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:25:03] It's also it feels like this very weird, long form kind of gaslighting in a way where you have to go through all of those hoops and then you could sit there thinking, is it that big of a deal? Is it even worth mentioning? Is it even worse than it feels like it's on you to prove that it's worth it for it to go through all of these steps? And Jared just like you were saying, it takes the people that have both been saying it takes the personality out of it. It takes the personal connection out of it, where you're filling out forms and talking around to talk about this.

Jared Dixon [00:25:36] And then I had a conversation recently where someone was upset with me about how they weren't we weren't upset with me. There was just upset. Right. And they didn't know why. And what I discovered in that conversation is often on the way to trying to figure out why you're upset. You lose you lose the passion of just being upset. And so they came to me and they're like, look, I'm upset. I don't know why, but we need to figure it out. And I and I was like, all right, let's just talk. And it turned out that, like, we both had a perspective on the thing that that... that found a cause and in effect, a cause effect and an answer and a resolution to the matter by, you know, them bringing their side of it. I brought my side. We figured out what was wrong and then we addressed it. And often in this business, it's really just like like, you know, like with microaggression like if you think about it, you know, someone touches my hair and like, this has happened to me. But I'm thinking, you know, I always put my myself in the shoes, right. If someone were to touch my hair and I felt like it was a microaggression in some way or even if they didn't without you know, without knowing that black hair is should be protected. Right. And I I would spend time I would spend so much time being like, was that racism? Was that a microaggression? Instead of feeling safe enough to go back to the person and say, y'all don't touch my hair right. In our industry, it's like you don't want to go to the union for ... Or for someone touch my hair. You want to go to the person, you want to go to the workspace that was created to make the person feel safe enough to

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because we're in a community together. I'm not in community with Actors Equity Association. I'm in community with Hamilton, the Philip company, and I'm in community with the with the other Hamilton companies, because we experienced some similar things on the road and in different houses and things of that nature. So why would I go to a third party to say I have an issue in House if I can handle it in House? And then I think going to the third party is the second call. Like I'd rather sit down with I'm putting Ashley in the space. I'd rather sit down with Ashley and say, can we talk about this? And if we can't come to a resolution, then let's together go to the mediator and figure it out when I when when we can't. Like Ashley said establish a safe space, then obviously something's wrong. So we're just I think we're adding necessary letters and numbers to the equation. And, you know, it's it's all it's tough work, but it's necessary. And there's been many times where we've gotten off a call and like, you know, uh, shoulders were up near the ears because the conversation was tense or something was said that made us uncomfortable or something. But there's been a lot of moments where we almost immediately see the benefit of having those tough conversations within a week or a couple of days or, you know, the thing I'm most interested in is how it's changing the people that we work with. I think that's the most beautiful work, is that seeing the other side of the of the of the car starting to flip, you know, and seeing people, um, people experiencing changes within themselves that show the benefit of of going a step further and doing the things that we were both asking for and wanting to find value in.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:29:30] Yeah. So let's say there are people listening who are not really in the Broadway world and or theater world. They found Hamilton on Disney, plus they somehow found this podcast and they're kind of thinking, wait, what? So you've both said Ashley, you said you want to return to work in a way that that is safe and Jared, you said, you know, as someone who stepped into the role, you didn't have the ability to talk to Lin and Lac about, you know, what the show was doing. Can you explain? You can be as vague or specific as you want, explain what has been happening that that we needed a task force, that you needed a task force to begin with just so that people can understand what you're feeling and where you're coming from here.

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Ashley De La Rosa [00:30:13] Yeah, sure. So I was still pretty new to Hamilton. So as far as Hamilton, specific things I can't really like attest to in my personal experience. But I have been in other shows and

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:31] you and I talked about some of the casting breakdowns. Yeah, I see the word spicy. We talked about

Ashley De La Rosa [00:30:37] exactly like and it's just like our industry.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:40] You got to listen to these episodes.

Jared Dixon [00:30:42] I, I did.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:30:44] I did. He did. He texted the task force like, oh it was so great. Yeah. But it, it speaks to our industry as a whole and because we are in Hamilton, like this is what we chose. And I'm so grateful to be in the show right now because I don't know any other show that is tackling like racism and white supremacy in the workplace and, you know, transphobia and all of these really horrible things like we are trying to address these problems head on and with full transparency and like just what Jared mentioned, like microaggressions and being on, you know, even on or off stage with someone or something with hair. Like I've been in shows where I you know, we had a closing night party and my friend and I, we went and she's got really tight curls. And we went to the hair room to because we were swing's to do our hair to get ready for the party. Towards the end of the show, the person who was doing the hair, the wigs was like, yeah, you can use it like we asked and everything. And so we finished up our hair and, you know, I cleaned my sink out and my friend, like, didn't fully clean her sink. There were still some here and there. And the woman came over like later on in the night we were at the party and was like, oh, I looked in the sink and I thought it was pubes like, oh my gosh. Like, yeah. So it's more and like she knew she knew it wasn't pubes. Like what. So telling a person, a black person that their hair looks like pubic hair is so and to think it's like funny in a joke like that to me isn't even a microaggression like that is like aggressive and the fact that people don't you know, that's just one example and people don't think that that's a bad thing to say. And so it's just like that, like it's in

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our industry as a whole having to be on stage and and receive notes from choreographer. And, you know, the choreographer will look at the three black people and be like, you know, so I want it to be more urban, you know what I mean? And like one of them is like a Juilliard prima ballerina. And the other one's like an Alvin Ailey ballerina. And they're just like, OK,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:15] that is straight out of the office where Stanley's like I grew up in the suburbs. What about me is urban to you

Ashley De La Rosa [00:33:20] and you've got like this white guy, like telling you like more urban. And then there's like these like L.A. hip hop dancers who happen to be white. But it's just like you're not like...

Ashley De La Rosa [00:33:32] they would probably know more what you're talking about than just the black people because they're black. And so having these conversations, because the thing is, I did I mean, I had the day that I was talking about the big meeting that we had when the task where we talked to the producers before that I had a mean girls meeting that they invited me in on, even though I wasn't in the show anymore. And they were like, do you want to be in this? And I was like, oh, yes, I absolutely, positively do. And I have stuff to say. It's been a year. I'm ready to light these people up. No, but and that's really the energy I was going in with.

Jared Dixon [00:34:10] Oh my God. I'm just remembering actually coming on our call after that meeting.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:34:14] You mean right. You mean like there was one scheduled at one o'clock, about three o'clock back to back she came.

Jared Dixon [00:34:21] She came on like, OK, that's all nice. But I have

Ashley De La Rosa [00:34:24] yeah. I was like, but I'm here to talk about your proximity to whiteness. Like I was just like trying to light this place on fire because, you know, I was feeling not necessarily that that was a good thing or the right thing to do, but

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I was just, like, riled up and and I quickly was able to just, like, drop my shoulders a little bit because. The atmosphere was totally different and and I was stepping into a space where I was being listened to and and coming from a space where we weren't being listened to and we the only way that people would even they would listen, but they weren't hearing us. And so the only way that they would like listen was like if we put our trauma on display. So it was like, let me talk about every horrible thing that's happened to me. And then you look over and, you know, like people are just like texting on. The director of the show is just like texting on the phone like and I'm just like, OK, cool. So you're great. Like moving forward...

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:32] Then what are we doing here and what are we doing to call that fucking phone?

Ashley De La Rosa [00:35:36] Exactly.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:37] Why are you calling the fucking meeting.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:35:39] Exactly.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:40] That's performative. Stop it.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:35:41] That's why. And just and it never went anywhere

Jared Dixon [00:35:44] because there was a difference between one. I'm just like remembering God. That was a year ago actually. Here we are. And I'm I'm also just realizing that the difference in you know, I remember a year ago or around a year ago when my my white friends, cast mates, colleagues were texting me like, oh, my God, are you OK? I just want to let you know I'm in support of you, anything that I can do. And I just remember responding like I don't, thank you. And what I need to say to you is the the way that the world is set up right now, there's nothing that you can do. And I need you to grapple with that reality. There is nothing you and I can do. And we need to figure out how to address that. And I remember sitting in that meeting and thinking all the same things that that most of our BIPOC people will think going into any meaning like that, like, oh, my God,

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this is going to be putting my trauma on display and all that stuff. And then but I remember that discomfort that we had led to us being like, OK, we're going to take it a step further. This wouldn't happen if you had black dance captains. This wouldn't happen if you had black music directors. This wouldn't happen if you had black hairdressers. This wouldn't happen if you had more black people in the crew. This wouldn't happen if there were more black people on your board. This wouldn't. And it quickly became like, yes, I'm telling you that you've been as the kids, they ain't shit. But but I'm also telling you that there's a way out. And if you don't see the value in taking the step to get out of aint shittiness, then I don't want to be a part of your business anymore. Like and that's the recognition that that the Broadway community is having. That's the reckoning that America is having. We're just a microcosm of what's happening in America and Broadway, Broadway and Hollywood, Hollywood and just media in general. They specifically tout this idea that artists, because we're sensitive and we create and blah, blah, blah, that we're so much more connected than the rest of the world to what's actually going on. And we we care so much more. And that's very true. But the money has been involved way too long for feelings and intimacy to be precedent and to be as important as people would think they are in the arts. Right. So what we're what we're doing now is just saying that, like, our feelings matter, our lives matter. And if you're going to appropriate our culture, our bodies, our lifeblood, then you need to be reciprocating. We're not like we're just not in a space of sacrifice anymore. It doesn't do any good for you or for us, for us first. But it's actually if if if I make a specific if creative producers and executive producers could see that keeping their staff happy and keeping them motivated to I mean, corporations have been doing this for twenty five years, right. With H.R. and blah, blah, blah. But if you can see the benefit of keeping your staff happy and motivated equaling dollars and cents, like when you can make that intersectional, that's when everyone's happy. When you make when you make it possible for people to go to work and feel safe, they continue to go to work and feel safe. They show up. They show up whether they want to or not. Because at the end of the day, like I, I partially do theater to escape life. Like I love existing in Hamilton as a black man because I don't love existing in America as a black man, like I feel celebrated on the Hamilton. They in a way that I don't feel celebrated all the time in life, and so if I have to go to Hamilton and grapple with the disdain that I have for being

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black in America as well, then where the hell is my safe space? And if you're using my body to create this art, this better it better be a safe space like I just.... I don't know how else to put it. There's no we don't have time to waste on the other stuff. I mean, personally, I'm just not I'm not the kind of person that doesn't say how I like to get how I feel out of the way so I can get to the art. So I've never I've never really been in a space, at least in Hamilton, where I felt like that was an issue. But in and I'll call it like it is in The Lion King. Um, my my my experience with The Lion King was deep. I mean, we talked about that how it took me six years to get into the show and stuff like that. Yeah. Um, I had a very eye opening conversation at the top of the quarantine at the top of the pandemic with a casting director from Lion King. And there was a there was tension between us for a few years because I I recognized that I needed to grow as an actor. Like I came into this thing super raw, like straight out of college, almost the same as Ashley. I just didn't go I didn't decide to go to the program, you know, and in hindsight, I kind of wish I did. But whatever, you know, but I did I learn from I learned from, you know, on job experience. And early in my audition process, I recognized that he saw me as like raw kind of like untapped talent. Right. Um, well, I had a few callbacks with him over the course of like three or four years. And I think I told you there was a time I was like, yo, don't call me back. This is why it happened. Um, I went to an audition where I had decided before the audition that I was going to be my most vulnerable. I like prepared. I was always prepared, like had the notes on everything. But I was like, I'm going to attempt to do something that I've never done before. I'm going to let go because I'm a very safe and close the chest person or have been in my life, which is why I identify with Burr in so many different ways. But, um, I was like, I'm going to get like let go and let God right. I go into this audition. I'm trying, but it's not happening. Right. And he won't be mad that I told the story. Mark Brydon, he's like, try this, try this thing. It like look out the window and thing like that or or maybe try this. And he was trying to elicit something out of me that I just wasn't bringing to the to the room because I hadn't figured it out yet. And then he like took a pause and his next thing that he said, like I could tell it was choice words. He was like, I, I don't know anyone that cant relate to this song. It's endless night. Right. That can't relate to this song in some way. And he's like and I don't know any black man that can't relate to the narrative of the song or just any any man in

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general, not not not about you being black or anything like that, but just like, you know. Have you ever had an experience with your with your father where you just you just didn't you know, you didn't get you didn't get along or it started to go along the lines of like, you know, happened to two people who who genuinely wanted something to work. Like he he genuinely wanted me to be in the show. And I have to put that forward because he was trying to pull something out of me that I couldn't pull out of myself. And I respect him for it. But the conversation that we had at the top of the pandemic went a little bit like, hey, I want to tell you, I want to talk about like what's happening in our industry. I want to see how I can be a part of making change, blah, blah, blah. Mind you, he's giving me the space to have this conversation with him personally. And I told him what know what happened, what my response was. I was like you said this thing and I shut down. This is what I decided I was going to give you that. But I couldn't get there because I don't I don't have the training at this point in my life or the experience to give you what what you wanted. And he was like, oh, my God, Jerry. Like, I didn't know. I didn't want I didn't know that that audition affected you that way. I'm so sorry. And I've been you know, he tells me about conversations that he's had that are similar, about other things that he might have said to other people. And he was like, you know, no one's ever really approached me the way that you did, like telling me this thing. And he's like, just humor me. Like, I don't know. Your life, what was it specifically about what I said that affected you this way? And I was like, Well, Mark Brandon, you have to know that there is there's a narrative about black men and their fathers. Right? And he goes, no. What? I'm not sure. Tell me about it. I'm like, OK, I'll put it to you like this. When's the last time that you saw a black man on stage where his father was present and he also didn't have an issue with him? I'll help you out. It didn't happen, right? Like the two things don't exist in in specifically a musical theater, like we're getting more nuanced stories and in TV and film now. But like there's never been a black man on stage with his father in full support of him. There's like Harpo and Mister, there is Simba in the Lion King symbol, symbolic move fast. There's seaweed in his mom and dad's not present. There is, you know, and the list goes on and on and on. I was like, this is the media that's being this is the story that's being perpetuated to you, that black men are not present in their children's lives. And so by by virtue of the black experience, you naturally thought that I had to relate to the story

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in some way because I'm a black. Like, you might not have put the pieces together like that, but that's what's happening, whether you're aware of it or not. And he really was just like, oh, my God, I didn't one. I didn't realize that that narrative doesn't exist in our theater. It might exist in black plays. I'm not as well versed in plays, but in big musical theater, musical theater, big you know, the plays that I do know. I just know that it doesn't exist. Never seen it. And we really we really just like had a moment of, like, realizing that we went on a four year journey to get to this point. And he thanked me for enlightening him by this point. I had been in the show already. So there was like I was in Hamilton at this point that he cant fire me. So whatever. And I think the the the lesson is just like, you know, I gave him information. I did. I think I in that conversation, I did what I hadn't done in the audition room, which was to be vulnerable if I had said to him for four years prior or six years prior, whenever that was, I remember. But if I had said to him in the room like, this is what this is the story you're telling me and this is the story I'm hearing. And this is what I'm telling myself in my head, and this is how it's coming back to you. Like maybe we would have gotten somewhere six years ago. But the I think that just like the moral of the story is to just empower yourself with your with your own perspective and empower other people with your perspective as well. Because like my mama said, closemouthed don't get fed. And, you know, I think I think we have to empower each other and we have to empower we have to empower our community to just open up their mouths a little bit. And, you know, we're tired. We're tired of screaming. We're tired of yelling. And, um, but it's not going to stop so and so until everything until we feel safer. It's, you know, it's all we got. But I'm I'm encouraged by the amount of people who are starting to see, like, the fact that the term BIPOC exists just tells me that something whether whether you agree with it or not, it tells me that something's happening in the world, like there's a intersectionality that's happening in marginalized communities that's never happened before. Um, I'm very interested to see when there is what I said. I said this in the task force meeting, like when it's BIPOCW or somethingWWBIPOC , like white women and bipoc.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:48:50] Oh my gosh.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:48:50] Are there people who just what you said. Oh, people might disagree with. Ah there are people who disagree with the idea of BIPOC in general. Yeah.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:48:57] Yeah. I'm black just or I'm. Yeah I say, I say ok. Yeah. Just like putting a label on it. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:05] OK, I thought you were talking about white people because I would, I would. I'm sure there are plenty of white people are just like I don't believe it's

Jared Dixon [00:49:12] because there's a connection to like all lives matter like like if you think about it, it's like BIPOC is adding IPOC to black. And you know, when the point of the Black Lives Matter movement is to say that black lives matter because they are the most marginalized and marginalized lives or among the most marginalized lives in America. But then to go the step further and say that like, you know, and create the term BIPOC to some people is saying, like they they don't see the specificity of it. It's losing the specificity of the term black. Lives matter, you know, the phrase, it's also not inclusive of all marginalized people, like it doesn't the term doesn't include the LGBTQ community, right.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:58] Or disabled people or people.

Jared Dixon [00:50:00] Exactly.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:50:01] I, I do like that. It includes that. It does include indigenous people.

Jared Dixon [00:50:07] Yes. Speaking about marginalized people.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:50:10] Exactly. You could argue that they are I mean, really, they are the most marginalized group and they are people like indigenous people don't get like talked about enough because they're not in enough rooms to I'm never going to speak on someone's experience. I'm never going to speak for them. But like, I'm here with a platform speaking about my own. And so I do I do like the phrase, but I also understand, like, where the rub is. It's like saying I don't know if you have any either one of you have seen that Michael Che has a TV show. It's like a sketch show on HBO. It's

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called that Dan Michael Che. You should totally watch it if you have an Gillian. It's so good.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:50:51] I know I have it yet I'm still behind it. I'm not cool. I have to watch Bridgton like I'm so behind on everything either.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:50:57] So we're on the same level there. But there's this one scene. He gets trapped in an elevator with Cecily Strong and she's like, well, you know, what's a person how do you feel as a person of color person? And he's like, can you stop seeing a person of color? We pick the color. It's black.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:11] Like, Yeah, I'm just a black guy.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:51:14] Exactly. He's like, I'm just black. And so some people prefer that. And but that just like, made me laugh because I was like, that's true. Like we're all like these terms and everything and be inclusive and true. But..

Jared Dixon [00:51:26] hard. It's tough because it's, you know, sitting in the in meetings and hearing people say, oh, we want to hire more biopunk people. And I'm like, OK, well, what about deaf people? What about what about the LGBTQ community? What about the you know, yeah, everybody deserves to work like and you can't just you can't be very you can't be specific when you're trying to help everyone. If you're saying you're trying to be inclusive and help everyone. And the coolest thing, the coolest bed is shit somebody ever said to me. He's like, you're saying he's saying he's like you say, a marginalized a lot. And I just need you to know that the margin is still on the paper. And I was like, oh, my God. Like, he's like there are people who have been erased.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:52:12] Holy shit.

Jared Dixon [00:52:13] Like, right. That you know, it's funny because as a as a black man, I live in this this weird space where it's like I'm on the page. Right. But I'm somewhere between on the page and erased off the page too. Like I experience cultural erasure. I experience cultural appropriation, I experience gentrification. You know, it is very interesting intersection on the think like being

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black in America is a very duplicitous experience. You are both in and out, you know, and somebody is going to write a phenomenal play about this the the black experience and explain it all in one day. And but the play is going to be well, it be ten days long. I don't think so. I'll be in it though. It's going to be a long Iceman Cometh.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:53:11] I have a mandatory lunch break in between.

Jared Dixon [00:53:15] Right.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:53:17] Where either of you or both of you having these thoughts about Hamilton as the show as you were going through your audition process or early in your in your experience with it? And is it now, again, like the safe space? Now you can talk about it. Was it one of those things that you were sort of feeling or was it was it kind of shoved into the light after we've had we've all had this horrible thing happen to us, the pandemic and also all of these, you know, murders that now people are starting to finally pay attention to.

Jared Dixon [00:53:48] I dreamed before being in Hamilton that Hamilton was this this safe space that I feel that is now and is trying to become, um. I think actually my experience is that was also from a space of like I had an experience much, much of like the bigger theater scene. I've done a lot of regional shows at that point. My first thought was Color Purple and I did three. My first Broadway production was Color Purple. And doing three of those shows on varying scales in three in less than three years was very eye opening. Like I went from a CITA contract to Aaron Burr in two years. And I mean, like even just experiencing like being on a cita tour, like from from regional theater to CITA like I was very like, oh, my God. Like, this is so much better. And then I thought, like, you know, and then things and things would happen and it would just kind of bounce off of me because I was just so happy to be making a living wage off the thing I love for the first time or quote unquote living wage. But then, like, the glitter started to wear off throughout the time. And luckily, by the time I got to Lion King, that glitter came right back because I wasn't boom. I was Simba. I was in The Lion King. And then same thing happened over time and I got dropped into

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Hamilton Show. But then by the time I got to Hamilton, it really like I really had a very specific view of how just how theater works and how much the reality of our of our world exists in the theater world. And it's not I can't it was it was a slow burn for sure. And I definitely got to the point where I wouldn't say I've ever been jaded, but I definitely do approach everything that I do in theater, knowing both realities, knowing that like like I said, the duplicity of of my life is that I can be celebrated in one moment and I can be receiving standing ovations and people loving my black skin. And I can walk out of the theater and be called the N-word, you know, or be racially profiled. And I just it's been a learning experience. And I think, though Hamilton's done, I think, a lot of the tough work and work and hopefully will continue to and I know that we're going to hold them to task on that. I'd like I'd actually like to be a part of helping the younger generation of actors to understand that that reality exists. And just being like, you know, I'm not I'm not going to like I made a post recently, I'm not going to glorify doing an eight show week. It's just it's not something to celebrate. I'm proud of myself. I'm proud of my body. I love my I love my body. Like, sometimes I look in the mirror and I'm like, yo, you get me through. Like, I appreciate you for all the knee pain and all. But but at the same time, I'm not going to glorify the sacrifices that I put my body through for the sake of my love. You know, I'm not going to glorify theater for the sacrifices that I put my mental space through being a black man in America and then also by proxy, being a black man in musical theater. Um, you know, pay pay gap differences from representation from, you know, the points conversation that happened earlier on early in the original company. Things of that nature. You know, being on the outside, I you know, I didn't know the specifics, but then I you know, I think like when I first heard that conversation, when I first heard that the the original company was, you know, having some bargaining, I was just like, oh, that's amazing. Like, they're letting them bargain. Like, how stupid was I? Not not that it didn't work out how you know, how it did. But the blind spot, you know, shout out to Rafa and Diggs. The blind spot that I had was just built out of a built out of this base of of the glorification of the of the thing of the thing I love, you know, um and, you know, I think it's OK to celebrate our community at any given time. I still celebrate our community all through the summer and through the pandemic. We were out there on and on in Times Square. I was looking around like, damn, look at these actors. Like

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they are like, wow, wow. And, you know, often I'll text Ashley and be like, oh, whenever you're ready to run, just let me know. Like, I'm still going to celebrate. I'm still going to celebrate this community no matter what. But, you know, that's also with the the knowing of the reality of our experiences.

Ashley De La Rosa [00:58:50] For me, it was it's it was very similar to what Jared described. I had been auditioning for it for three years. Um, I done a non union tours, uh, national tour, made my Broadway debut, and then did another Broadway show. And I mean, when I was with Mean Girls and I know we had talked about it like the what happened, how I felt about myself and about theater. And, you know, I think, mean, girls really, really showed me the business part of show business in a way that really just left kind of a bad taste in my mouth. Um, and so once I did Beautiful, I was sort of reignited with that love for not only theater, but like my faith in in people and in an industry and in in a company, because there were so many black people in that show. And it was so much fun and the way that we were treated was to me, felt very equal and I know everyone's experience is different, but when I finally got that call, like for Hamilton, I mean, first of all, I wasn't going to go. I was just like West Coast, not too far away, like I'm trying to stay in New York. But I was really feeling my oats. I'm really glad I went. But, you know, I was like, OK, like, this will be fun. This will be great. And this is something I've been working on working towards for three years. Like, I am so excited. And then I also think that the Peggy Company, my experience and then a couple a lot of people that I've talked to, like they have just they've all had a really, really great experiences with the And Peggy Company. And I think just as a whole and maybe it's because our entire stage management team or company management team to. Yeah, company management and stage management, like main stage managers, are all women. They're not women of color, but they're all women like, you know, I think that that has something to sort of contribute. I think that contribute something to the culture of like the And Peggy tour specifically. And there are still things just with the industry as a whole that start to, you know, pull like pull that that that curtain pull. But I don't know what I'm mixing my metaphors, but where the glitter starts to fade

Gillian Pensavalle [01:01:26] I'm right there with you. I get it. I know exactly what you mean

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Ashley De La Rosa [01:01:30] Oh, yeah. Like there are still parts of the industry where that. I feel kind of like disheartened, but at least my time in Hamilton so far has been like the most transformational, like enriching educational time that I've had in my career because, like, it was one, a dream come true for me to be in the show and to I get to be a part of the first ever racial justice task force ever in the history of theater. I'm pretty sure like and we have just been making moves and and I'm actually excited. I know people are excited to go back to work because we have not been working for so long. But I'm excited to go back because I know that I feel safe and I know that, like, we have started to create an environment where people are like, I can just be myself. And if I have a problem, I can talk to someone and I'll get listened to. And we've got an amazing woman named Collette Lucky shout out to Collette, who is now our in-house H.R. It's like weird to say HR, but she is the.

Jared Dixon [01:02:49] H.R. consultant.

Ashley De La Rosa [01:02:51] Yeah, H.R. consultant. And I still have like our mediator from the first couple of meetings that Gillian mentioned, like, we still have him. And it's just like, oh my gosh, like we did this in in a year, honestly, in less than a year because we had these people hired and ready to go. And like now it's just keeping up and holding people and holding people accountable and like, really just like going to work and doing our jobs. Like, I get to go to work and do my job and not have to teach someone with a microaggression. It's like I don't have to teach anyone.

Jared Dixon [01:03:31] I also love that when we go back, there is going to like often as a principle, people will come to you for advice or they'll come to you to tell you about, you know, what about something that's going on or, you know, to just talk to you about what's happening on the road or just in the show. And usually my response is like, you know, like, is the business like, you know, it is what it is. But like as a task force member, now, I'm a part of the collective voice and I'm a representative of the collective voice that, like, I can actually we can actually do something about it, like, you know, we can. Yes, we'll bring like can you Jared, can you bring this up in the task force meeting? Yeah. Like, let's frame it

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this way. Let's make sure like, what do you actually want me to like. What do you what do you want to talk about and what do you want to be done. Right. The problem solution method is, is, is through and through the best way to approach anything. And I think I like I'm so much more motivated to go back to work then I won't say than anyone because some people obviously have been through it in the past year. But like I recognize that, like I have like we have a distinct privilege that the task force specifically of knowing that, like our blood, sweat and tears throughout this year has been beneficial to more than just people's pockets. It's I mean, you saw the joy in our voices like that moment. And then also we were doing a live stream where we were watching it together, watching watching them see the product like the first official product of the racial justice task force that was physically, you know, like a tangible thing. That was amazing, man. And then when we got read the stats on how our power, our our social media activism and phone banking and emailing and all that stuff affected the election and specifically the special election in Georgia. Yes. When they read that off to me and then and then when the election came through, like the beauty of the drop in the bucket, like, you know, does the drop in the bucket ever appreciate itself? I don't know. But I was happy to be in the bucket that day.

Gillian Pensavalle [01:05:50] Yes. 100 Percent.

Gillian Pensavalle [01:06:01] See, I told you these were going to be important eps. All right, next week I'll be back to wrap up my conversation with Ashley and Jared. We're talking about social media versus real life, finding power in your possession, ways to research and learn what the shows you're seeing support and finding out where your money goes when you buy a ticket. And Ashley and Jared take some questions from the Patreon peeps. You can find more information on Broadway for Racial Justice, the Broadway advocacy coalition, Beyond the Stage Door, the Codi Rennard Richard Scholarship Program and more great resources in today's show notes and on theHamilcast.com, you can follow @Ham4Progress on Instagram to stay in the loop on what the Hamfam is doing, more information on new initiatives and how you can take part. And that's Ham, the number 4, progress. All right, so that's your homework for the week. Thank you so much for joining me for these very important episodes. I'll talk to you next Monday. Until then, stay safe. Stay healthy. I love you. I'm G. Pen.

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Gillian Pensavalle [01:07:28] The Hamilcast is brought to you by my love of the thing TM and my complete lack of chill, please join me in raising all the glasses to Sir Alex Lacamoire for generously making my intro music and this custom Yorktown arrangement that I will never, ever get over. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. To become a patreon peep and join the best, kindest and most welcoming corner of the Internet, go to Patreon dot com, slash the Hamilcast. You can submit questions to guests, join Zoom Hangouts, get behind the scenes access and of course, my unending gratitude. I'm at the Hamilcast on all social media and you can listen wherever you get your podcasts. Visit the Hamilcast dot com for transcripts, episodes and more. You can see what's going on with Mike. You know Mike at Michael Paul Smith dot net. True Crime Obsessed is my true crime comedy podcast with my podcast soul mate Patrick Hinds of Theater People and Broadway BackStory fame. Thank you so much for listening. It means the world to me, to the revolution