

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness and Dr. Erroll Souther

JVN [00:00:03] Welcome to "Getting Curious". I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by USC Professor of the Practice in National and Homeland Security, Dr. Erroll Southers. Where we discuss how big of a threat is domestic terrorism? How is the term domestic terrorism applied on a federal level? Is it balanced? And how do I survive a mass shooting situation? Honey, let's go. So, Doctor, how, I mean to become a doctor or something, don't you have to write like a really, it's like a dis-

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:00:41] Dissertation.

JVN [00:00:43] Dissertation. And so. And what did you write yours on?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:00:45] I wrote mine on homegrown violent extremism and strategies to engage the community to reduce the risk of violence and radicalization.

JVN [00:00:5] Dang. Well, let's just dive right in. So. Oh you don't need coffee or something or water?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:00:58] No, I'm good. I'm one of those-.

JVN [00:01:00] Are you not a coff-? You probably are too aware of the world, so you can't have coffee because it makes you too fuckin stressed.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:01:04] And I'm up at 4:30, so like I've been up for a while.

JVN [00:01:07] Dang. Why? Everyday 4:30?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:01:10] It's an old SWAT habit. When I was on SWAT, up at 4:30.

JVN [00:01:12] Oh. So you were on a SWAT team.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:01:14] FBI SWAT. Yeah.

JVN [00:01:15] OK, I have to say based off of your gorgeous stature, I'm not surprised you are serving me muscles. You are serving me, I'm going to get you out of here if someone comes in here, honey. I feel safe. I feel protected.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:01:27] All right.

JVN [00:01:28] So you're on the SWAT team. Then you work with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Then you go through that other moment. Then you become a doctor.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:01:37] Yeah.

JVN [00:01:38] And I'm just giving people the timeline. So really, like your whole adulthood career has been like, is been in, in defending people and, really defending people and studying acts of violence.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:01:50] It's been in public safety. Started my career 40 years ago at the Santa Monica Police Department and went to the FBI and then finished my career, uniform

career, at the L.A. Airport Police, where I was assistant chief of Homeland Security and Intelligence.

JVN [00:02:05] Dang. So you're just like, you've really been like elbow deep in this stuff for a minute.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:02:12] And it's been fun. It's been fun and I've been able to serve my country and my community and, and hopefully make a difference.

JVN [00:02:18] But isn't it been also terrifying?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:02:20] It's been challenging. I will say that I don't think there's much fear about it, as I do have respect for what's happening. But it certainly has been challenging and unfortunately continues to be so.

JVN [00:02:33] I guess that's the difference between someone who is like, you know, an expert in this versus like a civilian. Like to me, I'm scared of it. To you, it's like you respect the process because you're really like on the frontlines of it, like every single day.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:02:45] Yeah. And it really is, once you get educated, become more aware, the fear level goes down, the confidence goes up. And knowing what it is, what it looks like, how long it's been here, and hopefully what we can do to reduce it going for-, further.

JVN [00:02:57] So because, you know, you've really kind of approached it in a, from a day-to-day standpoint, but you've also have approached it from like a policy standpoint because of your work as like a police officer, and because that to me is more on like a, that's like really in your community. But then, as you like, you know, worked your way up and in public safety like you had, you would be able to affect more of like a wider, like, macro view on, like the, like on the forces that cause stuff to happen.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:03:26] You have it absolutely correct. And people don't understand that policy is the most important element of this. Being able to influence those policies that can make those changes are the things that we really are concerned about. But for me, it's kind of unique because I come to the policy world from having been a practitioner. So it's a little bit different when you're operational and then enter academia and legislative processes, where you can actually make that change because I'm not speaking as someone who's never done it and felt it and, and had to go through it. That makes my intuition a little bit different, perhaps than some others who've just gone the legislative route.

JVN [00:04:02] Yeah. I mean, you've really been able to approach it from, like, all sorts of different ways, which I think makes your expertise, like, really far ranging. So one thing that I want to ask you about is your thoughts on white, white supremacy being added to the Department of Homeland Security's list of threats. Was it not ever on there? Like I mean, to me, like 1995, Timothy McVeigh. I've been scared of crazy white people my whole life. I mean, seriously, I've been very scared of some of the people that I, yeah, I mean, the people that were the hard, the hardest and scariest to me were always white people. Where I'm from.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:04:38] Well, Jonathan, it's interesting. The document you're talking about, is it Department of Homeland Security, strategic framework for countering terrorism and targeted violence. It came out last week. And to your point, what's interesting is that people don't know there's a huge difference in America when someone engages in extremist violence and they yell, "Heil Hitler", or they yell "Allahu Akbar". So I'll go back to Timothy McVeigh. Timothy McVeigh was not convicted of terrorism. He was actually convicted for using a weapon of mass

destruction on a government building and committing 168 acts of murder. Dylann Roof was convicted of a hate crime. So.

JVN [00:05:17] And Dylann Roof was the Charlotte shoo-.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:05:19] Was in South Carolina.

JVN [00:05:21] Yes.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:05:21] Correct. In the church. Whereas Omar Mateen at the Pulse nightclub, it was terrorism from the beginning.

JVN [00:05:27] The jump.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:05:28] Exactly. So there's a huge difference there, and here's why. If you look at the, we have a definition of do-, domestic terrorism, but not a prosecutorial process for that. Now, I will say this. There are federal statutes that allow us to charge these individuals with terrorism, but we've always chosen not to.

JVN [00:05:47] Why is that? And who would charge the statute? Is that like the District Attorney in the place where this happens? Is that the FBI who chooses to do those? Because OK. So in the case of like, let's say, Dylann Roof or Omar Mateen, so that the act of violence happens.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:06:01] Right.

JVN [00:06:02] Then the local police would be on the scene responding. But as they realize that it's like a huge issue, would they reach, immediately call in the FBI?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:06:09] Well, anytime you have an act of violence like that today and we think it might be an act of terrorism, the FBI has jurisdiction. The challenge with a Dylann Roof, because he's not attached to a foreign ideology or a foreign or terrorist organization, there's where it gets a little dicey. To answer your question about who would charge, if it were federal, it'd be the United States Attorney's office. But what happens is the state statutes take over and states can actually charge for terrorism, usually don't. But that's what, who would enact these, the prosecution.

JVN [00:06:44] So the dis-, the United States, who office?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:06:48] United State's Attorney's office. For example, Omar Mateen, United States Attorney's office steps in. He gets charged with terrorism federally. He could also be charged with whatever murder statutes or terrorism statutes they have in terms of the state of Florida.

JVN [00:07:01] So who runs the United States Attorney's office now? Isn't that, was that? 'Cause is that, would that be Barr? Is it, is he, is that the Justice Department? Is he the top of that?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:07:09] It would be the Justice Department. And every state has United States Attorney's office. Then you have districts.

JVN [00:07:14] OK. So basically. So what just happened in Texas, like a few weeks ago.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:07:21] In El Paso.

JVN [00:07:21] In El Paso, the, so basically, William Barr would be the one who would decide, would, he would decide if this is going to be labeled as domestic terrorism or?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:07:31] The Justice Department would decide whether or not they could charge for terrorism.

JVN [00:07:34] Right.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:07:35] And what will typically happen is they won't. They'll charge for murder. They'll put as many statues as they can on the books for the charge. But typically, you don't see the "T" word being used, as in "terrorism", when they actually go through with it.

JVN [00:07:52] Now, oh my God, I got a lot of questions. OK, so what is the criteria, criteria for something to be considered terrorism?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:08:04] That's another interesting question. Believe it or not, with all the organizations that are charged with counterterrorism in the United States, there is not one universal definition.

JVN [00:08:15] Well, that seems like it would help.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:08:17] It would certainly help. The FBI has a different definition than the Department of Homeland Security has a different definition than some of the state laws. There is no one definition. So that's one of the problems.

JVN [00:08:31] So what's the, what's, how is terrorism versus the hate crime?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:08:35] Hate crimes are when you have protected groups of people, LGBTQ, religious individuals, elements like that. Terrorism, on the other hand, the broad definition that I always use for people to make it really simple, you need three things. You need an act of violence. You need a civilian that's being targeted. By civilian, I also mean police officers. That means someone who is not uniform military in a war environment. And you need a political ideology being put forward. Those three-

JVN [00:09:11] A political, not a religious.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:09:13] Political-.

JVN [00:09:14] Or any.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:09:15] So politically, I mean, it's a very broad umbrella here. That political motivation could be either in terms of race, religion, or what I call issue oriented groups, like what I call the anti-category.

JVN [00:09:26] Yeah. So how in the world could could a Dylann Roof or a Timothy McVeigh possibly not qualify under that?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:09:33] That's a great question. That's a great question.

JVN [00:09:36] Has there ever been a time where the United States Attorney's office labeled something murder, but the state wanted to call it terrorism?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:09:45] I would imagine probably so. We've seen a couple of instances recently where the state is decided it's terrorism immediately and they can do that. So El Paso, because, again, these statements made. The online presence. I believe, I hate to call it this, but sometimes they do a manifesto or any documents that are written.

JVN [00:10:07] Yeah.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:10:08] All those things combined give us enough to demonstrate that this is a ideologically motivated plot. In this case, based on race, he fits the category for terrorism. In my book.

JVN [00:10:19] So and, you know, I do think that there has been a really, that's been something that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her colleagues in the squad have done such a good job of is bringing light to this and really shining a light on this inconsistency in the way that justice is, you know, is served amongst mass acts or mass shootings, because that is, I think that that is a way that, the way, it is a way that, like privilege seeps into, kind of seeps in through the Sinclair medias of the world to make sure that, like, we always have to call white people something and then always call people of color something else. So I do think it's really good, at least in this case, is in light of El Paso, that we're calling that what it is, which is domestic terrorism. But I do have to just give a credit where it's due. I feel like that is a lot of the work that, like people have been doing to make sure that, like, we are talking openly about these things and calling them what they are. So that's good. So I have another question.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:11:18] OK.

JVN [00:11:18] Well, OK. Online radical-, OK, I'm writing down so many things. So. Well, actually, I have a different question. So backing up to like the policies and just in your opinion in your observation in your career, because you have had such an incredible one.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:11:39] Thank you.

JVN [00:11:40] What is it that? Like is it scarier than ever? Do I just feel like it's scarier than ever? Are we closer to making any meaningful gun control legislation? I mean, I have, I kind of, I think, you know, as I've experienced, like, you know, this swell of, you know, success and like, in greater visibility, like, I really have a lot of fear. Like, I, I, like security fear, just worrying about, you know, about people and what has led to I mean, obviously there is the Donald Trump of it all, so I, I guess I'm almost saying before I ans-, ask the question like I want like a not that response, but it's like what is, and I know that he's a part of it, but what is led to this? Why are we in this toxic soup?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:12:32] We're in this toxic soup because of a movement that's begun long ago. So I won't, well, to your first question, your fears are well-founded. And I'll just say this. When I used to be interviewed and asked what keeps me up at night, I would always hedge my bets on what I would say publicly because I didn't want people to be extremely alarmed and or concerned. And what I would have said then, but didn't, but say it now, are individuals who would attack children in schools or people in their houses of worship. And that's happening now. We've seen a, an uptick here in this activity based on something that's happened at long, or for quite some time. If you go to and I don't suggest you do this, if you go to any of the extremist websites, you'll see that one of their primary issues is immigration. Several years ago, many of them had on their websites even a ticking clock down to the year 2050 when America would become a minority majority, that was the concern. It's been updated now to, I believe, 2045, when then Donald Trump, before he became president, comes out of the gate with his announcement he's going to run. What's the first thing he does? He attacks immigration. So there you have the dog whistle and the green light to all those groups who are out there saying we need to make sure we're not

replaced. And what's driving this is this incredible theory called "replacement theory", where they believe the white race in America is going to be replaced by ethnic and religious minorities and they have to stop it. They've engaged in a couple of different things. Number one is called accelerationism. So accelerationism is something whereby they believe they have to come out of the gate, meaning white males, mostly, to accelerate their response to this threat. Because they don't want to be eliminated as a race. And so now you're seeing actions where they're taking on ethnic and religious minorities and unfortunately, aggressively in a way of thinking that they can eliminate people. And it's a whole eliminationism theory is one of eliminating ethnic and religious minorities by killing them.

JVN [00:14:44] You know. Oh, my God, we got to take a break. We're going to be right back with more Dr. Erroll Southers right after the break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious", this is Jonathan Van Ness, we have Dr. Erroll Southers. OK. So I cannot tell you how many times in a week I think about the law of scarcity, the law of abundance versus scarcity. You know? It's like it's such a, like, primal animal kind of thing where it's like, oh, my gosh. Like it's like if you're really hungry and you only have, like, you know, two dollars. Right? And you go to Taco Bell to get like, your chicken soft shell tacos. And it's like you and your friend. And they're eating it too quickly. But that's not, life isn't going to Taco Bell when you have two dollars. Like there's actually enough room for all of us, honey, it is not, this freedom and this like, you know, pursuit of happiness is an abundant pie. This is not actually two softshell tacos from Tower-, or from Taco Bell on our last 1.99, domestic terrorists. So you know it's the law, so why do we, it's the law of scarcity that's driving this. Like this belief that there is not enough to go around.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:15:59] Exactly. And they believe it's a zero sum game. So for example, when groups like Black Lives Matter came out, the pushback on that was all zero sum thinking. They were, they were interpreting that as only black lives matter.

JVN [00:16:12] Right.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:16:12] And it wasn't that at all. It was just say Black Lives Matter too. So to them, you're saying black lives matter and white lives don't.

JVN [00:16:19] Right.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:16:20] And you're right. That's exactly how they interpret everything. Everything, zero-sum. And they drive on that.

JVN [00:16:25] And not taking like into context really like the fact that this country was, 'cause really to me, like Black Lives Matter is the fact that the United States was built on slave labor. And it was a lot of the the things that I mean, Wall Street, the fact that, like people of color couldn't vote. And then even when they could vote, it was like the three fifths thing for so long. And then it was only like men of color, like women couldn't vote until like 1919. So, yeah, it's 1919, which when you think about the fact that women couldn't vote till 1919, like, that's crazy.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:17:00] Right.

JVN [00:17:00] Like our country was, we, in 1776-1781. I mean, women not having their vote. There, and so there's this other thing that Eckhart Tolle talks about, which is like the pain body of like any group of people that share something so like they're would be like a pain body of like women. There would be a pain body of like gay people. There's like a pain body of like every group of people. Right.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:17:20] Right.

JVN [00:17:21] So to me, like Black Lives Matter is more just like the fact that we have only really ever been taught and fed this, you know, incorrect racist power dynamic that this country was founded on. And actually, Tina Knowles talks about it in, in that one clip of, of, of Solange in "A Seat at the Table" when she's like, we've only ever been taught this, like, why would you be mad at someone wanting to celebrate their, like the beauty of black people, honey? Like there's enough beauty for everyone to celebrate themselves. And just because someone is celebrating one thing doesn't invalidate like the celebration of your thing.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:17:55] Exactly.

JVN [00:17:55] And really, like so really, it's the acknowledging that this country was founded on a deeply racist slave trade. And it took a whole civil war to break that up. That took like a hundred years. And then that slave trade was replaced with a fundamentally racist federal system that took like another hundred years of oppression to get rid of. And we're still dealing with the struggle, the fact-. And I think that it's like, I know as a white person that, like, one thing that we really don't like is having to sit with guilt. Like, my parents were not into, honey, they could dish it, but they can't take it. And that is such a thing that we have to be able to. And it doesn't mean that we're like, you just have to acknowledge what is.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:18:37] Right.

JVN [00:18:37] And like, I don't understand why that's such a problem for people in this, well, extremists.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:18:46] Yeah. Yeah. Well.

JVN [00:18:47] Why is it such a problem for extremists?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:18:50] Because they have a whole different way of thinking that, it's not just being extreme, it's that they're intolerant. And that's what drives them mostly. They're intolerant of another race, they're intolerant of another religion. They're intolerant of people that they consider the other. I talk about otherism quite often. And in, back to your original questions of, you know, why don't we ever address domestic terrorism the way it really is? Because we've always had this notion in our system of counterterrorism that dealt with the other. Otherism, coming from another country, professing another religion, another type of way of living. And so that's how we've framed it. So counterterrorism has always dealt with otherism. Now that it's come home, in the fact that it's homegrown. We've been in denial for quite some time. And now that the data is just overwhelming.

JVN [00:19:46] And that actually really makes sense. And it brings up a point that if American counterintelligence is founded on otherism, yet we are a melting pot of people from all over the world of different races, of different experiences. How can you otherism something that is in and of itself everything?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:20:04] Right.

JVN [00:20:04] Like you have to have an all encompassing view of the threats and the wider systems at play here to really understand that. So it's almost like the counterterrorism community, like misidentifying, well just had a blind spot for the fact that we are, America is all-encompassing. We are a melting pot of, you know, a gorgeous mixture of people from all sorts of different backgrounds. OK, so I have another question. How do we diffuse and de-escalate extremism? And, you know, we, you've heard about what happens to like, children that survive these, like

extremist camps in the Middle East and what, how, how do we diffuse people who have been subjected to this extremist rhetoric and this extremist culture? Like how do, like how do extremists heal? How do we help extremists, like, gain tolerance? Like is there anything? Like what has, is there any like FBI cute program where like there on Twitter, like looking up like all the fucked up people and they're like hun, like because, because I have to believe that, and I hope this isn't naive, but I have to believe that, like, everyone is capable of healing. And I don't think that anyone really wants to, like, be someone killing people. And I can't imagine, I would believe that people really don't want to do that in their heart of hearts and that they've been like brainwashed and they themselves have been hijacked by like a false ideology system themselves. Is there anything going on to help, like, diffuse these fucking extremists?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:21:26] I am so glad you asked that. I belong to an organization called Life After Hate. I'm on their board. Life After Hate. And I want you to brace yourself. It's an organization founded on former neo-Nazis and white supremacists. I'm on their board and we work with those individuals that want to come out of those movements. Now, we don't just deal with white nationalists and white supremacists. We also deal with jihadists. And we have people on our board that used to be jihadists. And there's three elements that go into someone becoming an extremist. You've got an alienated individual. You've got a legitimizing ideology that's usually furthered by some act of radicalization. And then you've got this enabling community. That last element, that community is what we can affect the most. Their immediate community is their family. So as we offer counseling and services to these individuals who want to come out, we work very closely with their families to get them on board, to make them understand that this is incorrect thinking. The most important thing, Jonathan, when you want to bring people out of those movements is having them first divorce themselves from violence. If we can get them to stop thinking violently, that's a win. We may not be able to take them totally away from the ideology, but if we can do that much, it's a win because now society is safer. The ultimate win is when they can divorce themselves from violence and agree that the ideology is not appropriate. It's a win-win. We have, for example, Dylann Roof did what he did because he started doing research on black on white crime. And the Google algorithm directed him toward some misinformation that supported his belief. Then he went to the church and he acted out. We now have a platform that we work with at Life After Hate called Redirect. So you go to your computer one day, you sit down and type, "I want to join the Ku Klux Klan". Redirect will take you to another site that says, and start asking you questions. Why do you want to join the Klan? What is it you think they're going to do for you? Why do you feel that they're necessary? And as you go through those questions, you now start to back off and say, hmm. And it'll even to redirect you to other places that suggest the Klan is not the thing to join. We've had interactions now with Redirect for the past year. We've had 320,000 users that have come online to go to sites seeking extremist organizations and we redirected them to some other options.

JVN [00:23:52] How many?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:23:53] 320,000.

JVN [00:23:56] Fucking Christ. So. Wow. OK. So I wrote down "Race Bias in Tech", which we've covered a little bit here in, in "Getting Curious". But it's interesting, slash terrifying that like that that is, that someone would be able to research black on white crime and it would go to like a fake news, like that is just noting the terror of that and how scary that is. Then that made me go to, where is domestic terrorism thriving? Is one question. My other question is. And I think I already know the answer to this, so I'll just say it's like, you know, if, if you know someone who is, who is in one of these, like, radicalize things, like you can't really go in and save someone, like they have to want to come out in the first place. Right?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:24:43] They certainly do.

JVN [00:24:44] Yeah.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:24:44] Yeah. They, they have to want to do that. And I'll also give you this analogy. It is much like substance abusers or alcoholism. They'll start and stop. They'll decide I want to do it, nah, I'm not really sure. And then they'll come out for a while and they may go back. It's a process. And so there's a patience element here that's really important in dealing with them and having them understand they can do it.

JVN [00:25:10] Is there a mental health link here?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:25:12] There may be. It's funny you should ask, because we're not the only country with this problem.

JVN [00:25:17] Right.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:25:17] I work in France and, and teach there as well on their homegrown issue. And they're treating this issue as a health problem. So they sit down not just with counterterrorism and intelligence people. They sit down with psychiatrists, psychologists. They're studying this to see how, in fact, they can work with those radicalized individuals. They have a population there, their radicalized population in France, their estimates are as high as 30 and 40 percent of those radicalized people have mental health issues.

JVN [00:25:48] So where is domestic terrorism thriving the most in America?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:25:54] I guess the question would be, where is it not?

JVN [00:25:58] Wow.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:25:59] Because what you're seeing now are people that have been given the OK to be public. This didn't just start. These people have lived, worked, played, been amongst us forever. And now there's just a coming out. There's an OK of quote unquote, not being "politically correct". And if I want to use the N-word in public, I'll do it. You know, if I want to challenge you as you're trying to buy your, your coffee, I'll do it because I can. So unfortunately, it's thriving. But I will say this. It is a very small percentage of the American population. It's just that they're getting a lot of press. They want us to believe the numbers are much larger than they are. And they use that to recruit. So it is, unfortunately, everywhere. But I think there are a lot more of us than them. And that's going to be the counterbalance to this entire challenge.

JVN [00:26:52] 'Kay, we're going to take a really quick break. And then were going to be back with more of Dr. Erroll Southers right after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious", this is Jonathan Van Ness, we have Dr. Erroll Southers. OK, so back to the defuse and de-escalate. So on a macro policy level, we do have some people that are, you know, working to de-escalate, working to research this. If that's something that you're interested in or want to become more involved in. You have Life After Hate. Is there other things that are interesting? Are, is there any like American funded, like American government funded studies going on like that? Like is it on the Trump administration's radar? I mean, he had that whole, like thing with finding people on both sides. Like, do you think that anyone in the administration at this point is really, do you think anyone cares? Do you think they take any responsibility for the toxic soup that we're in?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:27:49] Well, I'll answer your question with what they did when they came into office. The first thing they wanted to do is take a move, a strategy put forth by the

Obama administration called Countering Violent Extremism, CVE. They want to change that to countering radical Islamists. So, so there in you have, you have a clue right away.

JVN [00:28:10] And it is coming in on a, on a, on an Islamophobic.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:28:13] Right.

JVN [00:28:14] Yeah.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:28:14] Right. They wrote a National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America. And in that document, their priorities were foreign terrorist organizations and those other organizations that are backed by Iran. So, again, we're not talking about anything that we're dealing with today.

JVN [00:28:31] That's also so shortsighted because Iran is a lot of not who, I mean, if you're, if I'm in Yemen, I'm scared of Iran.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:28:41] Right.

JVN [00:28:42] OK, I'm much more scared of other extremist threats posed from like post-ISIS world, which is not really funded as much by that, that's more of like a, well Syria and Iran never-. But I don't really think that's like a-, whatever.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:28:57] Right.

JVN [00:28:57] But wait. OK. So post 2017, I don't, this is like an intense statistics. I don't know if you have it because it's a question like, of our mass shootings in America post-2017, I wonder how many have been conducted by white people vs. anyone who has like an Islamic ideology. Because I know Pulse was in 2016. So that was before Trump came in. But I remember there was like San Bernardino.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:29:23] Right.

JVN [00:29:23] That's the only one I can think of that was a mass shooting where we had someone who was from, that had like any sort of like Islamic affiliation.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:29:32] Yeah, there have been some. I'll say this, of the, instead of mass shootings, I'll put it into extremists category. Last year, 2018, we had over 80 incidents of extremist murders, all of them were committed by right wing extremists.

JVN [00:29:54] Mmmm.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:29:55] So that kind of gives you the picture.

JVN [00:29:57] So there is no domestic, or so there is no Islamic link to murders in America last year.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:30:01] 2018 of the extremist violence incidents we had, where there were murders involved. There were none.

JVN [00:30:07] We have to, that is a really, that is like an isolated link that we need to like or not like, that's a really, that's not isolated. I just want that link from this episode of the podcast because that is crazy. In 2018.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:30:17] Yeah.

JVN [00:30:18] Not one extremist.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:30:20] All linked to right wing. And in my data comes from, I worked very closely here in L.A. with the ADL. They do a fantastic-.

JVN [00:30:26] What's ADL?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:30:27] The Anti-Defamation League.

JVN [00:30:28] Of course. I knew that. I just made sure that you as a lifelong, you know, public servant and, you know, counter-terrorism expert, make sure that, you know, you weren't throwing around any sort of, you know, algor-, antonyms that, you know, I was just making sure you're on your toes. You are.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:30:42] OK.

JVN [00:30:42] So yay. Strike that from the record. I don't want anyone to know that I didn't know what that stood for. Thank you so much. Great. So how do we-? And if you're scared about this, cause I also am scared about this. Like, what do we do if we, because I'm sure you've like, interviewed people who have survived mass shootings. I'm sure you've like, like I remember this one time this guy was telling me about this, like, earthquake thing where it's like this thing that they wrote in Japan about like people who do survive massive earthquakes and people who don't, and like how you're not supposed to get under that desk because, like, the desk actually smashes you and you're supposed to get in like the pocket of safety next to a bigger desk so that if the roof collapses, like it falls on the desk and then you're it makes like a little triangle. It makes a little pocket, like you're not supposed to be under the desk. So what's that for, like like if we are in the wrong place at the wrong time, how do we, like what are the, how can we try to put ourselves in the best case of survival?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:31:34] Well, it's interesting you should ask that. And I hope I don't frighten you with some of the research we're doing. I'm involved in a research project now in the second year of a three year project with the National Science Foundation. And we're doing a project on attributes of building design and human behavior in response to an active shooter in a school or an office. So what we're doing, Jonathan, is were, we've created an office environment and a school environment, then we've created an enhanced office and an enhanced school environment. We're working with the Institute for Creative Technologies at USC in our School of Engineering. And we're altering the building design so that you could intuitively shelter in place or escape faster because the way that building is built. The sad thing is that we actually have to do that kind of research. So to answer your question, obviously, you know, run, hide, fight. Those things-.

JVN [00:32:29] See, that's not obvious to me.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:32:30] Yeah.

JVN [00:32:30] Run, hide, fight. That's like our new stop, drop, roll.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:32:34] Exactly. That's exactly what it is. And-.

JVN [00:32:36] Run, hide, fight. So you're minding your own business. You're in the gym, because I always have this daydream if I was in a mass shooting, honey, I would try to find a big thing to throw through the windows so that I could get out the first floor window.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:32:48] Smart.

JVN [00:32:48] Because I'm always, like, scared about, like, where's the door?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:32:50] Right.

JVN [00:32:50] So but if you're running, what if you run towards the violence accidentally?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:32:54] That can happen. Hopefully you won't because you'll hear that noise.

JVN [00:32:58] So do you need to pause for just two seconds to become, like, to orient yourself or do you need to more orient-? Because I always feel like I never want to stand too much in the middle of a crowd. Like, I kind of want to be on the periphery so that if I do need to, like, get the fuck out of somewhere fast. I also think about, like, wearing heels too much to crowds. 'Cause like, if I need to be able to, like, run really quickly. Like, I don't want to be in like a stiletto. Is that paranoid or do you think that's smart?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:33:23] It's not paranoid. I, I've talked to many people today whose clothing choices have been made on where they're going to go and the number of people that are there. You're right to pause-, you will pause automatically because most people that are not trained to understand or around gunfire, aren't sure what it is. And they will pause because the last thing they want to believe is: it's gunfire. So they'll say, is that gunfire? Is that a car backfiring? Is it firecracker?

JVN [00:33:50] Is a gunshot pretty like-?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:33:53] It doesn't sound like it does in the movies. I'll just say that. It really doesn't. Of course, it depends on if you're indoors or outdoors. It depends on the caliber of weapon. But it doesn't sound like what you think it does, and if you're not used to it, you are going to pause to say, what is that? Is it what I think it is? There's your two seconds.

JVN [00:34:12] And then so you're, it's kind of you need to be more aware of like where your exits are and what your exit strategy would be like, before-. Because if you're thinking about what your exit strategy is like when you're in the middle of the emergency, it's, it could potentially be too late.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:34:24] Absolutely. And I'll tell you, for example, I go to the movies. I, my family, we sit on the end of a row. We know where the exit is. I'm just used to doing that. You're smart to do that. When I go to a hotel and I travel a lot, I'll walk to the end of the hall, open that exit door to see what's that hallway look like? Is it a storeroom for all the things they can't put in a hotel or can I really go down the stairs? So those are things that people should do. I don't think it's paranoid. I think it's appropriate.

JVN [00:34:53] OK, so how about this? This could be really fucking controversial, but I'm going to say it. What if you're feeling a little Kamala Harris of it all and you're like, I'm a little scared because like, as someone who is very queer, very visible, I'm, like gun control. I'm really passionate about it. I feel like we need better gun control. I know that, like Chicago, Illinois has tried to enacted some gun control. And I know that we see from the violence within Chicago that

a lot of these guns come from Wisconsin. They come from Indiana. They come from Missouri. They come from Michigan. They come from surrounding places with looser gun control that have Republican backed state legislatures that enable this system of violence to go on and a reason, and a big reason why it is such a big problem in Chicago is because, I'm going a little off course here, but I'm going to come back to it. But it's like you have like white, white state legislatures and a lot of white people that make a lot of money from the guns that get bought and sold in Illinois, in Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio. And so there's a lot of people getting rich there. And because so many people that get killed are people of color, it de-incentivizes anyone from wanting to make any meaningful moves beyond the people very much within Chicago. So I think both people of color and white people within Chicago want meaningful gun control. And it's really sad that this is the state of like, that's like, that is a whole thing like that is like, that is like a microclimate of modern racism that has, like, enabled it to get as far as it has. That's one thing. The second thing in the Kamala Harris of it all is I am so fucking scared. I, and I am someone who, I follow Moms Demand. I follow Every Town. And I know that by being a gun owner, it increases your chances of suicide. It increases your chances of, of, if you have children in your house, like, that's a big problem. That's a big concern. But like, I kind of want an AK-47, like in a locked thing up above my front door. Like, what if someone comes to my fucking front door? Like, I don't have two exits from my house. Like, I kind of like, I am fucking scared. Like, do I need, like, body armor head-to-toe? Or do I need a fucking helmet? Like I'm fucking scared.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:36:59] OK. So let me work through this. The first thing I'm going to say is-

JVN [00:37:02] Or at least a handgun. I get no one needs an AK-47s, but what about a handgun?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:05] So let me say this. And here's what I say to people who, and I have a lot of people who come to me to ask about buying a firearm. I used to be firearms instructor. And I'll say this. Two things. Number one, your house. In all my years of law enforcement and teaching, I have never met anyone who's defended their home with their firearm in my career.

JVN [00:37:24] I just saw this bitch do it on Twitter the other day, honey. These people broke into her house in Florida and she came out looking like Smokey the Bandit with her gun chasing these people down. She killed one of them.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:33] OK. And I'm not saying it can't happen, but I've never met anybody. The other thing I also-

JVN [00:37:35] And you met a lot of people.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:36] I have.

JVN [00:37:37] OK.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:37] The other thing I'll say in terms of burglary, if someone-

JVN [00:37:42] You're going to fuck yourself up faster than them?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:44] But I'll say this. I've never met anyone whose home has been burglarized who owns a dog. So let me just go back and go-

JVN [00:37:51] What about cats? Because I got four of those.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:54] Not too intimidating.

JVN [00:37:55] Damn it!

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:37:56] But we can't, to all your questions about gun control. Let me just tell you how political will can work. I don't know if you're familiar with the Mulford Act. So the reason we don't have open carry in California of rifles and shotguns is because there's something called a Mulford Act. So in 1967, the Black Panther Party decided to arm themselves. They did their homework. They found out you could carry a loaded rifle or shotgun in public because they decided that the police were no longer going to brutalize African-Americans. They would show up on traffic stops, tell the person stopped by the police. We're here. You only have to show him your I.D. Tell him your name. Tell him your address. Nothing else. And if anything happens, we're here to watch. And they would stand there, black leather jackets, black berets, shotguns and rifles, watching the traffic stop. Extremely intimidating. That year, two things happen. The FBI labels the Black Panther Party a domestic terrorist organization. And Mr. Mulford, who was an assemblyman in the California assembly, went to Governor Reagan and said, we can't have this. They decide to propose the Mulford Act. I happened to meet Bobby Seale, who with Huey Newton, was one of the original founders of the Black Panther Party. I have a photograph at home of Bobby Seale walking into the state capital of Sacramento with his documents and his partners got a shotgun at Port Arms with a black leather jacket. They're going in to defend why they can continue to do that. That day in one afternoon, California enacted the Mulford Act, taking away the ability for people to carry loaded rifles and shotguns in public. And that bill was backed by the NRA. So we can't have the political will when certain people decide to arm themselves in public and they decide they're not going to stand for it.

JVN [00:39:55] That makes me feel worse. Like so. Like that makes me feel worse, like that's in like. So when people of color, like, really exercise the Second Amendment, it's not, it's not acceptable with literally Ronald fucking Reagan.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:40:12] Mmhmm.

JVN [00:40:14] But yet we've had white people blowing us away by the dozens.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:40:20] And I've got individuals-.

JVN [00:40:21] Hundreds of thousands.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:40:22] I see people in, I see individuals across America looking like they're in the middle of Fallujah walking into Wal-Mart to buy beer with vests and assault rifles and boots. And it just, it's absolutely unacceptable and unnecessary. But I just want to, I wanted to articulate the Mulford Act to say, we can have the political will when a demographic decides to arm themselves that we're uncomfortable with.

JVN [00:40:52] OK. OK. And we are uncomfortable with white people arming themselves now too.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:40:55] I would hope so. But unfortunately, the political will is not there.

JVN [00:41:00] Well, because it's money.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:41:01] And to your, and to your point, states that allow me to go in and buy that weapon and bring it back here. Let me just tell you that there is, there is a silver lining after the El Paso shooting in August. There were-

JVN [00:41:13] They're going to start manufacturing.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:41:14] Well, well, there were 27 arrests after that before September 1st of people who, someone called either because of what they said, what they did, something they had online. They went out and arrested 27 people. They used the state's extreme risk protection orders, take their weapon, get them to mental health facilities that they needed. And they thwarted over two dozen plots by doing that. The FBI in that timeframe, Jonathan, received 38,000 tips in one week after El Paso.

JVN [00:41:48] Well, let's keep talking. Keep, you know, keep share-. If you, if you see something, if you feel something, I mean, definitely let people know unless you're an overly nervous fucking white person in a parking lot and then shut the fuck up. You know, if it's just like someone having dinner or whatever. So then here's the other thing. So the surviving mass stuff. So run, hide, fight. Make sure that you, we're gonna, if you have like an extra seven minutes, I would like to just go a little bit longer because I think this is important. So, like the run, I understand, like, you know, kind of we need to basically know where our exits are and know what our escape plan is in any given building at any given time. If you're thinking about what your exit plan is in the middle of an emergency, it could potentially be too late. So that is the caveat with the run. So we always want to know where, be aware of aware of where we are. The hide, I understand hide. The fight is just like what? We just use like-? And so basically it's like don't arm yourself is what I'm hearing you saying. Like, if you're-

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:42:46] I'm not say-, I'm saying obviously, you know, firearms and firearms skills, it's just that, it's a skill. And I know on TV, you know, they're able to shoot a gun out of someone's hand. That doesn't happen. And most people go out and buy a firearm. They'll go to the range a couple of times. They put it at home in their nightstand or their desk drawer, and they never touch it again. They don't clean it. They don't practice. When I was on SWAT, I used to shoot almost every week, to sort of, to remain proficient. That's the level of skill you need. And you will still miss. So my biggest concern when I was in law enforcement was not getting shot by a suspect, it was getting shot by some homeowner when I go out to their house on a prowler call and I'm in the back yard in a dark blue uniform at night, they've got their weapon. They've forgot they called us.

JVN [00:43:35] Yeah.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:43:35] And it's me. So I'm saying arming yourself unless you going to maintain a level of proficiency is not a good idea.

JVN [00:43:43] And I don't have time to be proficient in that. And I'm too fucking scared. What if one of my cats gets it?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:43:47] Right. And it's, it's not something that you-.

JVN [00:43:49] And it's not a joke. But I was, you know what I was saying.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:43:50] And it's not, it's not a tool you're going to take out in public. So that's, that's not my first.

JVN [00:43:55] So is it more just like, OK, so I have this other daydream where I just need to have like an escape ladder out like my, my bedroom window so that if someone does come in my front door, like I just have like, I could just do like a repelling thing out my bedroom window. I do have that daydream.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:44:06] OK.

JVN [00:44:06] Or maybe like throwing like star, like with those like, like, or like a bat or something, like what's good ways? How can people-? Do you think a self-defense course is good for if you're going to do run, hide, fight?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:44:16] You know, anything that you are going to engage in is going to give you a certain level of confidence is always good. I would never say it's not a good idea, but. Protecting your home starts with security, obviously, you know, locks, perhaps close circuit TV cameras, which, which I have. I can, I can look at the outside of my house from my phone anywhere in the world when I'm, I'm not there, you know, signage that says you've got a certain alarm company protecting it. Signage, that says you've got a dog.

JVN [00:44:45] Do you like a bat under your bed or something?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:44:49] If you're prepared to use something like that, but I'm hoping that-.

JVN [00:44:51] I'll use the shit out of a bat. I feel like I could use the shit out of a bat. If someone's really, like, up in bed-, you know, if it's really-, I'll use the bat.

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:44:58] But I'm hoping that you're going to do things that will have someone not come in your house.

JVN [00:45:02] OK, Ok, that's smart. So then as we're winding up. Have you ever, like, just heard like a like, oh, that's smart. Like someone like just like whether they're like preventing something or they like survived something like that was like a good plan. Like they had like the scissors right there, like pow. Like is there any good things that we can keep in mind if we do, if we're in the, if you're in an emergency situation-. Cause OK, so in "Erin Brockovich", like I learned this one time that like if you're, if your car is filling up with water and you drive it into a lake, you know, you got to wait, wait until it fills up with water, like to, like because if you do it at the beginning, like all the water rushes in, you guys heard that, right? Have you ever heard that?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:45:39] No.

JVN [00:45:39] OK, well, what about that with surviving things? What do you remember?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:45:42] I'll, I'll only say this. Your, people will do what they've been trained to do when that level of stress hits that peak. So if you haven't trained to do it, you're not going to respond that way. If you've trained yourself that when that threat happens, you're going to run, you'll do it.

JVN [00:46:00] How do we train ourselves?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:46:01] Well, I mean, if it's something you've practiced. So, for example, we've got kids now in K through 12 schools going through active shooter drills, which will, I work with a group, by the way, called The Hero in You and we're educating three to nine year olds on all kinds of security and emergency preparedness. We don't call it active shooters.

We call them active threats. And those kids now know that an active threat or a fire drill or an earthquake drill is all the same. And they're so used to it's become routine. They're not afraid. They've got a confidence level. Someone comes in that's a stranger, that's, that's a danger to them, they all know what to do because they've done it every single month. So if you're in your house, something you've done repeatedly, that's what you're gonna to divert to physiologically, because that's what we do. And so if you haven't trained for it, you're never going to do something for the first time when your stress level has reached the point where it's unprecedented in that moment of fear. It's just not going to work.

JVN [00:46:56] So. OK. Then last question. So I think that until you've had, like, a violent something like this, like touch your life, I think it would be hard for people to really understand, like, why it affects you and like and why you really should be like a gun control voter, why you really should be someone who is actively engaged in the political process and like, really why we should never be saying like, oh, I don't read the news because it stresses me out and makes me feel bad, like everyone needs to really be like tuning in and opening up and opening their eyes to like what's going on so that we can get the democratic will who like going on. So. You know, going into 2020, considering the toxic soup that we're in. What do you say to people in your, you've been a lifetime public safety servant. You've worked for so many different people, like you want to keep people safe. I can only assume that you would have so many fears and anxieties around me, you know, that, in several direction that the country is headed in. So how do you think we can really be all allies for like a safer America?

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:47:54] I think that the most important thing is to educate yourself and be aware of what's going on. I am in the process now of actually touring, and I, and I hate to say this, but it's true. I'm touring, giving talks on homegrown violent extremism and protecting houses of worship. People are astounded when I give them statistics and data on how often it's happening, what these groups look like, how they might be in their backyard. Make yourself aware. And as we'd spoke earlier, if it doesn't look right, doesn't sound right, let someone know. Most of the times when plots are thwarted by public safety and law enforcement, it's because someone's called. They either know them, read about them, they've heard something and, and leave it to those professionals to be professional enough that if they contact that person, then it's unfounded. They'll talk their way through it to say, hey, this is what we heard. This is why we're here and we're talking to you because they had a concern. Don't hesitate to call. The best protection we have in this country is each other.

JVN [00:48:56] Wow. Thank you so much, Dr. Erroll Southers, for your work and your advocacy. I appreciate your time so much and thanks for coming on "Getting Curious".

DR. ERROLL SOUTHERS [00:49:02] Thank you. It's a pleasure being here.

JVN [00:49:06] You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Dr. Erroll Southers. You'll find links to his work in the episode description of wherever you're listening to the show on. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @curiouswithjvn. Our theme music as "Freak" by Quin. Thank you so much for her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend and then show them how to subscribe because, honey, sometimes it sound as easy as it looks. "Getting Curious" is produced by me, Julie Carrillo, Rae Ellis, Harry Nelson, Cody Ziglar and Colin Anderson, and special guest booking by Mary O'Hara. Who has a great book called "Project Twist It". She was our Brexit person. Get that book. Tweet about it. And she's coming on the show again soon 'cause we have to hear about Boris and everything that's going on over there. Good god.