Episode 10: Special episode with Sarah Crane

transcript

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:02

What do we mean by the upstander ripple effect?

**Werner Coppel** 00:06

Stand up against hate and prejudice, even if it does not affect you.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:13

From moral dilemmas in today's headlines... upstanders who rose for justice, and stories of survival

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:19

Be prepared to walk away from this conversation inspired and motivated. Hello everyone. I'm Kevin Aldridge

**Jackie Congedo** 00:29

and I'm Jackie Congedo, and welcome to the upstander ripple effect. And we are in Episode 10, where our theme this week is going to focus on resilience. It's kind of hard to believe we're 10 episodes in already almost

**Jackie Congedo** 00:42

Almost a year of doing these. And thanks to everybody who's been listening along and watching, the theme of resilience is, I think, an appropriate theme for the times that we're living in, and for this month in particular, we have a lot to talk about and unpack right off the top, related to current events and sort of thinking about how we can look at these things through the lens of history. We have so much in fact, to talk about today that the fact that there were actual Neo Nazis marching, you know, right outside Lincoln Heights on an overpass over I 75 is not the first thing we're going to talk about today, but we are going to get there. I think, you know, we wanted to start with sort of a broader conversation, because in the last few weeks certainly more prominently, but I think we've seen this conversation bubbling up in social media feeds and over dinner tables and in less formal places. But certainly in the last couple of weeks, I think there has been more of a mainstream conversation happening around parallels to the 1930s in Germany, you know, making comparisons between what we're seeing now in our sort of federal government and and the rise of sort of the Nazi regime to power, Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s so that's not my endorsement of that comparison. That is just a fact that that is a comparison that's being made, right and more and more so in more formal sort of establishment circles. I think, you know, if we, if we think just about the state of the state address in Illinois, a number of weeks ago, Governor Pritzker really centering this in his State of the State address, I should also mention, by the way, that we're, we're joined here by the incredible, indomitable Dr Sarah crane, who is very proudly our Scholar in Residence at the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. It's a partnership with the University of Cincinnati, where Sarah we get Sarah 20% of her time, 80% of her time she's at the at UC teaching the future generations about Holocaust and genocide studies. But I wanted Sarah to join for this conversation because of her perspective on the history. Because, you know, as we, as we approach these conversations, it's important to stay grounded in the facts. But anyway, before, before we get into that, I just want to kind of frame it using what Governor Pritzker had to say a couple of weeks ago in his State of the State. So, you know, he he was one of the families. His family was one of the families that came together to build the Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie. This was after the sort of failed March of Neo Nazis in Skokie. And, you know, he talks about how, in the wake of that, you know, there were, you know, that, essentially, he was grateful that the prospect of Nazis marching in their streets spurred the survivors and other Skokie residents to act. They joined together to form the Holocaust Memorial Foundation. Built the first Illinois Holocaust Museum in a storefront 1981 and then he goes on to say, "I do not invoke the specter of Nazis lightly, but I know the history intimately, and have spent more time than probably anyone in this room with people who survived the Holocaust. Here's what I've learned, the root that tears apart your house's foundation begins as a seed, a seed of distrust and hate and blame. That seed grew into a dictatorship in Europe a lifetime ago didn't arrive overnight or that grew into a dictatorship. It started with everyday Germans mad about inflation and looking for someone to blame. I'm watching with a foreboding dread what is happening in our country right now." And then he goes on to make a number of sort of more specific comparisons. And he says, "If you think I'm overreacting and sounding the alarm too soon, consider this, it took the Nazis one month, three weeks, two days, eight hours and 40 minutes to dismantle a constitutional republic. All I'm saying is, when the five alarm fire starts to burn, every good person better be ready to man a post with a bucket of water if you want to stop it from raging out of control." So. But of course, this very prominent comparison drew feedback, lots of conversation and questions and and has sparked some measure of controversy. You know, the chairman of Cook County's Republican Party, Sean Morrison, came out quickly in the aftermath and said that, you know, his address was was not merely an outline of fiscal policy, it was a deeply divisive and inflammatory speech that crossed a dangerous line. Rather than focusing on the pressing economic and social issues facing Illinois, our governor chose to use his platform to launch disgraceful attacks on President Donald Trump and his supporters, likening them to the rise of Nazism in 1930s Germany. Called it reckless and irresponsible rhetoric that's abhorrent and unbefitting of any elected official, let alone the governor of a major state. And he talks about how this rhetoric was basically vilifying half of Illinois' electorate, and that it detracted from and he went on to list all of these issues that people have really been facing hardships in Illinois in recent years and so, so we can talk a little bit in a minute about how that speech was written and sort of, you know, the calculus that went into making that comparison. But I think it's worth noting that as these, as these conversations are happening, you know? I know that there's a certain anxiety we all feel in just opening up the conversation about the conversation, because we don't want to be irresponsible, you know, and and I think we're trying to figure out in real time what is responsible and how do we have this conversation responsibly. But the one thing I know is that if the people around this table, steeped in the history, the actual history, are afraid and can't have a conversation about what is responsible and what isn't, then who can have it? So that's what we're going to do over the next little while. We're going to we're going to do our best to have a responsible conversation about these comparisons, about this conversation, what's instructive, what's not, what's inflammatory, what's not, what's helpful, what's grounded in facts, what's not. And we're probably going to get a lot wrong, but I think it's important that we model that we can talk about these things without being afraid. So that's my initial top, stepping off the soapbox for the moment, but Sarah, maybe I'd love to hear kind of how you've been thinking about this in recent weeks.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 07:27

Well, thank you. Nice to be here with you, Jackie, and with you, Kevin, thank you for having me. And I think what brings me to this conversation is, first of all, my students. I'm teaching a course on Holocaust memory this semester, and a couple of my students came up to me after class and basically said that they are seeing comparisons to 1930s Germany being made on social media and also on on their family dinner tables as well. And they wanted to know if I thought there was any kind of credence to it. And they really wanted a kind of cut and dry answer that I think, boiled down to one of my students told me, Should we be concerned? Should we be paying attention or not? Or is there still time, yeah, before we start kind of ringing these alarms, looking for the red lines, right? And my answer, that I'm still formulating, I think, is we're all talking about this is that, in my experience, direct historical comparisons do not necessarily help us understand, neither historical facts or the kind of present reality of what's happening now, because they tend to redirect the conversation where we're no longer talking about, how did Hitler come to power in the 1930s or what is actually happening right now? We get caught in these kind of inflammatory discussions about is Trump? Hitler is the US Nazi Germany. Are we currently seeing this resurgence of fascism? And I think a lot of people don't necessarily know what these words represent, and aren't as much concerned about what those words represent. They're a way of getting at something else, and I think that's where our conversation is going. In one aspect today is what work is this comparison doing? Is it trying to get us to pay attention and then, if so, just because, as Holocaust discourse has developed, especially in the United States, Nazism the Holocaust have become symbols of absolute evil. And to to evoke those is serious, as we've seen in this response to the State of the State address as well, but it's a response that can be used in some extent where it does get attention, but then again, attention towards what? And I think my understanding of the comparisons that are being made is that there is not necessarily this kind of determinism that we all need to fall into that, oh, things are happening. It's so much we don't fully understand. And as we're kind of processing that, there needs to be a moment where action happens. And I think we're being kind of called to action here. And what does that look like? And I think the answer to what does that look like is actually a very kind of American question, and here the kind of Nazi Germany comparison is not useful that gets us to pay attention. Democracy is not indestructible, but what American solutions do we have to that? I think this is where we can take this conversation productively.

**Jackie Congedo** 10:40

Yeah, right

**Kevin Aldridge** 10:41

yep, yeah, no. And I think that that has to be the focus is, is terms of what is productive and what is responsible. And I've always kind of felt like, you know, while I can understand why people might want to reach for that, particularly in these times, I always feel like those are such loaded terms, as you said, that it that it often distracts from the conversation that we need to be having, and I think there is a particularly unique American conversation that we need to be having right now about who we are as a country and what we represent, and what values we represent, and how what we see from the current administration is either consistent or inconsistent with those values. And I think that conversation is enough to be had for us here in America without having to reach to, you know, comparing what we're seeing currently with Nazi Germany. I mean, when you think about times being different, societies and cultures being different. It's not a direct apples to apples comparison to even sort of have that conversation about what Nazi Germany was back in the 1930s or or whatever, versus where we are in 2025 with the United States of America. The other thing I think that it does is, I think that it does alienate, you know, a good percentage of the American population when you when you say that, and automatically assume that those folks fall into that category of fascists and Nazis and things of that nature. You know, again, we'll be talking about this later, but I think there are a whole lot of people who supported the president who don't see themselves, like those individuals who are on that overpass on I 75 and it prevents us from having the larger conversation that we need to have, because now you've alienated, you've offended a whole group of people who need to be a part of that conversation, who are going to reject that outright. And so I think that's where we have to begin to get smarter about and more responsible about how we have this conversation, not saying that this doesn't need to be watch signs or things that we need to be conscious of or be aware of in our pursuit to continue to maintain our democracy. But I think there are other ways to have that conversation, I think, without being, you know, overly inflammatory.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:07

Yeah, it's interesting to look at, I mean, and that's exactly what the, you know, Republican response to Pritzker remarks focuses on, right is it disrespects the two and three quarter million hard working I'm going to get this wrong, illinoisians, illinoisians (someone please write us and tell us which one it is) who have voted for Trump, and trivializing, of course, alongside one of history's darkest chapters, because we know that Hitler Trump is not Hitler, right? The facts are, Trump is these. This is not the same person. We are not living in 1930s Germany. We're living in 2025 America. Those are facts, so you know. But the question becomes, to your point, Sarah, what are people who are making this comparison trying to say? What are they trying to get us to pay attention to? And I think it's interesting also to read a little bit. You know, these remarks that Pritzker shared in his State of the State have made have really been sort of debated since then, and unpacked since then, and Politico interviewed, I think his chief of staff, who wrote the speech, in conversation with the governor and and it's interesting. You know that she talks about how there was no pushback within Pritzker team about making this comparison, but she says there was a lot of conversation about it, like, quote, "How do we do this and how do we do it the right way? But I wouldn't say there was any hesitation. She said, This is the moment and the message that we need to deliver, and if it gets a lot of attention, we feel like people need to hear it." That's interesting, right? Because, because in that I hear, what are people trying to get us to see or to understand or to to look, look inward about? But I also hear, you know, if it gets a lot of attention, we feel like people need to hear it. Well, there's all kinds of things that we could say that would get a lot of attention, but that shouldn't define what we think people need to hear, right? And this goes back to what we were talking about before, around the discourse up here, actually, you know, in levels of power on both sides, right? Sure, sort of defining the narrative for everyone else. Or are there actually things bubbling up from everyday people, from students in your class, from folks at the dinner table who now feel like they have a language because they've been missing a language to talk about their concerns, and this is the language they're grasping onto, even if it is problem, inherently problematic, or inherently sort of, you know, not adequate or you know, or problem, yeah, problematic in many ways.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 15:55

Sure, and especially since Holocaust education spaces have been spaces to talk about democracy, to talk about human rights, human dignity, for also a large part of American history and American discourse, and the fact that terms from the Holocaust have colored our public debate before even this moment, we've had discussions about who is and who isn't, a fascist right for for for many years now. But I think what's interesting about about this moment is that not only are we using these words, but we're hopeful that the words are, are the reason that people will pay attention in a way that they haven't necessarily before, and our way of doing that is to reach farther back in the history, or to look at direct quotes of what Hitler said about what he promised to Germany, and what he... and the kind of scapegoating that he did do for kind of the reasons why Germany has not had the time in the sun, as he used to say, that they aren't, that the country doesn't deserve. And I mean, and this is how I teach Nazi Germany, we talk about Hitler's campaign promises. We talk about how he constructed who belonged to the national community, and who didn't?

**Jackie Congedo** 15:55

Should we just mention real quick what his campaign promises were? Sure, I think it's important. So, you know, this is a piece that was written Timothy Ryback in the Atlantic on January 8. And it talks about, literally, it is just a telling of the history of Hitler's rise to power and the dismantling of German democracy of the Weimar Republic at the time through constitutional means, right? Which, again we were talking about how American democracy has a 200 year, two century history. The Weimar Republic was a fragile, very new, nascent idea that was, in some ways, sort of put on post World War I Germans. It was not an organic principle that Germans, you know, fought for, necessarily.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 18:15

There was a German intellectual tradition that would support these ideas, but it was not the only one, and it was not the one that had prominently been in power.

**Jackie Congedo** 18:23

Right. So there are some significant differences. But when we talk about campaign promises, you know, Timothy Ryback points out in this piece that right after Hitler was was named Chancellor, he outlined his plans for expunging key government officials, filling their positions with loyalists. These are these are his words, Ryback's, words that I'm quoting, "At this point he turned to his main agenda item, the empowering law that he argued would give him the time for years according to the stipulations laid out in the draft of the law and the authority necessary to make good on his campaign promises to revive the economy, reduce unemployment, increase military spending, withdraw from international treaty obligations, purge the country of foreigners he claimed were poisoning the blood of the nation and exact revenge on political opponents." So you know that that's not hyperbole. That is simply the facts of what the man we know to be Hitler made on the first day as chancellor, right, and what he was committed to delivering on in terms of what He had promised the German public. I just think it's worth laying that out.

**Jackie Congedo** 18:32

That there is something there? Yes, definitely. I completely agree with that. And what is this language essentially doing? It's defining. What is Germany about? What does Germany stand for? I mean, these campaign promises were not only about, you know, the economy, military spending, etc, it was about this idea of there are grievances right now that need to be addressed. And I have a plan for a Germany that will move forward and have a have a means of addressing these grievances while also delineating what is German and what is not.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:19

And you know what? When I think about that, I'm just playing devil's advocate here. You could say that any American president who comes in and has campaign promises, sure to, you know, deliver on those promises and is laying out his vision, her his or her vision for how one might do that so but I think, I think that there are some things in here related to immigrants, right, revenge on political opponents and and filling positions with loyalists, this explicit promise to do that is, is important to pay attention to,

**Kevin Aldridge** 21:01

Yeah. I think one of the things too, that we miss, though, particularly here, and this is why I say like, it's important for us to talk about this as sort of like a uniquely American situation, is, what is the groundwork that has been laid? You know? What is the what is the fertilizer that's been placed over our nation that allows the seeds of this to to sprout. Because again, you know, 77 plus million Americans voted for these, these ideas, and this individual who made no bones about what his what his agenda, what his plans were. I mean, everything that we see happening with the current administration, was what he put out there. And it was a message that maybe they didn't agree with every aspect of it, but there were a lot of aspects of the message that they agreed with or either didn't find attractive about the the the opposite opponent that they chose to go in this direction. So I think there's, I think there's an underlying conversation that we're refusing to have. We're focusing on the individual, but we're not focusing on the underlying issues, if you want to call them grievances, that a considerable portion of the voting, I won't say the the American population, because we know more people don't vote than people who came to the polls, right? Right? Those who are engaged in the civic process felt like, you know, were going unaddressed. I think, like one of the things that I think a lot of people fear in this moment is sort of what we see, is the abuse of power, right? The President going too far, using overstepping his authority. And if you listen to whether it was Barack Obama or Joe Biden or whoever was in charge, you know also using their executive powers. If you think about how the right responded to their use of the executive powers, they were lobbing the same criticisms against them. You remember, they on the right, they said they were saying Obama thought he was a king, and all of these different types of things. And while they didn't use Nazi Germany, they used communism, Marxism, socialism, you know, all of these. It's just a different... Yeah, right. It's just a different terminology used on the other side, because there's, there seems to be a fundamental disagreement about where our country needs to be going in the future. To your point, what type of America is this that we're trying to that we're trying to create? And you know, we talk about this on the pod all the time, is that there's a nuanced conversation between immigrants poisoning the blood of America, and

**Jackie Congedo** 23:46

Open borders

**Kevin Aldridge** 23:46

immigrants, yeah, open borders and people coming into the country the right way for national security purposes, and all of these different things. And I think, like, that's where the where, when you talk about having a responsible, productive conversation like we're unable to, we're unable to have that around the key grievances that that people, let's just say, legitimately have. I mean, when we talk about recent elections that we've seen in Germany, for instance, you know they're, you know the conversations about how Angela Merkel handled immigration there, and letting you know millions of immigrants came in, ultimately led to her ouster, and sort of what we're seeing happening in Germany. The same about Canada, yeah, so, so there is a, I think there's a very real conversation that I think folks on the left, you know, need to, need to recognize that you can't just be dismissive, that you can't just lump a whole group of people into fascists and xenophobes and all of these different because,

**Jackie Congedo** 24:51

and write it off is that,

**Kevin Aldridge** 24:52

yeah, because I think that lays the foundation now, yeah, for those folks who are in the middle. Who have nowhere to go but to the extremes, and that creates

**Jackie Congedo** 25:04

Then you start calling them all Nazis, and where are they going to go? Right,

**Kevin Aldridge** 25:07

right, right? You leave no room for you leave no room for those folks, right?

**Jackie Congedo** 25:11

Yeah. I mean, that's so this, this again, I'm going to go back to the case that the the Republican Party chairman in Illinois made. You know, he laid them all out, right, like these are legitimate issues that have flourished under Pritzker's, as he says, flourished under Pritzker's leadership, broken economy, corruption and fraud, skyrocketing taxes and fees. Now I'm not, I'm not necessarily saying that I have independently validated those concerns, but I think there's no doubt that they're by by evidence. To your point, Kevin, of the voting record, and you know, the support that Trump had in Illinois, that people feel those are real concerns. People are struggling with these things. And so by casting off, you know, this movement, all of these people and their concerns as just evil, or as what we have come to know is sort of the ultimate label for evil. Does it get us closer to a place where we can address those concerns? Does it get us closer to a place where we can come together in the fabric and the way American democracy should operate and solve for those things, or have at least a shared conversation about what those look like? I don't know. I don't think so. So, but at the same time, there are some things I think that these comparisons, the people who are making them, particularly the people in the grassroots positions who are making them, are trying to tell us

**Jackie Congedo** 25:23

Sure. I mean, and to your point, Kevin and Jackie, what you talked about, as well, people are looking for a language to express their anxieties and to make sense of what is happening. And the question here is, how do we articulate that alternative in an American way and an alternative meaning a way of looking at what's happening and finding ways to address the ways in which that isn't America, or that is not ideals that we set up this democratic government to protect. What are those ideals? I feel like, if we talk with our friends and colleagues about that, we have, we have some idea, but it's not necessarily concrete enough for us to articulate where we can just say whatever's happening it's not that. And because Nazism is so ingrained in our ways of thinking, in our kind of American public discourse, this gives us a way to do that. But now we need to do the hard work of what is the American version of that? Yeah, and was the American language about what America represents, and why is this not that?

**Jackie Congedo** 26:35

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think, I think it's a conversation that's going to continue, obviously, for for a while. And I think, I think what I've taken is that we have to be unafraid to try and have a responsible conversation about that. I think we have to, you know, it's sort of a Jewish tradition. I like to think about it. Maybe it's not, you know, uniquely Jewish, but this idea that more debate, more debate, more robust conversation, more informed opinions, are better,

**Kevin Aldridge** 27:48

Absolutely,

**Jackie Congedo** 27:50

and so, you know, and that is the spirit, that's an American tradition too, right? So, you know, we really need to be in the deepest, in the deepest, like conversational empathy that we can muster, right, having the care for the people who are sitting around the table with us, having this conversation, able to articulate these concerns and opinions in a way that's responsible and robust, so that we can understand what the American alternative looks like and what what the next thing is that's more important than you know, is someone or is someone not Hitler? Is something or is something not Nazi Germany.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 28:57

So this is, ultimately what we should be afraid of is the lack of a space to do that together. So let's not preempt that by being afraid of having the conversation. Let's try to find a way. Let's try to find ways to even do it incorrectly, because if we are we're going to learn one thing from the reach to 1930s Nazi Germany is that Hitler was able to come to power because he completely dominated the public and political space and the conversation. He completely dominated the conversation and completely eliminated the voice of anyone who spoke against him. So let's take that lesson and learn how to articulate what we want to say, because I think that's a lesson that even even if we don't look at Nazi Germany, specifically, we have seen in times of political change and political insecurity, those who do not voice are usually eventually their ability to speak at all is snuffed out, becomes impossible.

**Kevin Aldridge** 30:02

And I think that's, that's, that's a great point, because if we look at sort and I even feel this way as someone who works in the media and who has an opportunity to have their voice expressed more, I think in our current political environment, you know, again, Donald Trump sort of dominates the conversation.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 30:22

Yes,

**Kevin Aldridge** 30:22

all of the conversations sort of revolve around him. And you know, it can be exhausting for you if you are someone who is who is against his policies or doesn't particularly care for him as an individual. And I think that exhaustion can keep you quiet. It can force you to disengage, because it can be overwhelming, because he so much dominates the news cycle in in so many different, in so many different ways. And you know, I've made the case that I think, you know, part of the problem is, or part of the solution is, to quit making him the focus of every debate, and focus on the policies, focus on what's focus on what's happening, and make it less about him and what your distaste is for him, or whatever, and focus on the policy and the impact. And those sorts of things talk about. Talk about those sorts of - you can talk about those sorts of things without ever having to mention his name. You know, beyond the fact that that he's the one who, who implemented it, but I think he has done a really great job of whether it's positive or negative, and I think that's part of who he was. You know, even as a businessman, this notion that there's no such thing as as, as bad press, right? All press is good, if you're talking about me, whether it's positively or negatively, I'm dominating the conversation. And I think he's carried that from his business pursuits into in the politics, and he does it very effectively. Whether you agree with that, whether that's for positive or negative things, one thing you can't disagree with is his ability to be able to do that. And I think, you know, we have to be able to graduate beyond that.

**Jackie Congedo** 32:05

Yeah, I think it's also worth, you know, we were talking a little bit about the the, I would say, the academic understanding of what fascism is and isn't. And this what you just said, Kevin, the fact that we're, you know, if we are sort of insisting on a focus on the issues, as opposed to a focus on any individual. Forget who's in power or when fascism cannot thrive in an environment where where we are focused on the issues,

**Jackie Congedo** 32:32

Right? Because the entire idea is the will of the leader, right? The entire idea of what distinguishes fascism from other forms of government, or, you know, tonalities of government is that there isn't, it doesn't. There is no such thing as poli - it is just the will of the leader. There is no will. It is all about the leader. And so to try and remember that we are, we are a democracy, and we are a place where governance of the people, for the people, by the people, and to focus on that means we have to get together and solve some issues here, right? If we are focused on the issues and focused on being in conversation with each other as an electorate that is just inherent to the definition, not something, not an environment in which fascism can thrive.

**Jackie Congedo** 32:32

Right

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 33:24

In which there are articulated alternatives,

**Jackie Congedo** 33:27

right,

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 33:27

right

**Kevin Aldridge** 33:28

I mean, if you think about it, people voters, focus more primarily on the presidential election, when, in the reality, it's their local and state elections, that in the congressional elections, that impact them more than a presidential election. Look, part of the reason why I think Donald Trump is able to kind of sell right now this disruption of the government is the failure that's right Congress to actually solve any of these issues that we're talking about. And I think Congress not everyone, but on many levels, there have been politicians who've made a career out of no progress, and gerrymandering and creating these districts where they don't have to worry about anything beyond a primary election has also lent to this sort of 'do nothing' nature of Congress that people are frustrated with, and so they're looking at government and they're saying this thing's broken anyway, so who cares if Donald Trump comes in? In fact, we kind of like it, because this Washington machine that hasn't been doing anything for decades. Let's go ahead. Let's get rid of all these bureaucrats and these do nothing, you know, folks in Washington who have kept the status quo for their own selfish purposes. You know, keep, kept us spinning our wheels for decades. You know, let's blow it up. And I think that that's, that's the confer... that's, again, that's a part of the conversation that we're not having, because. We're so focused on the presidential election, when guy you know, individuals like like Donald Trump or whomever, can come in and sort of use their executive powers and make a case to the American people like, "Hey, if I don't do this, it's not going to get done."

**Jackie Congedo** 35:16

Yeah? Right. Well, it's a, it's a, it's a perceived or actual dysfunction in the mechanism of democracy. And the reality is that is not a phenomenon unique to the right. This is why, in some ways, we've seen this like new sort of populist coalition rise and come together, where you have folks like Robert F Kennedy and Trump and like tech magnates like Elon Musk, who it depends on the day, whether or not that's their you know, it's like this, folks who feel at the fringes, more and more, at the fringes, on both sides, that the system isn't working. And so, yeah, I think you're absolutely right that this, this is, it's all of our problem to fix, yeah, because clearly it's not working for enough people.

**Speaker 1** 35:16

Well, yeah, that's what I was gonna say. It's important to understand that the system works just fine for the Elon Musks and the, you know, the Warren Buffets of the world, the the 10% or less who dominate most of - the system works just fine for them, regardless of what they might have you believe. Who it doesn't work for is the vast majority of Americans who are caught in the middle. Who are, they're the ones who are frustrated and who are, who are fighting for scraps, and who's whose issues and livelihoods are generally not, you know, not impacted on the level that they would like to see it and and that's that that's part of the mania about where we are right now, is that that even while you do have this disruption, so to speak, going on, it's sort of like the fox guarding the hen house. It's like you've got, you've got billionaires and even the president who's not hurting. You know, these are the, these are the individuals who are trying to make the... who are... who have now convinced the rest of us that they have the solutions to make life better for us when they've been the ones who've been prompt, you know, predominantly profiting from this broken system all along. And it's, it's, it's like, Trump's campaign line from 2016 it's like, Hey, I'm the one who beat the system, so I'm the best one to know how to fix it. And it's like, okay, well, that's a good line. But really, when have you ever known anyone who's been able to juice the system, who's going to fix it so that they can no longer juice the system? I mean that,

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 35:16

not going to happen.

**Jackie Congedo** 37:44

You're right. Like, even that is self interest, yeah, even,

**Kevin Aldridge** 37:49

Even that admission, in and of itself, was self serving, because it's, it's enough to convince people like, Well, yeah, that makes sense. He would be the one who knows how to fix it, because he's going to take advantage. But what?

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 38:00

Why would he destroy something that's

**Jackie Congedo** 38:02

Right? Yeah. And I think, I think kind of bringing us back to, like, you know, the historical context. And so when I think about people who are disenfranchised, people who feel or are not, and I'm not trying to, you know, make light of this in any way that the system doesn't work on both sides of this conversation, you know, there are two options - to migrate to the extremes, to look for simple solutions to complex problems, or to say we're engaged in this messy experiment called democracy, and that requires us to get together in difficult conversations with people who don't agree with us, with a level of nuance that's hard to find space for. And say, how do we actually solve for these things? Because they're complex problems. It's not as easy as saying that's something because of those people, or because of that thing, or because of this one. If we just eliminate x, if we just scapegoat x, these are, you know, when I think about some of the lessons or echoes of history, the danger it's it's so tempting to fall into this trap that this simple solution will solve for these complex problems. And what can be the cost of that, right? What's the sometimes, what's the cost of of sort of buying into that? I mean, it's a conspiratorial mindset at the end of the day. So as opposed to saying, well, we all, you know, we all, we're all in this pot together here, and we got to figure out how to make it work. And that requires me to look at you just as much as I look at myself and and to honor the humanity in all of us who are sitting around this American table and figure out what our path forward looks like. That's a much tougher conversation, and it's a conversation I think that people lose interest in when they feel like it doesn't work, or when they feel like you. They feel like things are desperate enough.

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:02

Yeah,

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 40:02

And this is a part of the Holocaust history that we should be talking about as well, not just the comparisons that it allows us to make, but the kind of post war discovery that to talk about the Holocaust means to talk about all of this as well, means to talk about human difference, and to talk about the fact that it took the state that we now know as Germany decades and decades to figure out how to articulate the state that we see today. There were a lot of discussions that were happening in post war Germany about, sure, the Nazi regime has been defeated, but what is the alternative now, and I think it's really beneficial to us that Holocaust spaces have historically been spaces to talk about democracy, etc, but then, but then let's, let's bring that part to the fore now about what have we learned? What have survivors told us? What? What have those who know this history told us about what we should take away from it? And it's not necessarily that not I mean, we have this phrase "never again" that I think sometimes obscures the fact that, sure, on one hand, we're concerned about prevention, on the other hand, we're concerned with fostering a discourse that allows us to discuss what possibilities still remain. We're not just concerned about avoiding the big bad. We're concerned with articulating this alternative as well.

**Jackie Congedo** 41:36

Yeah, yeah. And that's so consistent with our tone. I mean, in general, it's specifically at the Holocaust & Humanity Center around you know, half of our mission, half of our museum, half of our programming. It's an integrated half, but still it's every bit of half is dedicated to. You know, we have this space where we can explore the the conditions under which darkness thrives. Darkness in our human nature takes hold, and we ought to spend just as much time thinking about the alternative. What are the conditions under which human flourishing happens? What are the conditions under which we can functionally right... a democracy can thrive, and you know, we can live together with shared humanity and respect for each other and prosperity for all of us. I mean, that's it's not enough to say, "not that." It's not enough.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 42:30

And this is how Holocaust discourse has organically developed, yeah, yeah, which is, I think, what's so cool about it, yeah, right.

**Kevin Aldridge** 42:37

I think, you know, in listening to what you were, you were kind of saying, Jackie, I think that, like one of the unfortunate byproducts of our politics is it's very hard to get to what you described. You. You know, author James Baldwin once said that America is a complex country that insists on being simple minded. Yep, and that's right, the product of that is the very real reality that people are desperate, that people are struggling, that they do have challenges that they want solved like now the reality is, is some of the challenges and issues that people face are so complex that they're not one simple solution problems that can be solved within a year. Like moving almost all of them, yeah, like moving somebody from poverty to middle class status is not, some is not, is not a six month exercise. And I've seen this, you know, even at the local level. I think it was when, you know, John Cranley was mayor of Cincinnati, and he had this campaign promise that he was going to move like 15,000 people from poverty, out of poverty, to the middle class in like six months like and there were literally people who worked in that space, who I've talked to, you know, who said, like, the reality, and I might be exaggerating, six months. It might have been a little bit more time, but it was. It was a much shorter time period than what the experts in that field were telling him was realistically possible, but it was a campaign promise that he had made, and so therefore I've got to deliver on this in my term, or in the time that I've said, when, in reality, it may take 10 years to move that many people from poverty to middle class, versus a four year term of a mayor. And so I think this, these are the these are the traps that we fall into. And the politics is that these politicians get out here and they promise unrealistic things to the public, because the public is demanding answers now, and you're going to run into the rare politician who a winning campaign is to say, "Hey, you know, moving you from poverty is going to take about 10 years, but I've got a plan to get us there" right? Like, that's not, that's not going to get you, that's not going to get you

**Kevin Aldridge** 42:41

The guy who says six months gets the vote.

**Kevin Aldridge** 45:00

Yeah, exactly, and so that that's the unfortunate nature of our politics and why we continue to be frustrated because we don't have the courage or the reality to have very real conversations that are going to say, "You know what, Donald Trump's not going to come in and on day one, reduce inflation and lower the lower the cost of milk and eggs, because there are a whole lot of factors that go into that that are beyond his authority and ability to control, that he can't do anything about, quite frankly." And maybe the reality is, is this is something we're going to have to live with, you know, for a few months, as we're trying to do some other things to take some of the stress and strain.

**Jackie Congedo** 45:43

I think it's really important what you've said that, like, not only you know, because sometimes I think about it from like the cost, the cost of simple solutions to complex problems. And I think about the whole the history of the Holocaust is a really important example of the cost of saying, "We have these grievances and we have a simple solution?"

**Kevin Aldridge** 46:06

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 46:08

There was an incredible human cost and but I think it's also worth noting what you've just shared, Kevin, which is that if, if you've bought into the conspiracy of simple solutions to complex problems. The problems don't get solved, yeah, "it's a conspiracy," you know. So, you know, beyond the human toll, yeah, these, you know, this is not a real way of solving problems, and the problems don't get fixed. And what ends up happening is there's a deeper and deeper and deeper inequity, deeper and deeper and deeper scarcity, deeper and deeper and deeper fear that so it's a downward spiral, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 46:47

Resentment, cynicism, because the cost is, the cost is wasted money, wasted time, and lives impacted. And so rather than being real with people and say, "Hey, let's come up with a really good solution that might take. It might take more time than you might be comfortable with, but this is a really good, well thought out solution, and it's going to cost X number of dollars for us to do this, but we'll get to where we need to be at the end of this." It's better than putting some sort of ham handed half thought through program that you're going to spend a lot of money on anyway, it's not going to work, and then you're going to have to come up with a new solution, which is going to take more time, more money, and you ultimately probably wind up spending more money and wasting more time than if you had gone with the more realistic projection and program from the beginning. And you're not creating the the cynicism, because what people say is, as well, you spent, you know, you spent $30 million on this thing last time, and it didn't work. Why should? Why should we keep spending money on this problem? Right? Like, that's, that's what creates the resentment and the cynicism. Are these bad ideas that fail, versus saying, hey, let's really take some time to think about this study that's come up with a really, really great plan that might take a little bit more time than some folks can afford or might be uncomfortable with, but the reality is, is the end result is going to be the same anyway. I mean, what's, what's the difference between a bad program that still didn't help folks, you know, and wasting five years on that or saying, let's get to seven, you know, and get something that's really gonna impact and move people forward.

**Jackie Congedo** 48:26

Yeah, yeah. I think more to come on this. I mean, this is an evolving conversation. We also welcome your thoughts, you know, we want to hear how you're thinking about this and what you're hearing in your spaces, because, you know, we don't have all the answers, even though we have a scholar with us.

**Kevin Aldridge** 48:45

Oh, you're talking about Sarah,

**Jackie Congedo** 48:47

That's hilarious, two scholars - me and Sarah!

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 48:55

But history doesn't give us all the answers. Yeah, and that's actually, I think, a strength for us. Yeah, that's right. It's again. We're not going to get the answer without going through this discursive process of asking ourselves these tough questions, of articulating these long term solutions. And if that's what helps get us towards the solution, then that's great. That's great that history can't do all this for us. Yeah?

**Jackie Congedo** 49:19

Well said, and let's use it that way. Well, said, Yeah, I think we should probably let's move to the the conversation I know we want to spend some time on before we jump into some of our pieces from the archives and our interviews with some other folks related to a really disturbing. I know this. This was a hard couple weeks for our team at the Center for a number of reasons. You know, the state of the world, but but specifically, some watershed things that happened in the last couple of weeks, one of them being this one. Neo Nazi demonstration on the overpass over I 75 outside Lincoln Heights, which was not a, you know, arbitrary place for them to want to spew this hatred. And when I just want to be clear for folks who might be listening, who might not be familiar with what happened, this is not, this is not my description of neo Nazi demonstration. This is, these are people who came proudly with swastika flags, with, you know, language saying America is for whites only. You know, these are people who came as self proclaimed Neo Nazis, sure, and so and, you know, there were, I think, a handful of them, and they stopped traffic for for a period of time. And we saw an incredible response from the community of Lincoln Heights. But also, more broadly, you know, people saying, this is this is not going to happen. And I think I want to hear what the both of you have to say on this. But the one thing I've been sitting with is, when we talk about historical comparisons, I think it's important to recognize that that the facts of history are are that there was not this kind of like mass resistance people saying, "We are not going to stand for this here. This is not who we are," right? In the days following, some of these sort of, you know, very public and, you know, acts of discrimination and prejudice against the Jew, the Jews of Germany in the 1930s so, you know, that's, that's that's an important distinction. There, of course, are also some parallels and comparisons we can draw to the fact that there are people with swastika flags who feel emboldened enough that they are going to take to our streets and do this, and that there was the march in Columbus, and that, yes, right? And this follows another march in Columbus and and the mainstreaming also, of just the rhetoric around, you know, sure, white nationalism and Nazism is, is certainly concerning. So, I mean, how have you both been sort of wrestling with where we are in the aftermath of this, this event?

**Kevin Aldridge** 52:19

Yeah, so I have, I mean, we could probably do a whole other podcast on my thoughts on this. The first thing I think is that, while you're correct, there was a loud chorus of condemnation of this. I still don't think it was loud enough, like I think, you know, here in this country, and you know where the First Amendment allows this type of thing, even hate speech, as much as we find it distasteful, it is one of the rare things that makes, you know, the United States exceptional is that, you know, we do make space even for the most deplorable

**Jackie Congedo** 52:58

We've bought into this marketplace of ideas, concept and sunshine right,

**Kevin Aldridge** 53:03

to be able to have that expression so you can respect that, but also say that this is vile. It's repugnant. It's not representative of who we are as Americans. And that should be, if you aren't one of these folks like that should be. That should be your response to this? Yep, I think the fact that there are, for who knows what reason, so many people who wanted, who want, who still want, to remain silent and not say anything about it like this is something that has to be roundly rejected by every person. Not coming back and saying, Well, they had a First Amendment right to be there. That's fine, fine. You can, you can say that I agree with that they had a First Amendment right to be there, but they're still vile and repugnant. So it's like that, that saying they had a First Amendment right is not a an answer, an answer to the actions. And I think that whether it's, you know, we wrote a story about how the representative from that area, Warren Davidson, who's a Republican, had nothing, had zero to say on this. It's like he's, he's got a million things to say about a bunch of other things, but a Nazi protest that happens in his own district. He doesn't have a word to say about that. And I'll stand corrected if by now he's he's put out some sort of statement. I haven't seen it, nor heard anything. But to me, that's unacceptable, and I think it's it's one of the things as we talk about, the concerns that people have about, sort of like the comparisons between Nazi Germany and here it is, that sort of complicity through silence for whatever reason. And I think it's that sort of thing that is emboldened these types of individuals to say, "Well, they're not saying anything against us, so then maybe that means that quietly, they're with us, or that they're endorsing, you know, what it is that we're doing." And the fact that you - the President has, at best, you know, seemed, you know, seemed to equivocate on this matter at different times, whether it's the the and again, you know, people on the right will debate this. You know, good people on both sides, even if I wanted to be gracious and give him, you know, the benefit of the doubt on that any past politicians would have been much more declarative and definitive in their denunciation of this type of activity. And I think what we've seen in recent times is either more of a reluctance to do that, or kind of insinuate and sort of play fast and loose with these people, because we want their votes or whatever. It's that type of thing that sends the message to folks in Lincoln Heights and in other places that not everybody in their government and in the highest positions of leadership finds this deplorable. Find this deplorable, right? And if you don't find it deplorable, that means that you're making potential space for it. I mean, when, when you've got JD Vance going over to Germany and saying, "Hey, you guys ought to make room in the political discourse for these Nazis, you know, for a Nazi sympathetic, you know, far right party or or Elon Musk going over and saying, Hey, you ought not to feel, you know, any guilt about, you know, sort of the Holocaust," and you can parse that. I mean, I've made the statement many times that white folks today shouldn't feel guilt about slavery, that something that they had nothing to do with, but certainly you should be of the conscious mind to say, "Hey, I'm never going to allow something like that again." So I don't necessarily want your guilt, but I do want your social consciousness and awareness and action and speaking out against, you know, these sorts of things. So so that, yeah, that's, that's kind of my initial thought is just that, you know, we've got to get to a place where these folks remain on the fringes, that they stay on the fringes and that they know that there's no foothold in our society for their types of ideals or the things that that they believe in. You can say it, you can protest, demonstrate, or whatever, but we're not going to give you any comfort or quarter in terms of allowing these ideas to sort of take root in our society, because we don't believe that that's America.

**Jackie Congedo** 57:20

Yeah, yeah, I can relate that. I had some conversations with some people who, you know, who are sort of conservative minded, or, you know, who considered themselves Republicans, who voted for Trump, and it's just, it's and it's not, it's not, I'm not meaning to paint like paint in any way a blanket picture of this, but it's interesting that a couple of the conversations I've had have been people saying, "You know, when I when I share that news of what happened, it's like, why isn't the first and only response that 'this is abhorrent,' right? Why?" Why is there well, but they're allowed, or, well, but Well, we know, like you said, we know that. Or, you know, hateful people are everywhere. Yeah, we but, like, Why? Why is? Why is there a sort of a feeling that there needs to be some defense? Or is it that people feel that, when we raise that with them, that that they have to defend themselves, because...

**Kevin Aldridge** 58:19

They they're effected. They're not impacted by it. I guarantee you, if it had been there, there's no threat to them. Those who come back with that, there's no threat. But I guarantee you, if it had been a Black Lives Matter march or Antifa march, the response would have been very different, because there's a perceived threat there, and what and however, and however they see that threat. So when there's no threat, I can respond more philosophically, more academically, because there's no threat there, there's nothing, there's nothing involved in that case that's really going to impact my life, to to any sort of degree. And when you think about the environment where we are currently in, where there's this sort of attack on DEI, and there's this sort of sense that, at least, you know, among some corners of not, not, not every white male, but there's a prevailing sense that, you know, they're among the more discriminated against because of programs like DEI and stuff like that. I always say that some of these ideas that these white supremacist groups have, if we want to have a real conversation about it, are not too distant from how some folks feel politically. And I've said one of the dangers about this and where they are right now is, is their attempts to tie many of their ideals closely to to some of the mainstream. So if a neo Nazi group can say, "See, look this DEI stuff, this is exactly what I'm talking about here, they're trying to, they're trying to take away your whiteness. Or they're trying to, you know, make this a non white country." Right? I mean, we have that, you know, the Tucker Carlson replacement theory and all of this, it plays into that fear that that many whites have of losing control or losing something, and that sort of thing, even on a subconscious level, can make you desensitize to these types of things

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:21

and normalizes it,

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:00:24

and how do we respond to people? It's interesting. The kind of the use of the Nazi flag, of the swastika, I do think actually obscures, of course, this kind of other conversation about, what does this actually represent here and now? Right? What are these people actually I mean, what are they saying, perhaps in this protest, but what are those that we might associate with this movement? What do they say in other spaces? And mean is the kind of their use of this historical symbol of evil helping? I mean, I think there's a certain reason why, why they use it. But is it helping us understand what they're doing? And then is it helping we've talked about this before, like, like, like, why do we find the fact that there are Nazis marching in our vicinity so kind of threatening right now, when, though we have not seen Neo Nazis standing on a bridge in Cincinnati very recently, this is not the first time that we've seen this symbolism being evoked, and a lot of this language being evoked, and then, and then what? What is, what are we kind of getting at there? Sure there's a fear that that leadership is not going to to to stand against to stand against it. It might actually embolden it, but I think, but I think there's actually a kind of greater fear that this is part of a larger problem that has nothing to do necessarily with the Nazi swastika and and as as abhorrent as it is that they're using that, that symbol, I think actually, we need to not let ourselves limit the conversation to that, sure, um, and, and, as horrible and awful as it is, what is it actually standing for? And in their minds? Yeah, yeah, yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:02:20

that. And that's kind of the point that I've made, is like, there's a there's a toxic stoop that's all being mixed up in this incident. And this incident is sort of just like something that highlights that larger thing. So the conversation that we were having earlier about this administration and parallels to Nazi Germany, you know, even that hits the Jewish community a little bit different than it does the Black community. It's still a type of whether it's antisemitism on the Jewish side, racism on the Black side. And we've talked about, you know, in different spaces. And I'm, I'm, you know, reminded of my friend Eric Ward, who sort of talks about, sort of like this. This, this notion of how the racism and anti semitism are connected, and how these groups use both of those devices

**Jackie Congedo** 1:03:08

symbols and ideology.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:03:09

Yeah, yeah. And so I think for many African Americans who are responding to this, this is taking place in the midst of a time where you're questioning the administration and how they're doing things, where you're seeing at different levels, civil rights gains that were made in the the 60s, the 50s and 60s, a sense of that being walked back. Yeah, and so all of that is taking place in a person's mind. You know, even going back to George Floyd and some of the situations that we've seen in there. So now, when Evendale police are involved, and you're seeing the reaction and the response to that, it's all of this is going on in the mind of an individual who's processing and receiving this situation. The police are defending them, not us. You know, I mean, these are the things that you hear and how people are responding to it, and it's, and it's more than about just those handful of folks who aren't even from here, who are standing on that bridge. It's, it's what they've done is they've created a situation now of where we don't trust where we kind of really don't trust each other, right? 100% because it's like, well, I want to give the police the benefit of the doubt, but seems like they're kind of helping these guys. And we've already got issues with the police anyway, in terms of how they're dealing with the the African American community, so there's already not great trust there. So now, when I see that, it really only reinforces for me that, hey, maybe there are a few, maybe there are a few Nazi sympathizers, you know, on the police, on the police force and so, and what is the government going to do about it? It seems like you. Evendale government's not going to do anything about it, right? You know, Hamilton County Commissioners, you know, have, have voiced their concerns. But what is, what is government really going to do to stand up for the folks in Lincoln Heights who feel like they've been violated? Yeah, and that's, that's the, again, complexity of, right, all of this stuff, because all of that's going on, you know, at the same time, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:05:25

yeah. I think you're really smart to point out the way this lands in different communities and in different spaces. And I think you're right. I think part of the challenge is we don't have a lot of spaces where we can have one, a conference, a shared conversation about that. And I think, I think we need to focus on being more deliberate about that. Because this is, this is one of those moments where, where people can either retreat or engage and and where, if I'm going to be an optimist, where sometimes those spaces can emerge, yeah, yeah. First shared conversation about it,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:06:03

Sure, and it's a great opportunity for, and I don't know that I've seen this, perhaps, to the degree that it could have been done. And again, you know, I realize there are a lot of other things swirling in the background as well, but this is a great opportunity for, I think, for the Jewish and African American communities to come together in allyship and in conversation around this issue, because this is something that is deeply impactful for both communities, again, in different ways. So so there's a way to have a conversation around this unfortunate incident that builds allyship and strengthens ties. Because we've talked about, you know, in the wake of, sort of October 7, how the Jewish community really kind of felt to some degree alone, where our allies and, of course, we know all the complex scenarios that are involved in that, but I think this is another situation where, you know, there can be that sense of feeling like, Hey, where are our friends? Where are where's everybody else on this situation where here's a real opportunity for two impacted communities in different ways to come together and and share, you know, an opportunity to say, hey, we're here for each other, if nobody else is, if nobody else is here with us, standing with us in a way that we think, you know, we're, we're here for each other, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:07:25

yeah. And I think that's, that is what, you know, there are forces that are counting on that not happening, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:07:34

Absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:07:35

So, you know, that's that's on all of us to try and figure out, you know what, what's our role to play in facilitating that conversation. How can we make that happen? I think, I think sometimes it's just people who think like, oh, well, of course they're aligned on this, or, of course they're talking to each other. I just, you know, I don't know that that's always happening in the way that we would expect, or some would expect it is so.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:07:59

And I think there's a perception. And again, I always hesitate when I do this, because I don't I want to speak for all Black people. I'll just say, from my experience and conversations, there's a sense in the Black community that when things happen in the Jewish community and Jew the Jewish community raises his voice, people pay attention, like they get results. Like there's a sense that there's a power dynamic that's there, that the Jewish community, if they say, Hey, y'all need to pay attention to this, people pay attention. Now, whether, whether the Jewish community feels that way or not, that's all you get. You guys can only answer that question. But I think, I think in the in the in the Black community, there's that sense that the Jewish community typically gets a response when they raise their voices that the Black community doesn't always get. And there's a sense of a power dynamic that's that's available there, that is not available to the same extent within the Black community. So I think that when you have opportunities like this, I think there's, there's some degree of thought that, hey, a shared, you know, a shared problem among a group that has a power base and gets the kind of attention like, hey, let's, let's come together and kind of get some results there. Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:09:17

Yeah. I think, I think that it is we could have another conversation, and maybe we should actually for for the next podcast, just create more space on this. But I think, you know, related to what you shared, Kevin, it would be ignorant for any of us to pretend that race isn't part of this conversation. And, you know, jumping. The problem is that Jews have a complicated relationship with race, you know. And this idea of associating Jews as inherently white associates Jews in the you know, at. In the sort of the powerful, of the powerful, powerless dynamic which has, which can play into antisemitic tropes of the powerful Jew, right? And that's that's a dangerous place to be, and also the fact that it ignores the racial reality of Jews, which is not all Jews are white and many Jews are would you would look at and say that is not a white person. And in the context of an American society where, you know, white presenting Ashkenazi Jews have benefited from the way they walk around in the world with white skin, that's a real thing. That's a real thing. And so I guess I'm just sort of stating the obvious there that, that there are, there are, that that's a conversation that has sort of very challenging implications, because of the way antisemitism operates, because of the, because of the, you know, the dangers and the in the sort of default association of Jews in power and Jews and whiteness. But I will say, I will say that certainly you know, is it? Is it that you know folks in communities of color say, well, when the when the Jewish community speaks up, or is it when the white community speaks up?

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:11:19

Well, I think that's yeah, so I don't know. I think there is a, I think there's sort of a clear understanding,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:11:26

or is it that the Jewish community is implicated here, and so they have a reason to speak up. And so that's the part of the white community that should be and isn't, you know what I mean? I'm Yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:11:36

I think, you know, I'm not. I can't answer that. So I don't know, I can't answer that with any degree of certainty. But my sense is, is that people understand all of the things that you said about, you know, I think in many ways, when people say Jew, they think of

**Jackie Congedo** 1:11:54

white, white person, white religious person. Which is,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:11:57

yeah, right? Which we know is not

**Jackie Congedo** 1:11:59

one aspect of the identity,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:12:00

right? Which we know is not, you know, completely 100% accurate. But I think most interactions that folks have probably with, you know, Jews in Cincinnati is, is that right? And I think that there's nothing wrong with saying that, you know, by and large the Jewish community in Cincinnati has been prosperous, they there's a lot of success narrative. Does that mean that every Jew is successful and powerful? No, but, but you know, some of the facts are, is that, you know, Jews in Cincinnati have done very, very well, you know, in many spaces. And it doesn't mean that the challenges that Jews face aren't real, are the you know, only the Jewish community can speak to that, and that's an experience that probably many African Americans don't have and aren't aware of. I guess. What I'm just trying to say is, is what people see tends to be sort of their reality, regardless of what the true story is behind the scenes. And so if there's this perception that, you know, you know, Jews have a powerful voice in Cincinnati, and when they say something, they usually get results, that's probably what people are seeing, right? And that, and that's a and that's not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, that may be a testament to the organization, the connections that the Jewish community in Cincinnati has made, and the voice that they've been able to cultivate here in a way that Black Cincinnati may not have been able to. And so I think that, and I get all of the reasons why the Jewish community might want to retreat from some of those characterizations as they can become stereotypical. But I think it's you also can't run from the facts of the reality of what what exists on the ground and and what exists on the ground. Unfortunately we we know every stereotype is is somewhat based in in some degree of of truth, whether, even if it's a small grain. And so the unfortunate thing is, is that sometimes you have to retreat from what the actual realities of what a community can and should be proud of, because you don't, you're scared of playing into into a stereo. Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:14:12

yeah. I mean, I'll say a couple things about that. One is, you know, the idea of Jews in power is sort of an elusive phenomenon, because when we look at the 1930s and many other instances throughout the world, where whiteness has really never been a factor of what actually, at the end of the day, determines safety for Jewish communities. And so, you know, and in some ways actually, this idea of Jews having power actually fuels antisemitic ideas and stereotypes. And so I appreciate your sort of cautionary word there, because I think it's very important how we characterize that, or, you know, when we sort of paint in broad strokes about Jews in power. It's, it's concerning Jews and whiteness, because of whiteness, sort of, you know, being tied up in this notion of power in America. But I, I, I'll also say that, that I think, I think the conversation could benefit from more more discourse. I think, I think that people need to be better in touch with the lived realities of the other community. And I think, you know, it's interesting to hear, you know, talking about how when Jews speak up things happen. I am hearing, in some ways, a very different story in the Jewish community,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:15:39

sure, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:15:40

about when we speak up on certain things, but not other things, right? When we speak up about, you know, our insistence that Israel has a right to exist, or our insistent that Jewish students on college campuses should be able to freely navigate their college campus without fear of being intimidated to the point where they can't attend classes, right? That's that is not something that has been, I think, universally heard in a way that feels like an identity and a lived experience is honored. So, you know this notion of but, but we all have to be aware of the fact that we're having this conversation steeped in the implicit biases of our society, right? Which is, it's, it's easy for any of us to retreat into the neural pathways that say Jews get what they want, sure? Or, you know, any other number of stereotypes about people of color or about any other group, right? White people, yeah, so, so. But I think that, I think what, what's, what I feel emerges from this conversation and discussion is that we need to have more spaces, not fewer to have the conversation,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:16:45

more people, not less, who are willing to sit there and say in friendship, through shared experience, through relationship, with an actual starting point of relational capital. We can, we can talk about these things with the level of nuance that they deserve and that we can say. How you know? Can the Jewish community better understand what allyship looks like if? How do we know, if we're not even in conversation about it and same in the same right like after October 7, I think there were a lot of expectations of what everybody else was gonna say and do, and the reality is, there were some people who just didn't know what to say, who weren't in relationship to even understand what the lived experience was like. So it's more, it's just we need to lean in. And it feels like where's the time to do that? Well, you know what? We got to find it. You got to find it and make it.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:16:45

absolutely

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:17:42

Yeah, and I think that you know how those conversations come together. Who leads them? Like, I think every community, if it's, if it's your issue, you should lead the conversation, but not in such a way to where other voices don't have a seat, yeah, have a seat or any kind of credibility. So it's like, ultimately, the decision is yours for how you move forward. But in a true ally nature, I ought to be able to contribute that conversation and say what I need to say without being dismissed outright and saying, you know, hey, I just want you to, I just want you to stand with me with no voice, you know at all, as a part of the conversation. Like, that's not, that's not allyship. That's that in its truest sense. And so I think you know, if you're going to invite people to the table, you got to truly invite them to the table, and having an earnest conversation where all opinions, thoughts of views are considered, but understanding that, hey, you know, this is, this is ultimately your community's issue. But here are our thoughts, here, here's, here's how we think that...

**Jackie Congedo** 1:18:45

it's the only way we move the needle forward.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:18:47

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:18:47

I really think it's the only way we move the needle forward. And I think that, I think, you know, you brought this up in the past, Kevin, about, like, having conversations on racism with with friends of yours who are white, or who might have voted differently, or, you know, whatever. And you know, and just having to, like, give the disclaimer, because you can sense that someone in relationship with you is uncomfortable speaking how they you know, but, but how do we move forward if people can't in the care of each other's humanity, have a real conversation so that I can understand, Oh, wow. Like, that's a that's a piece that, like, needs more conversation. That's a piece that needs, like, further exploration, or that needs some debunking, or like, wow, that's an assumption that, like, is actually not quite what the lived reality is. On both sides, you gotta make a decision. You gotta, you have to be, you have to be a little like, there has to be some thick skin.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:19:35

Yeah, thick skin, thick skin. And you have to make a decision of what is more important to you. Is it more important for you to be offended, yeah, or is it and to be comfortable and not offended? Or is it more important for you to move to a productive conclusion? And if the answer is, we want to move forward in a productive then you've got to give people space, yeah, to say things that you're not going to like totally, that you're not going to want, that you're not. Going to want to hear. You know, I've been married 17 years. I didn't get to 17 years without being able to listen to some things that my wife said to me that I didn't particularly want to hear, you know, and didn't particularly like, but yeah, for the health of the relationship, I had to listen to it and consider it. And did I change every time? No, but you know, the by and large, the majority of of that situation, you got to consider, you know, what other people's thoughts are if you co exist with them?

**Jackie Congedo** 1:20:30

Yeah, totally. Well, I appreciate I'm really grateful for the breath of this conversation. I'm so grateful, Kevin, for your perspective, for your friendship, as always, and Sarah for just jumping in and joining us in this very difficult moment to try and sort some of this out and make some sense of it. Maybe we left people more confused than we started, but that's, I think, actually a sign of progress. Yeah, people are a little bit more thoughtfully confused than they were when they joined, and

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:20:59

I think we're seeing the opportunity that does exist. Yeah, right. It's these headlines. How does it help us have conversations that we haven't had before? Talk to each other in ways that we haven't had before, especially here in Cincinnati,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:21:12

and let's have the conversations, let's, let's, let's do it in a way that moves us forward. Yeah, sure.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:21:16

And have conversations with you know, part of our problem is we like going to the echo chamber.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:21:25

Going, feels really good, yeah, especially when things are hard.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:21:29

Absolutely, it's like, I want to make sure I'm not crazy, so I'm going to talk to somebody, you know, who's going to validate, yeah, validate my thoughts. And that's not, you know, that's not going to move us forward? Because, you know, we're at a point right now where we're clashing with individuals who think differently than us, maybe not on every issue, but perhaps on enough issues, and those are the folks that you got to make space to have the the courageous conversation. You know we that's why we use that, that term, if, if we allow fear to dictate every movement that we have, if we allow fear to dominate our emotions and our decision making, you know that just leads to anger, and anger makes us more closed off. So the more scared we are, the more angry we are, the more closed off we are, and all that leads to is more pain and destruction down the road, we got to figure out a way to sort of push past our concerns. Like, you know, Sarah said this in our in our pre-production meeting, she raised this question of, like, talking to people, like, what are you afraid of? What are you concerned about? Like, when is the last time you've opened a conversation with anybody with, you know, where we're talking about the issues. Like, why does this issue what is what are you most concerned about? Like, let's get down to the brass tacks of what is it that makes you so passionate and concerned and fearful about this particular issue? And let's work from there, because maybe I can say some things or give you some information that might walk back those fears a little bit. Or maybe you got a fear that I hadn't considered, you know, right? You might be justified in that concern, you know, or fear and so and so, if fear is what's driving us right now, let's find out what people are afraid of, and let's have a conversation. Let's have a talk. Let's let's talk about that first. Let's lean into that courageously and have some honest conversations about, what is it that we're really all scared about right now, and how do we push past that, overcome that fear, to get us to a place of productivity.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:23:30

What does that fear look like in your life?

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:23:31

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:23:32

yeah.

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:23:32

How can we address that,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:23:33

Yeah, because there are people who are, you know, who can use fear to motivate, right, and to who can leverage it in dangerous ways. So if we don't talk about it, we don't unpack it, we don't alchemize it, then it lives to be the political tool of of and it's a very powerful political tool, as we know. So thank you both for for the conversation. You know, we were going to jump to some some testimony from one of our survivors and from from one of our upstanders. But I actually think that maybe we should, we should save that for another time, just because we're running out of time here and want to give that its due as well. So maybe we should just end with a with an upstander shout out for today on the theme of resilience. I just think it's worth just the the incredible courage that the folks who spoke up in the wake of this on 75 you know, and people might say, well, who doesn't think those folks are crazy for marching with swastika flags? Well, you know what? The minute we stop having people saying those folks are crazy for marching with swastika flags. We are in a very tough spot.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:24:43

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:24:44

And so, you know, we all want to say, Well, someone should, well, these people did. These people did. Who came out and said, This is not going to happen here, who you know, who spoke up from positions of authority, those who did, who you know, wrote about it in the paper. And I'm not, not, not just saying, just me, there were a number of others who wrote about this, and who, you know, and I just think it's every, every one of those people deserves a shout out for, for having the for saying someone should, well, I'm gonna, you know, someone is me.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:25:18

Yeah, and you know, just to piggyback off of that. And I know they've taken a lot of criticism, and this might be a weird shout out, and it may not even be necessarily an upstander, but, you know, let's, let's give the the police in that situation. Yeah, you know, some degree of credit. And, you know, I may get raked for this, but it's, it's a they were thrust into a tough position, and we can make the argument about, were they trained well enough? Are there things that they could have been done to to put them in a better position to handle that situation? If that's the case of training is an issue that's not necessarily on those officers, per se, who responded to the scene, you know, I and watching some of the body cam footage, yeah, there were some moments on there that kind of made me, you know, kind of made me cringe a little bit, but, but again, you know, you're placed in a very volatile situation, and you're just trying to make sure that, you know, you get out of there without any kind of major incident, that nobody gets hurt. And you can't, you know, overlook the fact that that, that they were successful in that regard, that you didn't have a major blow up. Nobody got

**Jackie Congedo** 1:26:29

People armed with automatic rifles in the middle of a it's like a powder keg situation.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:26:33

Yeah, you know, nobody, nobody got arrested, nobody got injured, although some people feel like there probably should have been arrests in that situation. I mean, obviously you can debate that, but I think you know if, if, if you just want to extend some grace and you know humanity to the officers who are responding in that situation, you know they're trying to do the best, the best that they can and those situations, and I think, you know, for whatever criticism may come my way, for saying that, I think it did need to be said.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:27:06

Yeah, I appreciate that, and want to, want to want to second it. I think, you know, fortunately, we're not in a place where police officers have day to day experience confronting Neo Nazis, and let's hope we never get there. So, you know, this is probably each one of those officers first time in a situation where they have to deal with something like this. And, you know, we'd all like to say we could have done it differently or but the reality is, when you're in that spot and you're faced with the barrel of a semi automatic weapon on the back of some guy who's brazen enough to hold a swastika flag in public, you know? And again, that is the job. That is the job they signed up to do.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:27:46

Yeah, absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:27:47

It doesn't detract from the fact that these are human beings doing the job and trying to figure it out in real time and and the fact that they were able to, to your point, see the end of that without anybody getting hurt. Is, I is, I think, something that's really is commendable.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:28:00

I mean, let's face it, our officers, you know, they get, they get thrust in some of the worst situations, right? Like they're not showing up

**Jackie Congedo** 1:28:00

Harder and harder every day.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:28:01

Yeah, they're not. They're not necessarily, you know, when they get called on the scene, it's usually not into a situation where people are at their best and circumstances are at their best. And you're right. It is, it is part of the job. It is what these folks sign up for. But let's just face it, all of us, you know, need a little support and encouragement behind what we do. And I think, you know, there are some instances where I think, you know, police handle situations very poorly, and the criticism that they receive is justified, but I also think it can't. Every situation can't be, you know, beating up on beating up on them time and again. There has to be some acknowledgement that, you know, hey, look, these are, these are very difficult circumstances, and

**Jackie Congedo** 1:28:53

they're navigating it in real time with high cost, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:28:57

Absolutely, and they're and how they've been trained to assess threats and situations is very different than the average person right because they not only got to think about the safety of the public, but their own safety, and that that's a very different mentality than if I'm walking up onto that scene as as someone who's angry at these individuals. My my mindset is very different than that of an officer who's showing up on the scene trying to keep the peace, right? We're not, we're not coming to that situation with the same agenda, with the same thought process, with the same threat assessment type scenario. And I think sometimes we don't give that, give that enough credit that you know, how we're approaching situations is is very different. I mean, even, even from the standpoint of the way the Nazis on the bridge were assessing this, like all three of those groups are looking at that interaction very differently, and what their response is going to be to that well.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:29:55

And this is why, like at the Center, we do work with police officers, we have a, a course that's certified by the Ohio Police Officers Association. You know the OPOTA [Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy] in Columbus, which is all around upstander training, character strength training for police officers. You know to understand, you know how to understand humanity across differences, and you know, the communities that they're policing and the concerns that they have. And I mean, that's really important, and all that stuff matters when you walk into a situation like that, and you're having to just move moment to moment. There's no room for error. There's no time to, you know, to learn it. You got to have it in your bones or not. And so I think that you know, even the even, the even the most sort of, like, loyal or, you know, toe the blue line officers would tell you that there's always room for improvement there. Yeah, and I think, I think it's great that we see so many, so many leaders, police leaders and districts leaning in, to want to take advantage of those opportunities to to improve so

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:29:47

And let's not lose focus on the conversation, like, we’re not trying in this situation of Neo Nazis on a bridge in Lincoln Heights, I don’t think vilifying the police gets us to where we want to be.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:29:57

So true

Dr. Sarah Crane 1:30:01

So let’s focus on why we found this threatening, and that there was a community response, and how can we find ways to discuss that in such a way that we normalize that, or or or just normalize that there is a response. That this is a process. Especially since this will not be, unfortunately, the last time that we encounter this.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:30:20

Yeah yeah

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:30:21

In Ohio, how can we do it better the next time?

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:30:23

Absolutely

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:30:25

And and let’s have that be what we take away from this. Not that people responded not in the way we would have liked, but what do we want to see in the future?

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:30:36

What should the response look like?

**Dr. Sarah Crane** 1:30:38

Right

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:30:39

And I even think among communities that care about this, like, in my mind, you know it’s sort of like, OK, what is the police training, what is their response? But I also think, what is the community training? What is the community’s response? And part of what is a challenge for those of us in our community who care about this, whether you’re Black, Jewish, Asian, whatever, is what is our rapid response?

**Jackie Congedo**

We’re just anti-Nazi

**Kevin Aldridge**

When instances like this show up, do we have – instead of hearing about it on the news, and saying, oh that’s terrible – like, what is our rapid response to this? Do we send people immediately out to the scene to not only beat this back but also sort of help to maintain a peace among those who are trying to reject it? So that even if the police officers are not up to the task of handling it in a way that ideally the way that we would like to, we’ve got our own kind of rapid response team that’s there to kind of help in that regard, to make sure our folks don’t wind up arrested or in some type of situation, so there’s always ways that we can respond to these situations. Yes, there’s the voice, there’s condemning it, but I think there’s also that next step, to say

**Jackie**

What does good look like?

**Kevin**

Yeah. Right. And how do we make sure that these folks know and understand

**Jackie**

Not here.

**Kevin Aldridge**

As you said in your op-ed, “Not in our city.”

**Jackie**

Yeah, right yeah. Well, thanks to the both of you. Thanks to everyone who spent longer than usual with us today. I think it was a conversation that clearly could benefit from more time, and like I said, let us know what you think. Let us know what you’re hearing. And we will be back next time with some really powerful testimony from one of our survivors, and an upstander related to this theme of resilience. We will see you then.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:32:44

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**Jackie Congedo**

Managing Producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting Producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical Producer is Robert Mills, and Technical Director is Josh Emerson. The opening sequence is by Ken Furman. Select music is by Kick Lee, and this is recorded at Technical Consulting Partners studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.