**An Antiracist Love Letter to Cleveland**

Dr. Mark Joseph, Founding Director of the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities, at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School for Applied Social Science, Case Western Reserve University. In conversation with Dan Moulthrop, CEO, The City Club

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**Dan Moulthrop**

Good afternoon and welcome to the City Club of Cleveland in Public Square. And it's my pleasure to introduce today the second forum in a four-part series here on Public Square, "A Love Letter to an Anti-Racist Cleveland.” Here with me today is Mark Joseph. He is the Leona Bevis and Marguerite Haynam Associate Professor of Community Development at the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University. He's also the founding director of the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities. His research focuses on mixed-income development as a strategy for promoting urban equity and inclusion. He's the co-author of the award-winning book, *Integrating the Inner City: The Promise and Perils of Mixed-Income Public Housing Transformation* and co-editor of a massive and wonderful collection of essays called “What Works to Promote Inclusive, Equitable, and Mixed-Income communities,” which is published by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. And now all of the essays in fact are available for free online at the website of the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities.

Mark's community development work has been increasingly centered on the work of anti-racism. And I wanted to say a quick word about that. In 2015, author and Anisfield-Wolf Book Award winner, Marlon James spoke at the City Club, and he touched on the difference between being non-racist and being anti-racist. What he said essentially, is that not being a racist is passive. And in the past, we've kind of elevated that to some sort of moral value, that passivity, non-action as a legitimate stance. Anti-racism, however, he said, is something else. It's active. It's not just a stand you take, but it's what you choose to do. And so, Mark has this idea that the city, the whole city, all of Cleveland, including what's beeping behind me, could be an anti-racist city. And he wanted to title our event today, "A Love Letter to an Anti-Racist Cleveland." That's why we're doing that. So, let's get started. Let's hear this love letter. And please, let's start by giving Dr. Mark Joseph a round of applause. Welcome, Mark.

**Mark Joseph**

All right. Thank you, Dan.

**Moulthrop**

So, Mark, why did you want to title this event, "A Love Letter to an Anti-Racist Cleveland."?

**Mark Joseph**

So first of all, thank you for having me here. And can we just take a moment and appreciate that we are here in person everybody. So, as I thought about what we would talk about together, the reason for this "A Love Letter to an Anti-Racist Cleveland" is what an incredible moment we are in together, right, as a society. We're coming out of this 18-month pandemic period. I mean, an experience, we will remember all our lives as something shared by every single person on the planet. And I think one of the questions is, how do we leverage that moment? We've all experienced the same thing. And how do we avoid letting that slip away? And I already feel it happening.

So, part of what I wanted to do was challenge us to say, folks, we're in this incredible moment, we've had this shared experience, and how do we avoid going back to business as usual? So, we've got post pandemic, we are a year out from this incredible moment of racial reckoning in our country. And again, it's another moment that I don't know about you all, I feel slipping away a little bit. Right? We had the murder of George Floyd; we had the murder of Breonna Taylor. And we had all these statements, right, there was this statement frenzy of what folks and organizations, and corporations were going to do. And here we are a year out, and I literally would ask folks, for those of you who made those statements, a year later, what is the status of that? What has become of that? How often have you read that statement? Right? So, a year out from racial reckoning, post-pandemic. We got this moment where crazily our stock market is kind of going through the roof. So, we have people in incredible suffering, coming out of pandemic. Well yet there's incredible wealth being made. So, there's all these resources. And then speaking of resources, we have resources flowing from the federal government to our cities. You had a panel just last week and kicked off public square saying, how do we spend a billion dollars in Cuyahoga County. So, it's this incredible moment. So, as I thought about what I wanted to talk about, it's how do I encourage myself and all of us to step up to this moment?

**Moulthrop**

So why anti-racism? Why a love letter?

**Mark Joseph**

Well, let me start with anti-racism and come to love letter because anti-racism is where I started, right? If we're going to talk big, and we're going to talk seriously about what it's going to take for Cleveland and the Cleveland region, to truly be sustained and competitive as a region, we have to focus on race. We have to acknowledge the history of racism that's created where we are today, one of the most segregated cities in America. And so anti-racism, the question of how do we address and confront anti-racism, I think has to be front and center.

Why a love letter? When most of us think about race, or engage in a conversation on racism, I think where we go is either to fear, most of us probably to fear, I don't want to be in this conversation, this is not going to go well. This is not something I want to talk about. I've seen how this plays out, or to many of us rage, and anger, and despair. And I'd say that's certainly true for myself. And so, I want to be clear, even though my framing might be a love letter, that does not mean that this is not also something that I feel keenly in terms of anger and rage about where we are. But I was listening to a podcast that had Emmanuel Acho, I'm not sure if you're familiar with him. He's got a book, and a podcast that's titled, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*, which I feel like is a lot of the conversations I have with folks about race and our future. But he's this incredible guy who played pro football, brilliant speaker, brilliant thinker and what he said that really struck me is he said, when we have these conversations about race, and racism, we have to have them with love, and grace. And I feel like he was really calling us into our better selves. I'm not sure where we get if we enter into those conversations with fear and rage.

And so, as I thought about it, I said, you know what, my personal quest, and on the one hand this is very personal, it's just a charge to myself. What's my love letter? What's my commitment to our city? And what can I call others to say, and I invite the audience today, both right here in front of me and listening. If you are writing your love letter to an anti-racist Cleveland, what would you write? The first part is really deep gratitude. I am so grateful to this city. So, for me and my wife, 15 years now, in Cleveland, we consider ourselves Clevelanders at this point. Clevelanders would not consider ourselves Clevelanders because I don't know how long you have to be here to get that magical acceptance. But Clevelanders are serious. If you can't name where you went to high school in Cleveland, you're not a Clevelander, but this city has given us so much. We raised our kids here. So many things to love about Cleveland that we'll get into. So, part of the letter is about gratitude, gratitude for all of those who came before us and provided us with the city that is revitalizing, that is turning around. Look at us. We're sitting right now in this gorgeous Public Square that didn't just happen by itself. It had to be planned and executed. So, part of it is gratitude. But the other part of the love letter is a call to the city as its best self. What could we be if we really set our sights on being a city where literally every single citizen was valued for their potential to contribute? That's not the city we live in today.

**Moulthrop**

I want to dig in there because this is the stuff that I think people came to hear; you are uniquely positioned to offer a kind of a roadmap. You can get a lot of people to say yes, I want to do anti-racist work or yes, let's dismantle structural racism. But when it comes to how, it's a a much more difficult question. I've always I've long been of the mind—and you and I've talked about this—that you just choose, everybody should choose their work, right? Should choose what their work is, how they're going to lean in, and where they're going to put their weight. But I think you have some more specific things in mind besides just sort of letting everybody choose their work.

**Mark Joseph**

Absolutely. So, part of the reason for this framing of the love letter was kind of motivational. And this call to what would it mean for us to declare that we will be an anti-racist city. It's kind of a thought exercise that we can have together today. One of this moment of opportunity is that here we are about to have a new mayor and select a new mayor, for the first time in almost a couple decades, right, huge moment of opportunity. So, my thought exercise for us all is what if that next mayor, and I'm literally appealing for the mayoral candidates to declare that Cleveland will be—let's just say it—the first anti-racist city in America.

**Moulthrop**

How is that different from declaring racism is a public health crisis, which has been done last year?

**Mark Joseph**

Which was, by the way done a year ago, right? And so, we've got some interesting questions we could ask about what's happened in the past year since we declared that? I think what's different, is declaring racism as a public health puts one dimension on the issue—health, which I think is very, very helpful because it makes us think about racism in a different way. Wow, that really affects people's health. When I talk about Cleveland as an anti-racist city, I'm talking about anti-racism, infusing every single facet of city life. So, I'm talking not just about health, or the economy, or education, or the criminal justice system, or who we hang out with, who we spend time with, what we do in our places of work. I'm talking about across the board. Cleveland as an anti-racist city would be one where we would experience anti-racism in every facet of our lives.

Because when the city council declares racism a public health issue—again, fantastic move, and I applaud Councilman Griffin and all the others who are behind that—but what it does is it allows us to then look at the City Council and say, what are they going to do? It allows us to sit in this moment and say, it's been a year City Council, what have you done? My vision of Cleveland as anti-racist city is that it calls upon every single one of us. It calls upon us across sectors, so it's not something that we could point to the government, or point to the corporate sector, or point to philanthropy, or point to education, or point to our civic spaces, that Cleveland as an anti-racist city is infused across all of that. So, you asked a moment ago what would it take?

Three ingredients to anti-racist city. Number one, shared vision and will. Number two, shared language. And number three, collective everyday action. Vision and will, language, and action.

**Moulthrop**

So, vision, and will, you could see that coming from the next mayor of the city, if the next mayor of the city chooses to do that. And this has certainly been a part of the conversations that the citizens have heard from the candidates, but none has said we need to make Cleveland an anti-racist city. Many of them have spoken about the important work of anti-racism. Where else would you see that vision and will coming from? Who else needs to step up?

**Mark Joseph**

So again, politicians, mayor, city council, county council, but also government, but then other sectors. And I think it's going to be very, very important for our private sector, our corporations to get fully behind this. And we may talk about the Greater Cleveland Partnership in a moment, and our faith institutions, right, should be on board with that. People talk about Sunday as the most segregated time in our entire week. So, our faith institutions need to be on board. And there's some wonderful examples of that. But the vision needs to come from all of these different sectors. And I think part of the problem with anti-racist work is we very quickly look to others for what they need to do. And so, part of that shared vision is literally the shared part. Do we have a shared vision that we've spoken to? Have we really thought about what it would look like if we were living in a city that called itself an anti-racist city?

**Moulthrop**

Here we are in public square. How would our experience here at this moment be different if Cleveland was an anti-racist city?

**Mark Joseph**

e would be walking into our public and social spaces, more keenly attuned to who's there and who's not there, right? So, there's a lot of settings that my wife and I will walk into, and we live that way. And I would say most people of color, live that way, keenly attuned to walking into a room and saying, who's here? I think unfortunately, there are far too many white people who walk into a room and a space that's all white and it feels normal. It still just feels normal. So, we would walk into Public Square and there would be a sense of who's here and who's not here.

The second sense would be, do we, when we're in social spaces, lean out of our comfort zones a bit? So, I think most of us walk into a social space, and we look for where we think we will be comfortable. Right? So, for example, looking over on that side over there, I see mostly white folks sitting on that side. Right? Not to call any of them out in a particular way. Walking in, we would say, okay, that space looks a little homogenous, can I join it? Right, rather than my natural instinct, which might be look, all the black folks are over here, my natural instinct would be to go over there. In an anti-racist city, we would all be doing that. Right? And if for some reason, there's someone over there who's chosen that space, because that felt more comfortable. I'm going to go over back to uncomfortable conversations with the black man, give him an opportunity, right. So, in a public space and social spaces, I think we're very comfortable finding our comfort zone, which means that we end up being at places that might be diverse, right? You go to my kids’ school district—at lunchtime in Shaker Heights, walk into the lunchroom and what are you going to see played out in that social space? Folks sitting in homogenous tables, even though the whole space is diverse. So, I think part of it is how do we kind of you know, encourage ourselves, build the muscle, people talk about building anti-racist muscle, to lean out of our comfort zones and lean into discomfort and a little bit of a way.

**Moulthrop**

Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative talks about this, he's got a whole recipe, sort of similar to the things you’re discussing. The ones that have always stuck with me is getting comfortable with your discomfort, and also getting proximate.

**Mark Joseph**

Yeah. And proximate is right, being around other people, because I think part of that is when we stay in homogenous spaces, then we're allowed to just work in our assumptions, perceptions, stereotypes of the other. It becomes easier and easier to fall into that pathway of believing things that you have an experience for yourself. The part about Bryan Stevenson and getting proximate is learning and figuring out for yourself, how others you might have thought were very different from you, actually, you may have more common ground with.

But I think today in America, we still have far too much time when we're not leaning into our discomfort and giving ourselves a chance to be surprised, right? Part of what we'll talk about in a moment is curiosity and how can we be more curious about the other? I think we're sitting with a sense that we know the other, we've heard about the other, we have a sense how that's going to go, and I think the only way we're going to work toward being an anti-racist city is by moving out of that. By the way. One city in America, Riverside, California, has made legislation to name itself an anti-racist city, so we would not be the first. Another city, which is in England, Oxford, England, has also passed legislation to be an anti-racist city.

Fun fact, that's actually where I was born. So, for those of you who don't realize that I'm actually an immigrant kid, came to the US when I was 10. Well, there you go, Dan. And you've known me for 15 years. So, Oxford, England, city of my birth has named itself an anti-racist city.

**Moulthrop**

I would never have put Oxford and Riverside, California, in the same category.

**Mark Joseph**

There you go.

**Moulthrop**

I love it. You alluded earlier to the business community. How would the business community operate differently? What would be the hallmarks of a business community in an anti-racist city?

**Mark Joseph**

Yeah, let’s talk a little bit about this framework: person, role, system. If you walk away with nothing else today, walk away with “person, role, system.” It's a framework that's being very used in the kind of social change space to talk about operating at multiple levels. A lot of this work has to be individual, at the role level: what are the roles of individuals within their organizations, and what are the roles of those organizations and then at the system's level. For the corporations, the businesses, they would be applying exactly that framework they would be thinking, okay, literally, the people in this corporation, the CEO, CFO, COO, what steps are they taking? How are they modeling anti-racist behavior? What are they reading? What are they listening to? What are they talking about? How are they acting? What have they named for themselves, that they are leaning into as part of their racial equity journey, the anti-racist journey? What is happening internally in that company, to provide the members of that business community, that staff, opportunities to be learning, sharing?

Now, this is some of the work that is happening. I mean, that's what's exciting. You and I were talking before, what we have going on our favorite here in Cleveland, is these Racial Equity Institute, workshops, REI workshops. At this point, I know a while ago, we were up to 5000. We're probably moving closer to 10,000 soon. People in Cleveland, who have been part of one of these two day or half day workshops, right?

**Moulthrop**

We should give credit to the ThirdSpace Action Lab, for their work there and to Cleveland Neighborhood Progress before Third Space took it over.

**Mark Joseph**

Exactly. Cleveland Neighborhood Progress kicked it off under the leadership of Joel Ratner now under the leadership of Tania Menesse, ThirdSpace Action Lab, our friends, Evelyn Burnett, and Mordecai Cargill, now leading ThirdSpace Action Lab, which is holding these workshops. So, we do have workshops, trainings, exposure going on. What these businesses and other organizations need to be doing is what comes next. And I think that's where we're falling short.

I think when we talk about turning this into everyday action, everyday accountability, everyday continued learning, that's where our organizations and our businesses need to be providing a framework for themselves. The other thing that businesses need to be doing is thinking about what's their role in the broader system. And I think this is where it needs to be a balance of internal work for leadership executives and staff, external work in terms of what kind of coalitions are we in with our fellow corporations? Again, Greater Cleveland Partnership would be an example of one space that is pulling together. We're going to have an opportunity with a new mayor for businesses to kind of re-up and recommit, as far as the future of the city of Cleveland. How are they providing their resources, their space, they're positioning their voice, to supporting the direction that city is going in? So, there's a number of levels that businesses need to be operating at. And they need to be operating both internally and externally on that front.

**Moulthrop**

Mark, you and I have talked about what is sort of referred to in shorthand as “white fragility,” the tendency of some people to approach these kinds of conversations through a lens of fear and their own worries about what they will lose. And I want to ask you to address that issue broadly..

**Mark Joseph**

Understandably, there will be many people who see this as a zero-sum game. If you gain, I lose. I've got to give up something. So basically, this conversation is all about what do I give up? And we have to be honest, I think we all need to give up something. I talked about getting out of our comfort zones. We're asking all of us to say we're going to get out of our comfort zones. All of us need to share our resources and time in a different way.

Here's the key, I think we will not be the Cleveland that we want to be unless all of us are thriving. We will be left behind, and I would say have been left behind by other cities because we were willing to let part of our city fall behind while other parts of our city thrived. So, for those who are looking at this as a zero-sum game, the challenge—and this is where it comes down to vision and our leaders, whether they be political leaders, corporate leaders, faith leaders, civic leaders—helping name for all of us that we only thrive together. That goes way more than just words and symbolism, but literally, Cleveland will not seize its moment and here's the thing. Clevelanders can often get down on ourselves. Now, luckily, we all experienced together a fantastic NBA championship. So, we got that off of our back we seized it from their (Warriors) hands and took it, all of us have experienced that. So, we can't say that we don't win, we win. But I still think there's this sense that other cities have kind of this bright future and that's behind us.

When you take the long view, we sit on the body of one of the greatest amounts of fresh water on our planet. You cannot invent that. The world is moving in our direction, people are going to be wanting to live in a place like Cleveland, a region like Cleveland, where we don't have hurricanes, we don't have earthquakes, we don't have fires, we don't have all this other stuff going on. Now, it's a little scary because of climate change. But the point is, Cleveland's best days are truly still ahead of it. But we will not seize those fully if those best days are for some of us and not for all. And so, I think what we need to do is shift that conversation from “what are you asking me to give up” to “we are asking you to seize a future that's going to be better for all of us.” But that is going to require that we don't operate where we're the potential contributions of the majority of our population on the sidelines because we're not fully educating them, we're not fully giving them access to the best health. And so, we do have to see this as a collective from which we all gain.

**Moulthrop**

Mark, I have another question for you. Cleveland occupies a certain space in the national imagination. Partly that's because of the environmental journey that Cleveland has been on. And the success we found in environmental cleanup and environmental justice. Partly that's because of the challenges, the economic challenges we faced. But when it comes to race, there's also some really significant moments: we were the site of some very significant uprisings during the civil rights era. We're also the home of the first black mayor of a major American city, Carl Stokes, you know that really, the apogee of black political power of that moment. And, and also of Louis Stokes, his brother, who served as the first black Congressman for the state of Ohio. And there's more, too, but can you talk a little bit about why it would be not just important to Cleveland, but to the nation?

**Mark Joseph** I love this question, because as we go, I truly believe we can lead the nation, right? We are of a size and a positioning, not just Cleveland, not just Northeast Ohio, but the state of Ohio, where we have the attention of the nation, right? The nation is used to turning its eye to Cleveland, as you mentioned, historically, first major city to elect a black mayor, and shout out to the Stokes family who remain very supportive of Cleveland, particularly the Mandel school where I am. What we do here can gain national attention. What we prove here can model. I'll throw out for example, the work of Neighborhood Connections and Tom O'Brien. When I first came to Cleveland, that was a small grants program, neighborhood small grants, and that was innovative. But it has now moved to the point where it is literally every neighborhood, grassroots engagement, folks meeting, and building connections in a whole different kind of way to create a bottom-up structure for our city. We have cities across America who have come here to experience this, to go to a Network Night and Neighbor Up Night. So, you're right. When we do this with hope and optimism, it won't just be about us. It'll be what we model as a midsize city for our peers, midsize cities for the larger cities, and for smaller cities to emulate. Can we do shared language?

**Moulthrop**

You can do shared language.

**Mark Joseph**

The only way we will be an anti-racist city together is if we can effectively talk to each other about this work. Three big words: anti-racism, racial equity, and racial justice. It would really help if we meant the same thing when we say those terms. And I think today we don't. You already covered anti-racism, right? It's not enough to say you're not a racist. So, Cleveland as an anti-racist city would have no one in Cleveland saying, "I'm not a racist, I'm not part of the problem." Cleveland as an anti-racist city would have folks saying, "I am an anti-racist. Here's what that means, and here's what I'm doing.” It's not enough to be neutral. If you're neutral, you are flowing along with the racist river. You have to be anti-racist. Racial equity is a term that we've gotten comfortable with. As we've talked about, thousands of people have gone through racial equity Institutes but as of last summer, we're now talking about racial justice. My fear is that we've just replaced racial equity with racial justice, like those are interchangeable words. In my view, they are not. Racial equity for me, is like anti-racism 1.0. Racial justice is like anti-racism 5.0. Racial equity is about making it even. How do we make it even and give everyone an even shot? Racial justice is about making it right. How do we make it right? All right, closing out my little soapbox.

**Moulthrop**

I just want to highlight the fact that you are obliquely pointing to repairing a situation...something some people refer to as reparations.

**Mark Joseph**

There we go. So, I'm going to throw out eight words really quick. When you think of racial equity, here are the four words I think of, and I invite you to think about. And when you think of racial justice, here are the four words I think about, and I invite you to think about. Racial equity: curiosity, structure, perception, and belonging. Racial justice—and you're going to see why I call this 5.0—truth healing, restitution. You just mentioned reparations, restitution, and power. Truth, healing, restitution and power. In Cleveland as an anti-racist city, we would be leaning in with curiosity, addressing structure, changing the narrative and perceptions, and focusing on belonging over othering. In Cleveland as an anti-racist city, we would be speaking truth, we would be promoting healing and acknowledging trauma, we would be providing restitution for past harms, and we would be shifting power. That would be my formula for Cleveland as anti-racist city.

**Moulthrop**

Mark Joseph, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you. Do we have any questions from the audience? Go ahead and step right up to the microphone, ma'am.

**Audience member**

Okay, first of all, yes, I am a native Clevelander. I can tell you my high school, elementary school, middle school, etc., and so forth. Yes, Cleveland is a very segregated city. So, my question I guess would be all of these things that are going on in the workplace, possibly the church and so forth, but we go home to the same segregation. So, I'm saying, how does that work? How does that expand it? And I guess I'm thinking about the younger people, perhaps we're talking about because, you know, knowing many of the younger people now, they seem to have a very different and diverse attitude than those who have say, you know, like older, and really, I guess you would say, set in their ways. So how does that work? And the other part of that is intended outcome. I could go sit, where there are a group of, say, white people, and so forth. But I guess my question is, why am I sitting there? That becomes the question. I mean, just to integrate to say that I'm sitting there, or, you know, what's the intended outcome?

**Mark Joseph**  Great question, right? We have diversity, we have diversity workshops, we do this stuff at work. And then we go home and many of us go home to segregated neighborhoods. But let's be honest, segregated social spaces, right? We had a close friend that we met early on in Cleveland. And we realize she mentioned that she was out at a conversation, and someone asked her, this is a white friend, "Had you ever had black people over to your house to dinner?" And at first, she immediately was like, of course and then she thought about it, and thought about it, and thought about it and realized she had never had a black person over to dinner at her house. And this is living in a diverse community. So, I love this question because it goes back to the person, role, system framework. We have to think about on the personal level, you can't just think about doing this work this anti-racist work when you're in your workplace and there is the training or the, you know, work process. You have to think about what this means in your personal space. I also love the part of your question about adults and parents versus the youth. Because as adults, I think we tend to be more set in our ways, we tend to be a little bit behind the curve as your question, proposed. Youth are more open and active and connecting on a number of levels, not just racial diversity but many forms of diversity. How are we thinking about our social spaces? How are we thinking about who are we having over to dinner? Who are we going out to dinner with? How are we using our social time? And I'm not asking anyone to transform overnight. But I do think in Cleveland as an anti-racist city, one weekend a month, each Cleveland resident is thinking what is something I can do this weekend that is out of my normal space, that's going to take me into a different space? I mean one thing I would love is for folks to visit other folks’ churches or faith institutions, temples. I mean, these are actually welcoming spaces when you go, right? That's the culture of those spaces. But we get very comfortable when we go to the same place every Sunday, so what if you just leaned in once a month and went to a different place to experience it? I think it would be amazing discovery to see what you would learn being in a different kind of faith space. We absolutely need to take it into the social space.

**Moulthrop**

I like the idea of a worship exchange program. I think you missed the opportunity to talk about developing mixed-income communities.

**Mark Joseph**

I did, absolutely. Nice catch. If we're living in these segregated neighborhoods, we're not going to get to being an anti-racist city. And so, the work of the National Initiative on Mixed-Income communities. We focus every day on what are strategies, what are tactics to promote neighborhoods, buildings, housing complexes that are home to a mix of people, it gets back to the point you raised from Bryan Stevenson, right? If we're going to be proximate, we can't only be proximate in our workplaces. We also want to be proximate in other spaces that we hang out. We talk about our home space, we also talk about third spaces. It's all about those social spaces and community forums where we come together. And so how can we make sure that we are doing the policy work, the practice work, the real estate development work, that transformation initiative work as we have in the city to produce neighborhoods and spaces where folks from different backgrounds are able to live together and interact with each other.

**Moulthrop**

And I think, from my understanding of your research, that a key piece of that isn't just building different kinds of housing, but how you support that different kind of housing through different kinds of programs in the community. Things that are events and other sort of social structures that are opportunities that really bring people together.

**Mark Joseph**

Yes. And this reminds me there was a part of the wonderful question that I left out, which is why go into the homogenous space? What's the point? So, I'm just going over there is that just to kind of prove a point? So, this gives me a chance to come back to my racial equity frame: curiosity, structure, perception, belonging. You're going there, if you can, with some curiosity. Who are these people in this space? What are they doing over here in this space? What might I learn in this space? How might I invite some curiosity for them? Structure. You're going there to change the structure of the moment. If the structure of the room was some people sit at one place, some people sit at another place, you've disrupted that structure. The last two are really important. Perception. The people in that space may have a certain perception of people who look like you. By you going into that space and just being your awesome self, they will have an opportunity to experience your awesome self, and maybe just change that narrative they had in their heads. And particularly for black males, who are feared in our society, probably most feared of at every level, when we are able to give a change of that perception, shift the narrative, flip the script, as we say, right? It goes a long way because it's amazing how often we actually interact with people who've never had a conversation with a black guy. Like if you just have an opportunity all the time, on the bus, at the ballgame, wherever you are to step into a space and change perception. And then finally, and you might guess what it's all about: belonging versus othering. When you go into that space, you are actually appropriating that space and saying, "I'm not going to allow that to be another ad othering space, I am going to appropriate the space of somewhere I belong. I belong in this space, and I'm going to be a part of it." So, I hope that's helpful.

**Moulthrop**

Yeah, easy for you to say there's a bunch of introverts out here who are like, what? No way. Anyway, we have another question, I think.

**Audience Member**

Yes, sir. You're an immigrant yourself. How do you see immigrants and refugees figuring into your equation?

**Mark Joseph** 42:19

Awesome question. Yes, I am an immigrant, as I outed myself earlier. So, a couple of ways to go with this question. Immigrants and refugees have made a decision to come here to seek opportunity. There is a leaning into the future—a leaning into opportunity—that comes with immigrants and refugees. There is an incredible value and resource in that. However, we allow our racism, spoken or unspoken, to lean into othering. And to suggest that they don't necessarily belong, like everyone else, and to lean into the zero-sum game, as opposed to seeing the incredible value of having a set of folks who are seeking opportunity sleeved roles up, ready to do what it takes to make something different in a city like Cleveland. So that's number one.

On the darker side, immigrants and refugees to this country—and I had this choice—quickly face a choice of who do you stand with? Who are you going to be with? Where are you going to sit? What group? And immigrants and refugees quickly get a sense of the racial hierarchy in this country, quickly get a sense of who's at the bottom, which neighborhoods are at the bottom, which social spaces are at the bottom, and immigrants and refugees, and it's hard to blame them when they lean in the direction of how do I join those spaces that are valued? Right? We haven't mentioned white supremacy yet. (If we're going to be an anti-racist city, we have to be comfortable saying the term white supremacy maybe that should have been one of my big four terms: anti-racism, racial equity, racial justice and white supremacy.) White supremacy has set up this hierarchy where white people, white-appearing people, white-bodied people, to use a term of the day, are at the top, so immigrants and refugees naturally say I'm going to lean that way. What we have to do is have the engagement, have the work, have the momentum as a city, where we don't force immigrants and refugees to make that kind of choice, where we say there is value in all of our people, in all of our communities and invite our refugees and our immigrants to be a part of all of those. So let's make sure we're having those difficult conversations, naming these realities of the choice that our racist city, our racist system sets up for us. So that we don't have to make these choices about which part of the hierarchy am I going to aspire to? And which part of the hierarchy am I going to lean away from?

**Audience Member**

So, I appreciate everything you said. I guess the question though, comes in most of the civic leaders we have who are not elected leaders don't live in the city of Cleveland. I grew up in Shaker. I say I'm from Cleveland, but I'm not. How do we do the trust building and neighboring and relationship building that needs to happen to get to some of these conversations and be able to be comfortable in having some of these conversations with black men that is required. But you know, I now live in the city, but when I come to have this conversation with somebody who's not making that same investment, who's not sending their kids to Cleveland schools because Cleveland schools aren't good enough for their kids, how do I start that relationship and that conversation with somebody without necessarily being able to trust them because they go home to a suburb, where these aren't necessarily the issues?

**Mark Joseph**

Love it. Great question. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. So hopefully everyone heard the question. So, when these folks who don't live in Cleveland, who have chosen to be part of the dynamic that's been for decades, right? That opportunity has flowed away for the center city, when they're in Boston, or Phoenix, or LA, or Atlanta, and someone asks them where they live? What do they say? They say Cleveland, whether they're from Chagrin Falls or Solon, or Mayfield Heights or wherever, they say they live in Cleveland. So, this may just be Mark being glass half full, but I think it's kind of where we have to start being asset-based. That's important. Why do they identify with Cleveland when they're in Los Angeles? There's something about that. There's a connection. So, I think part of the answer to the question is move away from this either-or, us-them. I'm in the city, you're in the suburbs, you made this choice. Move toward a "we," which is that this is a regional issue. We sink or swim as a region; our central city is critical to the region as are our inner ring suburbs and our outer suburbs. So, part of that vision and will, that would start with county leaders, mayor, and others is to name this as a regional conversation. And there's been numerous conversations about how fragmented a region we are. Right? But the question really does get down to the kind of person level we talked about person, role, system. At a personal level, what would it mean for you to get beyond personally, you and your family and your friends and your peer network, out of your city-suburb frame? Where would you spend your time differently if you got out of that frame? How would you have conversations differently? The other point about the folks who are living in the suburbs is they do come to the city. They come in for the ballgames, they come in for the arts and culture, they come and hang out a Public Square. Maybe some of them are here today with us, right? A, do we make sure that they are welcome coming in? B, goes back to what we talked about earlier. Do we make sure that those spaces when they come in, are spaces where we are mixing? Are spaces where they are invited to come into that space and connect with the folks who are in the city? As opposed to come into that space, enjoy whatever larger thing is going on, but sit in their homogenous grouping and go back to the suburbs without ever having changed the narrative felt a sense of belonging. So, I think there's work that we can do in those spaces.

And I think that our next mayor should make that one of their top talking points is a return to the city but also making one of their talking points that wherever you are in the region, you are part of greater Cleveland's quest to be an anti-racist space, an anti-racist city, and anti-racist region.

**Audience Member**

You know, you've raised so many points that I probably have a million questions, but I'm a native Clevelander, and I live in Shaker Heights. And I guess we would say that living in that I'm a right now, I'm not a racist, but I'm not an anti-racist. And I think it brings up to the point of what happens educationally wise? We start in the elementary schools in Shaker Heights and the kids are great integrators. For years, my kids all went to schools. By the time they get to the high school, they have separated apart. Hasn't the educational system, even in a community that's supposedly so liberal, hasn't it let us down? I mean, it's not something that's going to happen overnight, but even the city of Shaker Heights, which is this bastion, they have to declare themselves to be anti-racist and actually do something.

**Mark Joseph**

So, my wife's out there smiling because you've just named our experience in the city. We moved here from Chicago 15 years ago. A big part of our excitement about moving to Cleveland was Cleveland neighborhoods, Cleveland opportunities but also, we had read and heard about the city of Shaker Heights. As you just said, bastion, when there were opportunities 50 years ago for Shaker Heights to go the way of other suburbs, they said we are going to be racially integrated. They've achieved through racial integration, but not racial inclusion. And we certainly could talk about this for a very long time, let me just say, there's still a tremendous amount of work to be done. Our kids have gone through that experience, two of them now in college of going through and that moment, where you have to make a choice. And suddenly, are you going to be in Advanced Placement classes, which means you're going to be separated from kids who look like you. I think one example, just one of many that Shaker Heights is doing right now is working away from tracking and walking away from pulling out and implementing the International Baccalaureate program but making it available to all. So, thinking about how can we have opportunities to have the best possible resources, academics, and teaching, but it's available to everyone. It's not tracked. It's not for certain students, right? So that's one of many, many, many examples. And I do think Shaker Heights is one of many districts that is pushing into that future. You're absolutely right. In some ways, it's a disappointment, because you say how could we be here 60 years later, for those of you read the Washington Post article recently about Shaker Heights, and still having these issues. It's heartbreaking in some ways. But I still firmly believe that there's ways in which Shaker Heights and Cleveland can demonstrate progress on these issues that can be models to other places in our region and other places in our country.

**Audience Member**

All right, really quickly, it's a bridge to what this gentleman just said. So based on what's happening currently at the state level, with Critical Race Theory being on the line in terms of the House Bill where they are promoting that they do not want you to talk about any type of you know, even racial equity or racial justice. Based on your four-prong approach under racial justice, when you talk about power, my question to you is what action steps we might want to take to kind of address this in the moment because these bills are like literally in process or being proposed, currently at the state level. So, is there anything you might offer based on your theory around power dealing with white supremacy that we can take to address this in real time?

**Mark Joseph**

Absolutely. Thanks for the question. Critical Race Theory. So, a few of the words I would go back to that I use, you mentioned power, and I'll get there. Curiosity. How many people in this Critical Race Theory debate are even asked or curious about it? We're all making up our minds about Critical Race Theory. Do we even know what it is? Right? Or are we relying on what someone else has told us that it's a bad thing? Perception. We have a perception of Critical Race Theory as this scary thing that we need to stay away from. And in my racial justice framework, the first word is truth. Really, that's what Critical Race Theory is about. It's about seeking truth, and realizing that there are multiple truths in any situation. Critical Race Theory just asks us to say, we've been taught one single truth. We have one single truth in our textbooks very often. And very often it misses other truths. And very often it's not factual. What I would say we each of us can do is find someone in your social space, your sphere of influence, family member, peer member, person in your workspace, who is anti-Critical Race Theory. Ask them what they think it means. Have a conversation with them about why is it such a bad thing, to want our children in our schools and our colleges, universities to be exposed to multiple truths. If we're going to be global citizens, and once we leave this country, we know that other folks have other truths. If we're not prepared in skills to operate—this goes back to immigrants to operate in that situation and multiple truths—we are going to fail on this globe and on this planet. Do you not want your children to be prepared to go anywhere in this world and be able to function with people who come from very different backgrounds? Who wouldn't want that? The world is coming to us, and we need to go to the world. So right now, find someone in your social space, who has a problem with Critical Race Theory and lean into that difficult conversation with curiosity, shifting perception, and trying to get to a different kind of truth about what it even really means.

**Moulthrop**

Dr. Mark Joseph of the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities and the Mandel School for Applied Social Sciences with "A Love Letter to an Anti-Racist Cleveland" Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much, Mark Joseph.

**Mark Joseph**

Thank you very much. Thanks, folks, for being here today.