

Queerology Episode 100

On Performative Allyship and Black Joy

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- Kashif: 00:11 Welcome to the 100th episode of Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being. My name is Kashif Andrew Graham, and thank you for joining us. It's my esteemed privilege to be your guest host for this episode, where I talk with Broderick Greer about moving from allyship to accompliceship and Black joy.
- Broderick: 00:29 Ally-saviors have a tendency to create dependency on themselves and their function as support and make themselves indispensable.
- Kashif: 00:41 Reverend Broderick Greer is a priest on staff at St. John's Cathedral in Denver, where he directs liturgy and oversees ministry with people in their 20s and 30s. Broderick occasionally offers lectures and facilitates conversations related to the interplay of culture, theology, and justice. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *Teen Vogue*, *The Washington Post*, and *On Being*.
- Kashif: 01:04 Let's dive right in.
- Kashif: 01:08 Broderick, thank you so much for joining us on Queerology! This is our 100th episode. We are very excited to talk about current events and what's going on in our lives. Thank you for joining us.
- Broderick: 01:21 Thank you for having me! I really appreciate the invitation.
- Kashif: 01:25 So... nationally, internationally... it's been a shitshow. I think that things are breaking, but in a very necessary way. I think that systems are being pulled apart. One story that came out in *The Washington Post* recently that stood out to me... it's actually about my city, so I wanted to start by talking about that.
- Kashif: 01:49 In this story, for the audience, we have a 29-year-old Black man named Shawn Dromgoole who posts on the Nextdoor app that he's afraid to walk in his own neighborhood. I don't know how many people have been on the Nextdoor app. I have experiences, too, where they start talking about... people post and say, "There are suspicious Black men walking in the neighborhood," and they give these very amorphous descriptions of the people. So he sees that like I have. I would also like to state that his family has lived in 12 South—this particular neighborhood—for several decades. So one day he posts that he's going to take a walk, and he invites anyone

who wishes to join him. Seventy-five people show up and walk with him, and it basically becomes this parade around the neighborhood. And, Broderick, I'm struggling with this because it feels very much like white saviorism. But when I think about allyship, which is what I think these folks are attempting to do, I think about allyship in two levels. I just want to break that down very quickly.

- Kashif: 03:01 Level One, for me, is where you join that person in their space and say, "I'm with you." I think of an instance in which we had a book club at the Nashville Public Library that was talking about the book *Dying of Whiteness*. People came from all over. They left their respective neighborhoods and came over.
- Kashif: 03:20 Level Two is where you use your privilege to address the powers at work. So, for example, it's much easier for me to go to my coworker who is much older than I am and say, "Some people are talking about getting rid of the older folks first if we have to have layoffs at work, and I just wanted you to know that I don't agree with that." I think the harder thing—what I call the Level Two—would be to address ageism in that respective group chat where my peers are saying those things.
- Kashif: 03:51 So I'm saying all of that to say: I struggle with this #walkwithshawn because I think that white folks really need to address the white fear of Black bodies and address the racism that's present on those forums such as Nextdoor. So I wanted to get your thoughts on that because I was chewing on that for several days, and it just wouldn't... I couldn't digest it.
- Broderick: 04:16 Exactly. Nor should you be able to. A few years ago—this had to be about five or six years ago—I came across this lovely short essay called "Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex."
- Kashif: 04:33 Wow.
- Broderick: 04:33 It's by an Indigenous person who basically talks about how so much of allyship or an ally framework is based around the perpetuation of allyship. It's never really concerned with abolishing the thing that causes a person to have to be an ally so that the person can remain a perpetual ally. It's kind of the difference between charity and justice.
- Kashif: 05:06 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]
- Broderick: 05:06 Charity is the handout that's not concerned with the structure—it's concerned with the immediate solution rather than getting to the root

of something. Dr. King has this lovely illustration—I think in his last sermon in Memphis—where he talks about... when you see, and I'm paraphrasing horribly, when you see someone having the same issues on the Jericho road every day, they're getting beaten up every single day, and you make yourself the good Samaritan, it's probably time to consider contacting the Jericho Transit Authority.

- Kashif: 05:46 Yes.
- Broderick: 05:46 Instead of just being the good Samaritan. And I think... what this person talks about in this essay is that accomplices are really concerned with putting themselves out of business. They want to get to the root of the problem. Accomplices in this instance would, as you said—they would go to the root of the problem. They would call in their white neighbors and say, "This is racist. You're a white supremacist. Your aggression and lack of imagination are violent and are making a Black neighbor feel very unsafe". But instead, they're living in what you call that Level One framework, which is the immediate fix, the immediate solution. And I'm sure there is a place for that, but it doesn't address the urgency... for instance, is that sustainable? Is what they're doing for him sustainable?
- Kashif: 06:40 Right!
- Broderick: 06:40 Are they going to go walking with him every time he leaves his house?
- Kashif: 06:45 Yeah, because otherwise they become white chaperones.
- Broderick: 06:49 Exactly. I think that's one of those questions that makes a difference between an allyship framework and an accomplice framework, is sustainability. What is sustainable for the person you're seeking to help? *And*, on top of that—and this is one of my perennial frustrations—is... who says that someone is an ally?
- Kashif: 07:14 Right.
- Broderick: 07:15 Am I an ally just because I say I'm an ally, and because that makes me feel good, and someone sees me do it or someone sees me wear a safety pin? Or am I doing the quiet, behind-the-scenes work that is making something more accessible, something more humane, and something more beautiful for someone I love?
- Kashif: 07:37 Yeah. I think... even "the quiet work." The work that doesn't have the fanfare and glory or the pomp and circumstance. That may look like signing, or voting in a particular way—I'm not necessarily talking about national or local politics, but on boards and things like this—I think that's such an important thing to note: the quiet work.

- Broderick: 08:03 Yeah, I mean... I would love to think that I'm an ally of trans people, but I've never been given that moniker by anyone before. And fill in the blank of the communities that I hope that I'm an ally or accomplice to, but if they're not saying that about me, then at best, I'm aspiring to be an ally or an accomplice. I'm giving myself over to that process.
- Kashif: 08:33 It's a process. Yes. Because you become a student—you have to humble yourself, and if you will sit at their feet and make mistakes and let them correct you as you use the wrong or inappropriate language... I think it's all of those things. Absolutely. It's a process. Yeah.
- Broderick: 08:55 Author says that "Ally 'saviors' have a tendency to create dependency on themselves and their function as support" and make themselves indispensable. So it becomes this codependent thing. It makes you think about the foreign mission trips, service trips... just the one-and-done type model of charity that is often more concerned with... as a lot of critical theorists will say, they're more concerned with equality than they are with equity.
- Kashif: 09:32 Yeah. I think... there are several things that you're saying that stand out to me. One of them is, what would happen if Shawn said, in the way that, in the last essay in Tressie McMillan Cottam's book *Thick*, where she says, "I refuse every one of them." She called herself "ugly." If he said it in that same spirit—"I refuse every one of you. I don't necessarily need any of you to walk with me. I need you to go and address the systems"—and if they got angry at that, who would they be? Because I'm just trying to think of how much their identity is tied up in being the helper. And if that's taken away from you and you're no longer needed to help someone, and you lose a great portion of your sense of self, what does that say about you and how you've built or constructed your identity?
- Broderick: 10:25 Yeah. That's the concerning part. It also—and I think this is always underlying so many of these discussions, is—when Black people, or a minority of any kind that's saying something like that... what are they wanting from that situation? Do they know they're gonna find some sympathetic liberals and get some attention for a few minutes from them? Because sometimes, people... unfortunately, that's what they want. They just want that attention. They want that rush of having the gaze of the powerful person. Or do they want an equitable situation to emerge from their complaint? I really get concerned for minorities of any kind because it's really precarious ground to walk on. I think Tressie's model is the best one. "I'm basically self-referential, and you can either catch up with that and contribute to my flourishing, or you can continue to be complicit and

participate in a wide and systemic oppression.”

- Kashif: 11:38 I want to go back to what you said about who gets to say whether they're an ally. I think it's also—I've been following your social media, as we follow each other—I think it's hilarious, the way in which you reposted something that was basically saying, “Some of you think that you're allies, or that you're checking on your Black friend, and that Black friend does not really consider you a friend. They consider you an acquaintance.” It's funny because in this time—again, I think that's contributed to my general sense of exhaustion—I've been overwhelmed with text messages and emails of people checking on me. And some of them, I really don't know what to do with, and I've chosen to not respond to a good deal of them. It's also interesting because even on Facebook, there was somebody that added me—and she must have realized at this point, when she was searching for me to send me a message, that we were no longer friends on Facebook—and I thought, “Oh, God. Here we go.” I just decided to ignore it. But I think that that's, for me, a form of self-care, is to say, “Y'all are all rushing at me, and I just have to refuse a good number of you,” and say, “What you need to do with what's going on is sit with it, let it marinate, let it boil over, and journey inward or whatever and make a decision about how you're gonna do things differently. But to reach out to me seeking absolution, or whatever you're seeking, is just... it's too much.” I wonder if you've been experiencing the same thing.
- Broderick: 13:15 It's unlike anything I've ever experienced, and it's amazing to talk to other Black people from similar backgrounds or who are working among similar demographics... that they're experiencing the same thing. Some comedian, a Black comedian—I can't even remember who it was—the other day said, “Why do these white people have your numbers in the first place?”
- Kashif: 13:42 Oh, God.
- Broderick: 13:46 Which is a fair question. And then some of the people that work there who he was talking to, they were like, “Well, a lot of them are people I work with,” etc., etc. I have a very racially mixed group of friends, just by virtue of where I went to college and where I went to grad school and the neighborhood I grew up in. It's a combination of things. And I've tried to find this article, but I can't seem to find it. I just remember—and maybe it's an article I should have written—from a couple of years ago that was about... Well, there is definitely an article in the *Washington Post* from 2014 about how white people claim to have a lot more Black friends than they actually have.

- Kashif: 14:33 Yes. I saw that. I saw that. Yeah.
- Broderick: 14:36 It was a transformative piece of reading for me a long time ago, and I revisit it about once a year. But I saw something sort of related to that a while ago that was all about—and I think it was a little tongue-in-cheek, but there was some truth to it—that if you're a white person and a Black person is nice to you at work, you're inclined to consider that Black person a friend, even though you've never been to their home, they've never been to your home, you don't know anything about them, and you only see them at work. And the Black person is actually way less likely to consider you a friend. They're like, "That's someone I work with. That's a coworker. We're not friends."
- Kashif: 15:22 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]
- Broderick: 15:23 And it's not—and the thing is, it doesn't mean that the Black person doesn't like you. They're just not your friend. That's just not how it works. And I saw this off and on on Twitter: when you're a hyper-visible person—and I think this can apply... I've never thought about this before, but I think it can apply to Black people or any sort of minority in a professional setting or social setting—when you're hyper-visible for whatever reason, there can often be this illusion of intimacy by people who don't actually know you. They're like, "Oh, that's the Black person from The Office. Yeah, he's" whatever, or "she's" whatever, or "they're" whatever. They feel like they have this intimate relationship with you even though they don't.
- Kashif: 16:12 I wonder if a lot of white folks feel that way about Oprah, for example. I'm not being shady, but I'm just thinking that for some of the folks that claim to have... they say that they have progressive politics and they seem to think that they have a lot of Black friends, but when you look at it, it's all celebrities that they follow on social media or that they somehow think that they're engaging with. I don't know. I'm just trying to figure out what's going on in this psyche here and why that is. I can't imagine... I think it's a very complex question. But I think, also... I just wanted to say this: one thing that has troubled me is seeing some of those people who, again, say that they have progressive politics and that they're, I don't know, I would hope to consider them accomplices, but then I look at all of their social media—which, granted, is only a fraction, a snapshot, or several snapshots of your life—and there are no Black people. And they have these very carefully, it seems, curated feeds, and there are no Black people anywhere. No people of color. I just don't understand that. And I think for some people, this is sort of hitting the fan now, that they're supposed to do the right thing and check in on their Black friends, and people are like, "Away from me! I know

you not,” or like, “This is a very strange text message.” You know what I’m saying?

- Broderick: 17:47 Yes. It’s complicated. It’s really complicated, I think, because this is one of those, as theologians would say, it’s one of those apocalyptic moments. “Apocalyptic” does not literally mean “the end of time” as it does in the popular imagination. Biblically, an apocalypse is an unveiling. And this is an unveiling. Nothing new is happening. It’s just that for so many people, the curtain, or the veil, has been ripped away, and they’re able to perceive things as they actually are and not as they want them to be or as they thought that they were.
- Kashif: 18:29 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]
- Broderick: 18:30 They can no longer be subject to what I saw someone call “toxic positivity.” And I think I did find that article, and it’s from the African-American Intellectual History Society, and it is called “A Brief History of the ‘Black Friend.’” It’s from 2018, and I am now remembering: it’s all about postbellum, post-Civil War Black/white relations. White people were confounded, because they were labor camp owners—some people call them plantations, but they were labor camps—they owned Black people, and among themselves, they thought, “But we heard them sing! They were always smiling when they were always smiling when they were around us!”
- Kashif: 19:26 Yeah! Yeah!
- Broderick: 19:29 “They didn’t try to escape! Why would they want to leave now?” It was this existential question that white Americans were asking after emancipation. That’s not where this started, but it, again, was another apocalyptic moment where white people’s perception had been that Black people were happy where they were.
- Kashif: 19:56 Oh, yeah.
- Broderick: 19:57 They were happy in the peculiar institution of enslavement. We know the truth is that Black people were not. They were miserable and dehumanized. And yet Black people often played a role to trick white people into thinking they were somewhat content where they were to keep the white people from killing them or separating them from their families! And so I think a lot of white people are having that same existential question right now. Which must feel—I mean, I cannot relate to them in any way, but it must feel... I had grown tired of a lot of my interactions with white people. They really came to a head for me about two months ago.
- Kashif: 20:42 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

- Broderick: 20:42 I walk about six miles a day. I was on a walk in my mask, like I always wear. This happened day after day, day after day. I'm walking, and there's a white straight couple with their baby and their dog. They take up the whole sidewalk, and they're not wearing masks, and the expectation is that I'm supposed to move for them. And this has happened my whole life. It's so funny. And so one day, I was like, "You know what? I'm not going to move."
- Broderick: 21:13 A long time ago—a few years ago—I decided I wasn't going to open doors for white people in stores, and I'm not going to move for them on sidewalks, because I've basically moved for white people on sidewalks my whole life.
- Kashif: 21:26 Yeah.
- Broderick: 21:26 So I made that decision five or six years ago. I wasn't going to do any of that anymore.
- Kashif: 21:30 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]
- Broderick: 21:30 But with the... I kind of loosened that with the pandemic because I was like, "I don't want to be close to anyone that's not wearing a mask, etc., etc., even if I'm walking." Then I was like, "You know what? I'm tired of this." So one day this white family, or a bunch of families, they were having some sort of social distanced party on their lawn. And this white woman is making these sarcastic comments to me because she obviously can tell from my body language I'm not very happy with them blocking the sidewalk, because I'm trying to take a walk on public property. And I think I said something like, "You really do think that you own this sidewalk." And she didn't say anything else.
- Broderick: 22:13 But that's how I was raised.
- Kashif: 22:15 Yeah.
- Broderick: 22:18 I was taught by my parents, "We don't take things from white people. We don't allow them to just treat us any way that they want to treat us. If we have to, we will verbally fight them." And I was like, "Well, I'm happy to have those skills," because it's truly just this very... they truly believe that this is their world.
- Kashif: 22:45 You know what? I have to jump in there, because I so commiserate. Or, let's not even talk about misery, but I'll just say I get that. For me, I grew up in New York, in Westchester—relatively diverse county just above New York City—and I went to school with children of all different colors. And I never really cowered from saying anything to any white person. I didn't think twice about it. You just

said what you needed to say, you tried to be respectful, and you moved on. It's interesting, Broderick, because when I moved to Tennessee—I moved to Cleveland first, so I lived in east Tennessee for about three years, actually, where I went to seminary—something happened. There was some sort of social reprogramming that I didn't realize was going on where it became exhausting for me to say anything, or I suddenly felt like I was fearing that I was going to have what Andre Perry describes as “a Negro moment”—he uses the other word that I don't want to use here—in which... I think about, if folks remember the movie, Disney's *Cinderella*. When Cinderella's about to go to the ball, and Cruella and—is it Cruella? Drisella and whatever the other sister's name is—they strip her gown.

Broderick: 24:08 I think we can call her Ivanka.

Kashif: 24:12 Ivanka, yes. Ivanka and Drisella. They strip Cinderella's gown. And for me, sometimes, I've struggled with anxiety in public encounters. This is why when Christian Cooper did what he did, to me, it was heroic. I don't know when it happened. It seemed it was by imperceptible degrees that I tried to avoid those encounters. So much so that I remember recently being at a performance at a sizeable performing arts studio here in Nashville. And of course, they offer up the rules at the very beginning and say, “No recording, no photography,” so on and so forth. Right? Well, there was a white man that was sitting to my right, and of course, he has his phone out and is holding it way out and is recording the performance. There was a white woman that was sitting to my left, and she said to me, “Is that bothering you? Do you want to say something?” And I said to her, “I'm not going to say anything.” And I think in that moment, it was both a combination of... there may have been a tinge of fear, but it was more so all the work that goes into that. Because you know that the person... I imagine that there would maybe be a backlash, or the person would make a scene and say, “How dare you speak to me in that way.” It's something that... I've come away from those encounters, Broderick... I've had to unpack them and go easy on myself, because I'm like, “Why didn't you say anything? Why didn't you say anything?” You know? And I think that that's a way that, as you talk about—I do think sometimes that white Americans have acted like they own the world.

Broderick: 26:03 Yeah, it's definitely a symptom of the colonialism, colonization, settler mindset. They have a right to this land, they have a right to our time, to our lives—things that we know that are not true but that they truly believe, and when they act on it, there generally isn't a negative consequence for them.

- Kashif: 26:30 And if I'm not careful as a Black queer man in Nashville, I can very easily internalize that. Their expectations. I've had to do a lot of therapy and unpacking to let that go because I thought, "This is not the way that I was raised. Where did I pick this up? And was this, perhaps, a survival mechanism"—I can imagine, living in rural east Tennessee—but for sure, I think that that is the result of seeming world-domination. And it's very hard for folks to hear "no." But they have to hear it. They have to hear "no." They have to hear that "You don't own the whole sidewalk."
- Kashif: 27:13 And that's been one of my bugaboos since this pandemic has started. I too walk several miles a day. And that was one thing that I'd notice is that people would slacken the lead on the dog instead of pulling it taut—like, you need to pull Fido in to you because I don't want Fido all over my clothes. You know what I'm saying? It feels like disrespect. It's like, "You have one side of the sidewalk. You should walk single file—as we say in Jamaica, "small up yourself"—and allow other people to pass, but there just seems to be some sort of disconnect that has been a struggle for me. Which is hard because walking is one of the things I do to take care of myself during this time. I try to walk, and that's me "getting away." But I feel like even there, I meet white supremacy.
- Kashif: 28:03 So I guess I wanted to also ask you: what are some of the other things that you are either doing, abstaining from, moving towards, to take care of yourself during this time?
- Broderick: 28:13 About a year ago, I deleted Twitter.
- Kashif: 28:16 Oh, I didn't know that!
- Broderick: 28:18 Yeah. Yeah.
- Kashif: 28:19 Wow. Okay.
- Broderick: 28:20 Which says a lot. I don't really think anyone noticed that I was gone, which is fine.
- Kashif: 28:15 Oh, Lord.
- Broderick: 28:15 One of the things that is so crazy about that experience is a couple of years before—maybe two or three or four years before—someone had given me this wonderful nugget of wisdom that in the Twitter settings, you can turn off automatic play of videos. It was around the time that Eric Garner was killed by New York police. And it was kind of on a nonstop loop, and I think that that's when someone shared that with me. And there were all of these very thoughtful essays by Black people that went out around that

time that said, “You don’t have to watch Black death.” The death of a Black person in a very public setting, in mass media or social media, only really does one thing. It reinforces how we operate in the white imagination anyway.

- Kashif: 29:27 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]
- Broderick: 29:27 In the white imagination, we’re dead. Just in general. So it just reinforces their feelings about that. “Oh. Yeah. This is what Black people do. They die.” And then for Black people, it just retraumatizes us. No one benefits from us keeping the death and lynching and dehumanization of Black people on a constant loop on mass media or social media. So a lot of that is gone from my life. I’ve not watched the video of George Floyd being killed—
- Kashif: 30:02 Same here. I didn’t watch it.
- Broderick: 30:04 —and I’m not going to. And what a monster one must be to say, “Oh my goodness, I watched that video, and now I understand what Black people go through.” And I’m like, “Oh, you just admitted to me that you’re a fucking monster.”
- Kashif: 30:19 Yeah.
- Broderick: 30:20 “So thank you. So I now know to run in the other direction.”
- Kashif: 30:24 Yeah, because that means your heart is so calloused that it took that thing to pierce your heart. That’s terrible. That is. That—mm-mm. [negative]
- Broderick: 30:35 And you know the thing that I keep in my heart so much is what the narrator of John’s Gospel says towards the end: “Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe.” I just think about that all the time—why do you have to see the video to believe us? That’s been a long process over the last six years.
- Broderick: 30:59 But other things are, I talk to my parents very regularly. I talk to them on a daily basis.
- Kashif: 31:07 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]
- Broderick: 31:07 I talk to a cousin I’m very close to multiple times a day. So that’s really good. I belong to a Black and Brown book club here in Denver and while we’ve not been able to meet in person, we have a text thread that we’re on, and we chat all the time. I’m a big, big, big fan of gospel music.
- Kashif: 31:28 Yes!

- Broderick: 31:28 Often, when I'm walking, that's all I'm listening to, is gospel music. My grandmother was a gospel musician. It's the language of my heart, and if there's not a B3 organ in heaven, I don't want to go.
- Kashif: 31:41 Seriously. I wanna say, too, that it's so funny, because that has come back up for me, gospel music, and listening to the whole old-score track of "Say Amen, Somebody"; the Barrett Sisters; "The storm is passing over! The storm is passing over! Hallelu"; and "He Brought Us"—there are so many of those things that have become my anthem, and I play them over and over. That definitely resonates with me.
- Broderick: 32:09 Yeah! The Clark Sisters movie came out in April—it was on Holy Saturday—and I've watched it three times during the pandemic. It's just such a gift that it came out. Because it was supposed to come out in January originally. Then Jacky's husband died, Jacky Clark Chisolm, so it was delayed until April, and that has just been such a balm for me.
- Kashif: 32:38 Yeah.
- Broderick: 32:39 And then just revisiting a lot of old essays that I really like. Right now, my scholarly interest is in... I grew up in a Black Baptist church in Texas and my family is Afro-Baptist, fifth generation. I was the first departure from that. But I've been reading this wonderful late '80s scholarly work by Walter Pitts, who was an anthropologist, sociologist, and a church musician, and wrote a lot about Afro-Baptist ritual and how it's deeply rooted not only in antiquated white Protestant ritual but is decisively rooted in African spiritualist ritual as well. So anything that is a reminder of my Blackness, a reminder of my queerness... is just a gift, it's a joy. I'm not exhausted by being Black.
- Kashif: 33:47 Say that again. So important. *So important. Say it again.* Because the people who are rushing towards me? That is the attitude that they're coming with. They're like, "I'm sorry you're Black." And I'm like, "Honey, that's not the problem."
- Broderick: 34:01 The problem is that they're white.
- Kashif: 34:03 Hello? *Hello?* [affirmative]
- Broderick: 34:04 And honestly, it's not even ontological. It's not that they're white by nature, because that's not natural. It's something that they believe about themselves.
- Kashif: 34:15 Right. It's the idea of whiteness. Yeah.

- Broderick: 34:17 Absolutely. So they're invested in that, and by virtue of their investment, that causes violence for us. So, yeah, I'm not exhausted by being Black. I'm exhilarated by it. I've been doing a lot of memory work in isolation, because I live by myself and I really haven't seen anyone in three months. So I'm left with a lot of memories from growing up, 85% of which are very, very positive. Just thinking about the barbershop that I used to go to that was also the barbershop that my grandfather and father went to, and the black and white TV in that barbershop, and church growing up. I was thinking the other day about this woman who... growing up Baptist, we would have called it "she caught the Holy Ghost."
- Kashif: 35:09 Oh yes.
- Broderick: 35:09 She was dancing, and her wig fell off in the middle of church, and my brother and I lost it.
- Kashif: 35:13 Oh, Lord.
- Broderick: 35:14 We were dying. We just couldn't believe that her wig fell off in the middle of church. And just thinking about funny stuff, and holidays with family, and how everyone would just be screaming laughing, and we would play games after dinner. Just the joy of my childhood, and the joy of my teenage years, and the joy of domestic life in my neighborhood.
- Kashif: 35:42 Broderick, I'm gonna jump in, because I think that that's such a powerful thing to do. Because I think that some of the people that are rushing towards us have seen Black death and have made the assumption that that is all our lives are and could be. And you are leaning in and letting your life take on sweetness in the remembering in a way that pushes back against that to say that there is much more than just Black death. If that's all that you were paying attention to, then you need to have a serious come-to-Jesus, come-to-whomever, come-to-Somebody, come-to-*yourself* moment. But that's so beautiful: journeying back through the memories. I love that.
- Broderick: 36:28 Yeah. Nikki Giovanni did an interview with Krista Tippett from *On Being* about four years ago, and I think about what she said so often. It's just a little clip from that. She was talking about how she does not want white people to be her biographers when she dies. This is just a little quote from her poem "Nikki-Rosa," and it's about that. She said:
- Broderick (reading): 36:58 childhood remembrances are always a drag
if you're Black
you always remember things like living in Woodlawn

with no inside toilet
 and if you become famous or something
 they never talk about how happy you were to have
 your mother
 all to yourself and
 how good the water felt when you got your bath
 from one of those
 big tubs that folk in Chicago barbecue in
 and somehow when you talk about home
 it never gets across how much you
 understood their feelings
 as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
 and even though you remember
 your biographers never understand
 your father's pain as he sells his stock
 and another dream goes
 And though you're poor it isn't poverty that
 concerns you
 and though they fought a lot
 it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
 but only that everybody is together and you
 and your sister have happy birthdays and very good
 Christmases
 and I really hope no white person ever has cause
 to write about me
 because they never understand
 Black love is Black wealth and they'll
 probably talk about my hard childhood
 and never understand that
 all the while I was quite happy

- Kashif: 38:07 *Wow.*
- Broderick: 38:07 And I think about that a lot. I just really don't want white people to know anything about my life, because they'll never understand the complexity because they don't have the imagination. Again, back to that "in their imagination I'm dead." So it's just amazing to think about my own complexity—
- Kashif: 38:28 I love it.
- Broderick: 38:28 —and my family's complexity. Yeah. It's amazing.
- Kashif: 38:30 I am definitely going to journey back through... what I'll probably do tonight, once we finish talking, I'll probably go and look through my photo album. I think that's a healing experience, to see your life stitched together—or whatever the continuity looks like for you,

- whether it feels seamless or... I think that's such a powerful thing.
- Broderick: 38:54 Well, someone once told me that if you're having a hard time loving someone, imagine them at age five.
- Kashif: 39:00 Wow.
- Broderick: 39:00 And I think that applies to oneself as well. If you're having a hard time loving yourself, or having a hard time in general, imagine yourself at age five.
- Kashif: 39:10 And when I think of myself at age five, I was happy. I was happy, because we had just moved to the suburbs. My parents were very happy, and we had a big new house, and a huge yard that wrapped around the house, and we barbequed, and it seemed that we were moving up in the world. But my concern was less about... I don't think I was thinking about moving up in the world at age five, but I was certainly happy that my family... that we were all together and that we could spend a lot of time together. I think that's such a powerful thing for Black folks to do right now, and I would encourage all of our listeners, especially our listeners of color, especially our Black folks, to do that, to journey back through and think about the happiness. Because I think that's just so healing in a time when very well-intentioned people who wish to become accomplices have signed on or awakened to our lives and all they're seeing, as we've said before, is death and destruction and sorrow. And I think they're coming with feelings of empathy and saying, "I'm so sorry." This is what, again, sums up a lot of the text messages that I have received in the past couple of weeks: "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." And my thing is, "You're sorry for what? If you are angry or sorry about white supremacy, then turn to white supremacy and give it a good whack at the foundations." Do you know what I'm saying? "That's where you need to channel that energy. But not towards me." And not towards you. Because I don't think our lives are anything to be sorry about.
- Broderick: 40:55 No, and also I think there has to be a commitment. These people we were talking about earlier, the white people post-emancipation who were like, "Those were our friends! The Black people were our friends," as if they didn't have a legal obligation to smile in front of white people. And you think about those big dinner parties that were held on those labor camps by white people, for white people, with Black people as the cooks and the attendants, and you think about all the stuff that the Black people discussed in the kitchen. And I think that image, for me, is so powerful, of what do we discuss in the kitchen that is not for white consumption? That is truly not for them, on any level, that they can never be privy to? And I think a lot of

Black people who are hungry for white attention are quick to overshare about their lives and about their feelings and about their experiences, and they're sharing with people who will never understand them. Why waste your time doing that?

- Kashif: 42:03 And will often not reciprocate, because for many—I mean, I've experienced that, where I'm talking to someone and they have this WASP-y reticence, and you're pouring out your heart and you can't get any information back. They don't give you anything. They just say, "I'm sorry." And they don't understand. Even the tension, as you mentioned before, holding in tension the beauty and the pain. That you don't wish you didn't have that, because it makes you who you are, and you know that, whatever you experienced as a child, you knew that parents were complicated people, but you loved them anyway, and you were glad to have them. And it's so true that you talk about... it's like the sacred circle of the kitchen. Like, "This stays here." Because if you can't appreciate the nuances and go with me to the unlevel surfaces in the story, I'm not really sure it's for you.
- Broderick: 43:01 And that's fine. That is okay.
- Kashif: 43:04 Yeah. And I wonder, again, whether trans folks, whether other folks have the same experience. That's something I hope to investigate as I enlist to become an accomplice for other people.
- Broderick: 43:19 Well, you know, Alice Walker talks about that in her definition of "womanist." She says a womanist is a seperatist—and I'm butchering this paraphrase—it's a seperatist for health. At what points in my life do I have to be a seperatist and huddle with my people for my own health? That does not mean that I'm not engaged with those outside of that community.
- Kashif: 43:44 Yeah.
- Broderick: 43:44 I have to. You know, work, and whatever. Fill in the blank.
- Kashif: 43:48 Yeah.
- Broderick: 43:48 But where are those places that are carved out where I'm able to seperate and not be under the eye of the majority and do it for my own health?
- Kashif: 44:00 I was at the Racial Justice Institute last year at Vanderbilt, and it was so healing. I think I spent the first two days fighting back tears because I was finally with mostly Black folks, and I hadn't had that experience... it had been years since I had been in any space with mostly Black folks. Something about that was so healing as we were talking about our experiences, as we were talking about race.

We didn't even talk about... it wasn't necessarily about race. It was just about our lives, or... do you know what I'm saying? It wasn't... It was healing. I guess that's the crux of what I wish to say. And I know that sometimes other folks have great difficulty when we talk about QPOC spaces, where it's QPOC only. I've had friends that don't understand that. "Why do you need to have... what does this do?" Or they'll say, "It's segregation." It's very necessary and very healing.

Kashif: 45:01 The last thing that I wanted to ask you, and I'll answer this question myself—attempt to answer it: In a few words, what does it mean—as we are about to journey through Pride month—what does it mean to be a queer Black man for you?

Broderick: 45:17 I think it means standing on the shoulders of giants. So many... the more we learn about the past, the more it's like, who among Black luminaries were not queer? It's basically just Martin Luther King. Everybody else was queer. Lorraine Hansberry, Bayard Rustin, James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Alice Walker, who is still with us, Angela Davis, who is still with us—it's just... what an inheritance. Langston Hughes—the list goes on and on. And it's like, "My goodness. We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." And that is beautiful. And it's amazing. So that, I think, for me, going into this Pride month 2020, that's what I hold. And I hold, also, all of the trans Black women who are mercilessly killed on a regular basis. What is my responsibility to them and for them? How do I have imagination that isn't just LGB? Because it was and is Black trans women who really... they were the ones who threw the first stones at Stonewall and ignited a fire that just won't go out. So I sit with all of that—the joy and the tension.

Kashif: 46:50 And I think that I would echo that sentiment. I've been trying to—I think "extricate" is the word there—meaning from experience and to say, "As a queer Black man, I have experienced sexual racism. I've experienced marginalization. I've experienced other things." But when I think about meaning—and that has, of course, not been anywhere near the sum total of my experience—that word "creatives" keeps coming back to me. The people who, although, for many of them, they didn't have it in front of them, they were able to envision a world in which... they were able to envision *Giovanni's Room*, and they were able to envision so many other things. So being a queer Black man, I think about being someone with a quality of spiritual vision. That's what comes home to me. You have to be both/and. You have to be surviving in this world and also critical of it because it hasn't accepted you fully. When we talk about double-consciousness, I just think of being here and also having two experiences at the same time. I guess just the sense of richness

and the spiritual vision that you're seeing—when I talk about two experiences at the same time—you're experiencing life now, but you have a sense of the future, and you have the vision for the future. It's both of those things. And that's what it means to be a queer Black man for me.

- Kashif: 48:30 Well, Broderick, thank you so much for joining us for our 100th episode. This has been an absolutely delightful, thought-provoking conversation. Be safe, and we will talk to one another soon.
- Broderick: 48:44 Thank you again for having me. This was a joy.
- Kashif: 48:47 I hope that this conversation has been most informative and that has made you uncomfortable in ways that are healthy. I encourage you to further your knowledge of race in America by visiting your local library. Please note that many libraries are now offering curbside pickup and have a whole host of electronic and audiobooks available for your perusal.
- Kashif: 49:07 If you'd like to read my protest poetry, you may follow me on Instagram @kagwrites.
- Kashif: 49:13 Keep fighting the good fight. Arm yourselves with accurate information and love. Take care.

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