**Your Mind on History, Guns & Racism, with Dr. Gerald Higginbotham**

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0:00:05.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Welcome back to Minds Matter. I'm Ava.

0:00:08.5 Beth Fisher: And I'm Beth.

0:00:09.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: This week I spoke to Dr. Gerald Higginbotham, who is a post-doctoral scholar at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia.

0:00:19.3 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Hello everyone. My name is Gerald Higginbotham. I'm currently at the University of Virginia in the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy as a post-doctoral research associate. Basically what that means is I got my PhD, but I'm still postponing the actual decision of whether to stay in academia and pursue faculty position or to go into industry [0:00:40.9] \_\_\_\_ very strongly pursuing this academic faculty route. I'm more than just my job and my position. I hail from St. Louis, Missouri, oldest brother, one younger brother. I were St. Louis close near dear to my heart. Before moving to Virginia for this recent position last year I had been in California doing the schooling thing, doing the working thing, doing the, enjoying the long walks on the beach thing.

0:01:03.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: So that's who I am as a person. But the work that I do is I'm trained as a social psychologist and what I've been up to recently was really thinking about how it's important to consider history as a social context, to understand a human behavior and attitudes. Being a social psychologist, we take social context into account, but one of the things that I've been pushing for and is actually rooted in some training that I had in cultural psychology is to really think about how group histories and understanding group histories can help illuminate the psychology that we see at group and individual levels today. So that's the broader scope of the work that I do and have been pursuing that and the domain of sports and firearms and even how we think about histories of oppression.

0:01:48.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: Mentioned that you started with thinking more about cultural psychology, but looking at why you think taking this historic lens is so important and whether you've seen in your work any consequences of us not having done that. In a lot of the research that we do.

0:02:03.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: It honestly started in grad school. So I mean in undergrad Jennifer Eberhardt was my major advisor. She had a lab with herself and Hazel Markus. And cultural psychology is this huge part of the Stanford culture. It's this idea that it's individuals, you have to understand what are our practices and institutions that we're embedded in and what are some of the original ideas that gave rise to these institutions and the practices that we engage in. And it affects us but also to how we consequently impacted. So that's always been in my head, but the thing that was a spark for me was as a graduate student trying to get his first couple projects off the ground. Like what I was interested in, which was a holdover from the work that I was doing in undergrad, was really thinking about why sports was such a important part of Black male identity.

0:02:53.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And I was trying to think about it not just from playing sports or going to college or being a student athlete or even participating in high school sports, but more of it as this broader identity that regardless of whether or not you played a sport, it was something that had meaning. Like whether it's the clothes that you wear, it's, being knowledgeable about the game. And I kept getting questions about why sports? Why not music? And it was a very hard question to answer, which is your typical social psych? Is it activity, utility-based type deals? And part of what I ended up writing about my master's thesis was the social historical reason for why sports might hold a particular value culturally for young Black men. And it being not something that just came out of nowhere. It came out of the present moment that came out, just the fact that there's LeBron and Michael Jordan playing on TV that people can see.

0:03:46.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: But more so because it was rooted in racial discrimination and educational occupational opportunities. And that in itself played a role in what were some pathways for Black men at the time to achieve some sort of poor trajectory but also status within the Black community and outside of it. And that sports was one of those things. Like you think about Jackie Robinson in 1947, right? That's before Branford Board of Education, that's before you know we're having these integration on the educational spaces and things such as that. And you have people integrating basketball teams in the fifties like Wilt Chamberlain going to Kansas? So that was where I was thinking about if it mattered in this way back then it's important to understand that trajectory and why that might matter today.

0:04:28.7 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And explaining and it tying together all of these different things, whether that's media representation, whether that's, support that Black youth perceived to get in sports, like the fact that my grandma, I got into Stanford for undergrad, not playing a sport just to be clear, just the academics and my grandma was like, oh why don't you like welcome to the basketball team. And I'm like, grandma, I'm barely 6 feet tall. What are you talking about? I'm there're just to go to class. But for her, in her generation, that was the thing that you did. Talking to my Black male therapist in his day and age, he was an older Black man. He was like, if you're a Black man in college, you're either student athlete or you served in the military. And so thinking about that kind of cultural history of why sports played such a big role in educational spaces for Black men, that really helped me make sense of the project and it was the true psychology behind what was happening in the present. And so that for me was one of the early triggers of saying I need to be thinking about this history and all of the... Like the psych work that I'm doing because it can be trivialising if I'm just saying sports is important because meet what people see on TV and that's part of it, but there's a longer trajectory of how we got here.

0:05:36.2 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And so I think that was one of the things that has really shaped the work that I'm currently doing now, whether that's with firearms and things such as that. And yeah, I think a failure to do psychology, and this isn't stuff that I've been brought up, it's things that other people are working on is taking out the history can really make us focused on what's going on in the present like why do we have these racial differences in the present? And in many ways that can be reifying, like racial differences versus saying how do we get here? Think about it as an active process thinking about, or just recently had a conversation in this relevance to some of the work we had published on sports and stereotypes when we submitted some of the papers, Black men being assumed to be a student athlete. And that being related to lower perceptions of academic ability on college campuses.

0:06:21.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: People are like, aren't they more likely to be student athletes? Isn't there a kernel truth to these stereotypes? But our argument is like where does that stereotype come from? What purpose does that serve to just assume that Black men, if you're on a college campus, you're a student athlete. Like why is that the stereotype? Why is that the prevalent experience and assumption? So again, they think thinking about history 'cause things are just a broader perspective and if social psychology is really interested in thinking about context, it has to consider the broader context in the histories that we're all subject to. So yeah, so that's where I'm at and it's not easy. There's a lot of learning, there's a lot of reading, there's a lot of talking to people. But for me it's refreshing to be able to feel like I get a bigger picture and a fuller story of understanding psychology today.

0:07:06.8 Beth Fisher: Yeah, that's really interesting also because I feel like I've come across some of this work about stereotypes and of... Specifically of Black college students being stereotyped as athletes and I feel like I've only ever read about it from the perceiver side, the non-Black side. So it's really interesting. That was also something that like your grandma was encouraging you to do and was excited for you to do and that there was these different ways of perceiving it though it was under the same almost stereotype umbrella, I don't know if you would call it that, but that it meant different things to both sides of the equation and both groups that were involved in this. And so I'm wondering, was that something that clicked for you and something that informs your work now?

0:07:49.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah, I feel like athletics was... Explaining, it was so hard because it's just like one, I'm a Black man doing work on sports, so there's all types of stereotypes I ran into with that. Did I play a sport college and all this different type of stuff? I think the thing that was so interesting, so for me growing up in St. Louis was like I was in majority Black spaces and so I was able to see I have my friends that I talk to sports about and it it's like a completely different experience of talking and how I'm thinking about sports when I'm in in these more interracial scenarios, which was my undergraduate experience. And I really wasn't really trying to focus or talk about sports with people who weren't Black partially because of what I thought it would make people assume about me.

0:08:29.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: It helped me from the beginning of my graduate school experience to think about the importance of studying or communities... Particularly like communities that just aren't affiliated with dominant groups for just our own experiences like, and my master's thesis was just a sample of Black people. It was just like looking at how do Black people think about sports and their experiences in school looking at how this is different for Black men and Black women, how sports can afford particular benefits for Black men where you're not saying that for Black women, but also to, I was looking at the interaction of what does it mean to be both academically identified and identified with sports and for Black men it was just saying that sports served as a buffer socially for Black men who were identified highly academically and we're finding that identifying academically it was a little bit of a cost socially for Black men, but for those who both were academically identified and identify with athletics, you didn't see those costs and that had some benefits across the transition of college with feeling closer to other young Black men and study behaviors and having more Black friends in college.

0:09:34.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: In the first year, for B women there was no cost of academically identifying no social costs or in that there was no bump for identifying with sports. But what we found for both Black men and Black women were that feeling a greater sense of connection, identification with your inter-sectional in group had these benefits across the college transition. And so it was interesting because it was a secondary data set and they had items that saying how close do you feel to other Black people in general or other young Black men and young Black women. And so these are high school age students and we found that for Black men identifying with sports didn't necessarily give you a bump on how close you felt to Black people in general, but it did on how close you felt to young Black men in particular.

0:10:17.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And so there are both racial and gender components to this identity for young Black men. And not saying that this doesn't have benefits for young Black women. Again, this is we're talking about on average and I think that there obviously is variation within... Wait, but that was one of the findings that really took me to a place where just saying it's important to understand how Black people think and to contribute that and that's worth study of regardless of anything else. And that was something that I was first introduced to at Stanford when I did take classes in African, African American studies and I was glad to be able to contribute to that with some of the early worst research and even the dissertation on the stuff we'll talk about later about the importance of ancestors in thinking about Black history. Because oftentimes, especially in social psychology, it feels that if you're studying other non-White people, you're just showing psychology boundary conditions to what's been found with just like a majority White samples.

0:11:18.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And sometimes it can be hard to break away from them because you get advice from people who are just study the population that you have access to and who are in these participant pools and they're giving you advice based off of the things that they've done in the past, their desire to want you to be able to do research quickly. And it's just like, no, we deserve to be seen and our perspectives deserve to be heard and deserve to be studied and hypothesized about. And it sounds like the stupidest thing to say because it's like of course, but it's not when you're doing the work and the research in these spaces and unfortunately it's not a given. And the funny thing is when I talk to my brother and other Black people about, they're like, Yeah, duh. And I'm like, Great. That's what I want it to be. I want you all to not be surprised at this because that means at least I captured something that was authentic.

0:12:09.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah. It's crazy how much of the time we talk about our research and then we talk to people who are not in the field and they're like, "Yeah, like why are you... " That's not new, Why are you telling me that? I feel like there's a lot of tension of what kinds of knowledge is valuable and how important is it for us to "legitimise" this kind of knowledge in these spaces that historically aren't colonialists and are not meant to represent the people that we're trying to study and to take on the challenges that we're trying to study some of the time.

0:12:39.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: It feels in some ways like icky. And that's why I don't ever want to be like, "We need to show this to show that it's real." Just because your perspective isn't represented in what has been shown and research and documented for doesn't mean that it's not real. Oftentimes it means they weren't studying these different groups or they're just studying at one particular aspect or had different perspective that typically isn't coming from the community. And so I don't think that the work... And I hope that the work is never taken as trying to legitimise it, but more so it's just, work that can be used to supplement. It's just, for instance, I've done stuff outside of like academia, like reports, like in film and media representation. It's not like telling anybody anything new. But when my Black friends who are in media or acting or music, they are able to take that report and use it.

0:13:28.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And so I want to make stuff that people can use and contribute in that way, especially the point... We're advocating for social change. I think one thing, I haven't done this myself, but definitely participatory research I think is important. And at some point I want to do that and make sure that's a part of the work that I'm doing because I think that having communities design what is the goal and what is the perspective? I think that is the most powerful work that can actually have meaningful change because there's no need to try and adapt it after the fact. It's already started with community input. But at this stage ideas that I've had, I just come from being in community and saying, okay, where... Is this a place where I can just give voice to the experiences that I've had other people have had and bring a psychological lens to it.

0:14:20.1 Beth Fisher: So one of the things that Gerald covered that I thought was interesting, and I feel like we've covered it a bit in our podcast episodes, but maybe haven't spoken about it so directly before. But one of the big issues with psychology research is most of it is done in undergraduate psychology students at Western universities. So there's this effect called the WEIRD bias, which is Western Educated, Industrial Rich Democratic countries. So if we're wanting to understand behavior or something about the brain and we just have this population, we're not really getting a sample across different cultures.

0:15:02.4 Beth Fisher: Yeah. And so one of the reasons why that really is a problem is that when some of this cross-culture research started being done in western psychology, or when Western psychology started being involved in studies looking at places other than the West, which interestingly also coincided with researchers coming to the West from other places to start graduate school. So a lot of it did come from diverse researchers as well. But when part of this started happening and when researchers in the West started looking at other cultures, we actually realized that a lot of the things that we took for granted as basic cognition and even perception, things that we took as human nature actually didn't hold across a lot of populations. So for example, even some optical illusions that are really strong for people in the West didn't hold in other places.

0:15:54.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: So one illusion that some people might be familiar with, that's called The Müller-Lyer illusion is where there's two horizontal lines and at the edges of these lines there are arrows pointing inward or outward. And we'll put this on our website so you can take a look if you don't know what I'm talking about. But in this illusion, even though these two lines are the same length actually because of the arrows, there's an illusion that's created that makes the line seem longer or shorter. And this is a pretty strong illusion. Again, for people who haven't seen it, I encourage you to check it out. But when researchers in the West started looking at other populations, they realized that this didn't hold for everyone. So one of the theories behind why this holds so strongly for us is because in the West were used to a certain type of carpentry, which specifically is these straight lines.

0:16:44.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: So our walls and our floors often end in straight lines in our architecture, whereas in other places, there aren't any straight lines. And so in some hunter-gatherer communities where this doesn't exist, they just see those lines as the same and they don't see how we could possibly be seeing them as any different. So because these illusions are so strong, it was really shocking that this wasn't a feature of nature, but was rather nurture. And so we realized that a lot of elements of our cognition that we thought were human nature were actually just due to our culture and the way that we were raised and our experiences and so I also think Gerald's work really situating what he's doing in a particular population. And taking into account all this context is really important and really cool. And again, going off of what Gerald was talking about saying that a lot of these things might actually perhaps counter-intuitively feel really obvious from the outside when you're not researching this type of stuff, that it might seem obvious that you should be taking into account culture and taking into account history and context, especially if you're studying something like racism and the experience of Black people in America, for example.

0:17:57.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: But actually a lot of the time this isn't done in research and in social psychology specifically, there's really been a move to try to make everything as objective as possible because social psychology considers itself a science. And I would consider it a science as well. But I do think that it's hard to deny that it's different in a lot of ways than being a physicist and studying something like gravitational forces. Though I know that that is also a debate. But I do think it's hard to deny that social psychology is going to be messier than physics, at least in some ways. But anyway, because of this in research and social psychology in psychology that studies inter-group relations specifically. So social identity and how our social identities affect how we engage with other people. A lot of research is actually done using something called the minimal groups paradigm. So people will come into the lab and will say, "You're part of the Eagles and you're part of the Rattlers." So these brand new teams that kind of come from nothing. Or you are with the blue shirts and you're with the green shirts. And so with that, we look at the effects of what just being put in a group can do.

0:19:09.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: We kind of try to minimize all the existing groups that a person is part of, the existing social identities that they're part of to create new social identities in the lab. And there's something to be said about that research because it does minimize the amount of effects that we're looking at. So with that research, you can really get into what is the effect of just being split into a group without all of this history and without all of this context when you're looking at race or gender, but oftentimes with that research we do then sacrifice some real world validity. So how much we can actually take out of that research to apply to the real world for internal reliability. So how much that research is valid and how much we can actually say that just this group effect is leading to the results that we see rather than something else, rather than all the complicated, messy stuff that comes with studying real groups and taking history and power relations into account.

0:20:02.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: And so I think the fact that Gerald is actually studying what kind of has been stripped away from a lot of social psychology, I think is really interesting and really important. And while I do think, again, that the research that has been done in the past, of course, has been important and has brought us a lot, I think we have been missing that second side of actually studying all of the messy real world stuff.

0:20:24.6 Beth Fisher: And another thing. A lot of psychology also uses questionnaires. And these questionnaires, obviously, are written usually first in English, and language has a certain meaning and phrases that we define and say it means X, Y, Z. So if we're using these same questionnaires in different cultures and translating them into different languages, we can be asking a totally different question. I had a really cool conversation recently with someone I know who studies bizarre dreaming, why we have these bizarre images in our dreams. And she was saying that in a lot of cultures, they consider dreams to come from their ancestors. So they're messages from their ancestors. And when they dream, they believe that's what it is. So when you ask these populations about bizarre dreaming, they report way less. But is it because, oh, if you think it's from your ancestors, it's going to seem less bizarre than the people who don't think that, but then these groups, so it's tribes in East African countries, we just don't really use that data then. So then what are we really capturing? And I think that's, yeah, it comes up a lot in psychology, and it's... Yeah, it's interesting to think about.

0:21:38.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah. That's definitely been an issue in cultural psych research too when Western researchers tried to make the point that what they had found previously is "The truth." One of the first researchers in emotions was Paul Ekman, who was a proponent of this basic emotions theory, which just means that he believed that there were six or seven basic emotions that included things like anger, surprise, joy, fear, and that this basic subset existed across the world, and that it was the same for everyone, that this was human nature. And so he went to some places like Papua New Guinea, and he tested this in tribes that were remote and not in touch with other civilizations as much. And he said that he found that they were able to recognize these emotions and that if you showed them a photo of a Western person who was posing these different emotions, like surprise or fear, that they would be able to actually pick out that emotion. But with translation and also with forcing these people to make these choices with this random person from a place that you've never seen, that you've never been in contact with, tells you to answer these questions, and when we're trying to impose a lot of the research that we've done in the West on other cultures, it often just doesn't translate because these types of things don't make sense.

0:23:02.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: So you might have heard of the World Happiness Index, I think it's called, which is a ranking of the happiest countries in the world, and oftentimes, these Scandinavian countries come out at the top. But again, as Beth was saying, those are like surveys that ask particular questions in particular ways. So let's just say that we're trying to measure happiness with our questionnaires, and we're asking people, How often do you feel excited? How often do you feel euphoric? Maybe some questions that are a little bit more nuanced than that. I imagine that they're more nuanced than that. But essentially, they are trying to get at this understanding of what we think of as happiness. So these high arousal emotions. That's what we consider happiness to be. But if you're asking those pointed questions with that view of happiness in mind and other cultures don't consider happiness to actually be what those questions are asking, then you're not getting a good representation of the happiest country in the world, or maybe you're just getting a snapshot of the happiest country in the world if you come from a certain culture.

0:24:00.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: There's also side notes of interesting work on the fact that in some cultures, the pursuit of happiness as a concept just isn't something that's really valued. So even asking those types of questions are a little bit out of place. But just this basic idea of the fact that when we're asking questions using surveys and trying to import a particular viewpoint and trying to get at a view of human nature with a specific type of human nature in mind from the get-go, you're often not going to be getting good results, and you're often going to be biasing your results in some ways. And that might partially explain why we get those results consistently year after year with certain Western countries coming out on top of those happiness measures.

0:24:40.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: So I think these are just some reminders of the lesson that we've learned so many times in psychology that we need to be taking culture into account. We need to be taking structures into account and the way that people's environments influence them. This is stuff that psychologists have been talking about for a very long time, but that, I think, is often forgotten about when we're doing our psych studies in the basements of our universities. And I think what's also interesting about what Gerald does is that it's a really good reminder that we not only need to be taking broad culture into account in the sense of, when we think about weird populations, I think a lot of the times it calls to mind this geographic map of the world where it's about regions that are really separated geographically. It's about North America and Europe versus the rest of the world, in some ways. And I think it's a good reminder that this issue of weird populations is not just about some countries being studied and others not being studied, but of it being a particular slice of a population in these countries being studied. Some people have argued that it's not only W meaning Western, but that that W also means White.

0:25:52.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: And I think Gerald 's research is a really good reminder of the fact that that W can really stand for White and that in a lot of the research that's done, as Gerald mentioned, we do use convenience samples a lot. So there are reasons that are more practical that people are just going to be using whatever population is at hand. But there are also more structural reasons behind the fact that a lot of research wasn't looking at the kind of other side of prejudice, namely the people who are affected by prejudice, not the people who are potential perpetrators of prejudice. So a lot of the times research is done on dominant groups and how can we get dominant groups to stop being racist or stop being prejudiced? Stop being misogynistic. Whereas there's been a lot less research until recently that looks at how does prejudice and racism. And now luckily with research, like the research that Gerald is doing, we get to see how is structure, how is history actually affecting these populations and how can we see how these people are actually being influenced by the structures that they lived in. Rather than saying, how can we focus on the dominant group and trying to fix this from the dominant group's perspective. Just from the cultural perspective, another good reminder of culture not only being at the geographic level.

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0:27:20.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So you also have a line of work on firearms and gun ownership. Could you tell us a little bit about that research?

0:27:26.4 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Oh yeah. So the guns work actually started off as one of those, you have an idea, you see something out there in the world. It was that Sniper in Texas. And he ended up being Black and they ended up killing him. Like one of the stories of how a Black person is killed before they're arrested. But there was like a Facebook video that was going around about a Dallas Gun Club and it was just like Black people talking about protecting their own communities. I had never seen it, seen it, if you hear about it, especially thinking about like the Black Panther party and things like that. But I had seen what that looked like and I was like, oh, like that probably would scare some White people. I kept running into that kind of idea. Went to a comedy show and this was before he, it was controversial. I think about history, it was in Chicago and Dave Chappelle was a surprise, 'cause he was talking about, it was in the conscious of gun too. He was like, what if Black people, we just all got firearms, gun control laws also change tomorrow. This and other things kept happening. I was like, okay, this is something that I think is important to study. But before doing that, I was thinking about educating stuff on gun control and gun policy. One of the histories that stood out to me was firearm policy in California.

0:28:37.4 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And California has some of the most strictest gun control laws, but one of the stricter laws were passed in response to the Black Panther Party in 1967. And what was crazy was that the people who supported it was then Governor Ronald Reagan and he had the support of NRA or National Rifles Association. And it was in response to Black Panthers who had been carrying weapons to protect Black communities from police brutality in the '60s. So they're doing like police patrol. So police pull over Black person, Black Panthers were called, they would stand across the street just watching with their guns. And it had effects on some of the brutality that was going on because like you're not going to do that in front of Black people with a lot of guns. But that was threatening and it was attributed as one of the reasons for the [0:29:25.5] \_\_\_\_ being passed. And there's this iconic protest image of the Black Panthers like protests in the bill on the steps of the state capitol with loaded firearms. They're like, this is specifically designed to keep Black people disempowered. And so that was really illuminating for me thinking about, this is a very specific historical moment, but do this map warrant to a psychology that we see today.

0:29:47.1 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Again thinking about history and talk about the time of the trajectory more on the specific research paper. And in that paper we were asking, who do White Americans perceive gun rights to be for? And what we find is that using implicit measures that White Americans, particularly those with strong anti-Black attitudes, associate gun rights with White people and gun control with Black people. So they're showing these more indirect associations with these implicit measures. And then what we tested was we show that Black people are using particular gun rights at a faster rate than White people compared to exposing a separate set of White people to information suggesting that White people are using this gun right at the fastest rate. Are those who see utilization higher in Black communities, are they going to be less likely to support the gun law or more in support for gun control? And we find that particularly among White Americans who have these strong anti-Black attitudes who are the same people who associate gun rights with White people. And it's all crazy because also there's research that shows that it's these White Americans with stronger anti-Black attitudes that are some of the most staunch supporters of gun rights.

0:30:55.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And there's research that's been done in sociology and political science showing them, if you can get a sense of a White person's level of anti-Black attitudes that is almost as strong as a predictor, if not stronger than their political ideology of how much they support gun rights or an opposition of gun control. And so it was really interesting that it was among these White Americans that are like less supportive of specific gun rights that Black Americans were described as using hell faster rate than White people. So that was what came out of these early observations. But in the process of doing the research, anything about the history of it, there's crazy racist gun control laws in this country. From... Before the abolition of slavery to right after abolition of slavery, the second amendment militias that were guaranteed you going to be a White man serving in those militias. So it was like excluding non-White people. At some point, some of those militias were instead termed to slave patrols. White citizens were able to go into free and enslaved Black households and search for and seize found firearms and...

0:31:58.4 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Could distribute punishment if Black people didn't have a good reason, "For having them." And then after abolition of slavery, Black codes in the south often had causes like Black people couldn't own firearms. So going through the history of firearms and gun control, it infused race into something that was just, again, observation. It's always stood out to me, though the NRA isn't as vocal about Black people's rights. Like when Philando Castile was killed by the police officer and he was just like, yo, I got a firearm. I literally have a registered firearm, and he's no longer with us they murdered him. But there wasn't an outcry. He is a legal gun owner. Where is the outcry? Where is the protection from government overreach and for his gun rights that NRA typically calls for? So those things are obviously very salient in the present, but looking back to history, just again clarify broader pattern and it's a pretty sobering thought about what do guns mean in the US and who are guns for and how they've been tied to white supremacy. And putting in the broader context, it makes what the Black Panther party was calling for when they were saying, "These people were trying to take away our rights and it's to keep Black people disarmed and powerless."

0:33:14.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: That had history infused in it, and so we're coming on today a little bit separated from... Barely separated from that past, though that historical trajectory still matters for these patterns that we we're seeing today, and it all eventually comes back to power or less patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism and classicism. Yeah, so that was that trajectory of where we're going with the firearms, but where we're going now is thinking about, again, highlighting what are Black Americans and what do we think about guns from a social psychological perspective, what are some of the things that are influencing our own attitudes to guns, our own experiences. And again, not just to say how are we different from white people, but to really highlight and give voice to our perspectives in the gun debate.

0:34:00.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So I'm wondering, because now you're at the School of Public Policy, right? So do you see a direct line already into how things like this can be translated into policy or applications of this type work? Let's say someone wanted to increase gun control in the US and they find your work and they basically come to the conclusion that Dave Chappelle came to, which is give all the Black people guns and then the people in power will get nervous and might end up actually implementing gun control. I'm assuming that's not your line of thought, but are you thinking in terms of any kinds of policy applications with this work?

0:34:36.3 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah, no, it's a great question. I teach a corset Batten school on identity policies that we talked about this research and the role of race and racism in guns. Also, the students have that question, so to be very clear and blunt, no, that is not the takeaway. The takeaway is not to weaponize lawful legal Black gun owners, and the fact that Black people are utilising their rights to firearms. I say that because if you're motivating policy based off of galvanising anti-Black sentiment, how does that show up in the policy? How does that show up in its writing, it's intent, it's application and how is that going to land on the experience of Black people, like just literally trying to live their lives and weaponizing Black people in that way is not the recommendation. 'Cause it's been asked in a way of was just, could it? And it's just like, no, we're not like the point of this right is to show that even in race neutral policy debates, racism plays a role, particularly like power. And one of the takeaways could be thinking about how are gun control legislation being applied? Is it unfairly targeting Black people, for example, Black people are more likely to be denied for Concealed carry permit than White person.

0:35:46.4 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Is the access to guns or gun rights fair? And then also too, I was reading some today about the GI use. So basically it's like a armed police who are going into communities and trying to get back illegal firearms. In many ways, it skews as a way to police and surveil Black communities. It's like how is gun legislation, gun policy actually still functioning as a arm of white supremacy and making sure that is not the case? 'Cause if something is being motivated by anti-Black attitudes, how is that more reinforcing hierarchies and also too leaving areas of literal neglect in terms of what are other threats. So mass shooters, aren't Black. So if you're talking about gun safety in that way and being able to make gun policy, how are you going to have gun policies that actually make a meaningful change versus just simply target the rights of Black people? And because that can be an easy way to spur up support, but you're now contributing to the greater surveillance of Black people, greater contact with the criminal legal system. What lives are you prioritising if you're utilising and weaponizing this kind of anti-blackness to pass some legislation.

0:36:50.4 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: That's one of the caveats, but from a policy perspective, generally, one thing that I've learned being in the policy school is that policy's messy and there's so many different factors that go into it, but at the end of the day, that thing I tried to emphasize with my students is that when you're thinking about policy, you're thinking about implementation, when you're thinking about the creation, you have to be aware of these broader structures of power and oppression to do your best. You can never predict it because white supremacy is very malleable. It can shapeshift and can use things that you might not have foresaw to reify hierarchy but you at least have to create laws with the understanding of how it could be usurped, how it could contribute to further perpetuating harms against communities that have been harmed historically. So that's where I think this paper can have important insight into the policy making.

0:37:41.0 Beth Fisher: So you did some work also on COVID and firearm purchasing, right?

0:37:45.1 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah. So that was in collaboration with some great folks at the University of Florida and University of Dayton, and they had been doing a lot of work on perceiving guns as a source of safety versus threat, and that collaboration was... Oh, there's this obviously looming threat out there with COVID. And if you think about guns as providing a source of symbolic safety, how might this play into gun purchase interest? So there's this broad threat out there. There's multiple different concerns going on, and does...

0:38:15.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: How you think about guns as whether it's more of a source of safety versus threat. Influence how you're thinking about guns as a potential solution to managing these threats? So we asked people over April, through May of 2020, just about different concerns that they had, whether that was actually about getting sick from COVID, whether that was concerns about restrictions, local restrictions like the fact that, will government used COVID, to take guns and things like that. And then ideology, conservative to liberal, and then whether or not you own the gun, do these things predict firearm purchase interest. And because there was a huge swing in how many people reported buying firearms and the early parts and still now with COVID. And so what we did find was that whether you're liberal, conservative, whether you own a gun or not, concerns about local restrictions, all of the predictive power that had in your interest in purchasing a firearm was explained by the extent to which you saw guns as a source of safety. And so it was really interesting, this meaning of guns as this individual sense of safety versus thinking about guns as actually a threat. And so it was a little application of some of the things that at least social psych had been contributing to understanding of firearms.

0:39:27.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: One of the interesting things though that stood out was that the only concern that we measured and we measured about 10 different concerns and though one thing that stood out that wasn't fully explained by seeing guns as a source of safety was, did you think the government was going to use COVID to take your guns? So that concern had over and above effects on your interest in purchasing a firearm than simply just seeing guns as a source of safety. And so it was at least an indication that there is some level of concern about this broader government power that was playing a role in addition to what we think about individual level of safety concerns. And so I think that work was really fascinating for me to get into because at that point I was really thinking about the racial aspect of it. But going back to this very basic, we have this need to feel a sense of safety. And in the US, unfortunately guns gets kind of a maladaptive coping mechanism because it provides this sense of safety but also too heightens the danger that you perceive. It also heightens your risk of dying by firearm, whether it's homicide or suicide, just by simply having it, in many ways it actually is heightening the threats that you originally got the gun for.

0:40:35.1 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And that's why I think it's a spiral. And I think breaking the spiral is a huge undertaking and I think the work that we did in this paper showed that. For sure.

0:40:43.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: Did you look at any outcomes in the paper of how comforted people felt post buying guns? Or was it just an in the moment?

0:40:51.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah, so we just looked at interest in buying guns. So we did have some people who reported having bought guns, but it was a very small sample of folks who actually reported having bought a gun. And it is hard to tell whether or not that's because people feel comfortable saying they'd bought a gun or not. But no, we didn't follow up with people afterwards and say, for those who bought a gun, do you now feel safer? But the one thing thing that's interesting that that's been found in the gun research is that even reminding people about guns or asking them questions about guns increases their sense of threat. For example, they have a scale of belief in a dangerous world or belief that the world is dangerous. And they ask people to what extent do you believe the world is dangerous? And then all this items that they used to measure that. And then they asked them about gun attitudes. But for some people they flipped the order. And what they found was that when they asked people about guns first, those people reported higher belief in a dangerous world than folks who are asked about the dangerous world questions first. So simply even thinking about guns increases the sense that there's danger to be attended to, and so...

0:41:51.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: And these are people who are gun owners. It would just be interesting that gun owners themselves get more freaked out by being reminded that there are guns when presumably they're buying guns to feel safer. As you said, some people view them more as like safety tool?

0:42:06.0 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah. But I think that's a maladaptive part of it and these were gun owners. Okay. So you say you've never been... You've never shot a gun?

0:42:11.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: No, I'm Canadian and we don't. [laughter] I'm sure Beth, she's Australian. I'm sure she's also never shot a gun. I think all of this from a non-American perspective also feels so foreign. It's just not something that we grew up with at all. So definitely, never shot a gun. But Yeah. [laughter]

0:42:27.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah, it's... Okay. So I'll just say the first time is wild. And the first time it was wild because there was so much power in your hands, but when I left, I didn't buy a gun. I was just like, she took me and brother went to a shooting range the first time. And when I left I felt like, wait, there are people out here with this type of power and now I'm aware of it and I don't have one. And that it is often how it's described of people, like gun owners are just like, when I left my weapon at home, I feel naked without it. I feel like I don't feel whole. Some researchers talk about it, embodied experience with guns, other people just talk symbolic safety and things. It's an entire experience and it becomes like a part of an identity, a meaningful part of one's sense of self. And I felt it even the first time that I actually shot a firearm.

0:43:11.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: But that's why it's because the maladaptive part where you're just reminded of how dangerous the world can be when we're made to think about guns. And that was something that when I was first thinking about this from a research perspective, I've always thought about there's this crazy amount of guns, but learning, thinking about the psychology behind it, like why the proliferation, it makes sense from a baseline level, but there's so much underneath it that contributes to why. And it's multifaceted, it's lack of trust in government to protect, but also too it's racism and concern and power concerns. And that's why the US is an outlier because we don't often talk about these things.

[music]

0:43:51.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: I think something that, I mean probably was obvious for everyone listening to it, but is that with gun control, I really never considered it under a racial lens.

0:44:02.7 Beth Fisher: No, me neither.

0:44:03.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: And like people who know me know that I tend to put a lot of things under a racial lens. So it was interesting that it was so clear that gun control is so linked to racism, that racism was driving gun control and is something that can motivate that. And also something that clearly, I think with the example of the NRA not caring at all about a Black person who had a legal right to a gun when they're demanding that guns not be taken away from other people is just such a stark example of the fact that you can't ignore that these issues are there within this debate.

0:44:42.5 Beth Fisher: No, I had never really come across that either. And I think it's because maybe it's one of these overarching things that were just like, oh, that's bad. It's all bad. But we're not actually looking into the underlying things, that are of... Bad within the bad, it's just like, oh, guns are bad. And that's that and not these other things that are at play. But I thought that was really interesting and I was also surprised that I hadn't come across that viewpoint before.

0:45:05.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, it's just definitely something that I, at least for me, I hadn't seen talked about. And I think it's just so hard to ignore how much race really does play such a huge role in America's, but also across the world in different ways. And I just keep coming across things that I thought were "neutral", which of course they never, nothing ever is. But this is for the TikTokers out there. Do you know the Clean Girl trend?

0:45:32.4 Beth Fisher: No, because after our TikTok episode, I refused to ever go on it.

0:45:36.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: I'm sure you've seen it online as well, but there's this...

0:45:38.7 Beth Fisher: What is it?

0:45:39.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: I guess it's like a Gen Z trend. You've seen it, this like model look of like middle part and then slicking down your hair.

0:45:46.7 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Oh, yeah.

0:45:47.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: And then that bun and some little hoop earrings type of thing.

0:45:51.4 Beth Fisher: Yeah. Yeah. And like a singlet or something.

0:45:53.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah. And it's like the off-duty model look and it's the Kendall Jenner look or like this Ex-White model look.

0:46:00.8 Beth Fisher: Yeah.

0:46:00.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: And I saw an essay about the Clean Girl Look and about how actually women of color, Black women and Latino women have been doing that look forever. Like the slicked back bun, hooped earrings, all of that is just basically copy pasted from Black women and Latino women. But that's never been associated with being clean, "With hygiene." And yeah, I just thought that was so crazy that even in something like that, that I also definitely associated that look with White models and White women.

0:46:37.2 Beth Fisher: Yeah.

0:46:37.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: And realizing that was just again, another kind of case of appropriation or of us, even if we don't want to put it that heavily of us just not realizing that was exactly the same thing. Just the fact that it was on a different body and a different skin color made us not associate it with cleanliness. Yeah. Just that type of stuff. It's just everywhere. Obviously, that's a more trivial example, but we can't escape our history that it's always going to be there.

0:47:01.9 Beth Fisher: Exactly. I think that Clean Girl thing is a good example. 'Cause I think that shows how these ways that we think are so ingrained. So it's hard for us to actually step out and be like, oh wait, why did we associate this group with the cleanliness? And this looks has been around for a long time, but it really does take someone else pointing it out or something 'cause it is just so much how we unfortunately see the world and it's just so ingrained from what we've been shown before.

0:47:30.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah. And I think that's another point about not only studying diverse populations, but having diverse researchers be doing the work because there's just things that I wouldn't think about or I wouldn't know. For example, in Gerald's earlier work on sports. I wouldn't know that in the Black community that people are also talking about sports in a certain way and that there's also this type of history attached to it and this type of pride in it depending on the group, of course. And I think Gerald is such a great example of, and he was very clear about this too, but of living your life as a person and your research is of course something that you love and you dedicate yourself to, but that your research has to be informed by your life.

0:48:10.6 Beth Fisher: Yeah. And the idea that we just come into the lab, put on a white coat and leave behind who we are outside of the lab, it just doesn't happen. And you do bring all of your life experiences into what you do. It often is why you study certain things, why you're curious about other things. That is so, so much of your lived experience comes into that. So given that that is why it is so important to have people from diverse backgrounds with diverse experiences informing who's deciding what questions we study and how we look at them. Because we will get the best answers in that approach as well, because we'll get the most diverse points of view, which always come to the best answers.

0:48:54.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: So we've talked about some of your research on history and psychology that kind of takes the perspective of looking at how individuals are influenced by broader structures, so that work on firearms and attitudes about firearms. But you also do work that looks at more intimate personal connections with history, namely looking at the amount of closeness people feel to their ancestors and how that influences how they might see a historical event, how that influences their perceptions of history. Could you tell us a bit about your approach with those studies and what you found in that work?

0:49:29.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Basically, this study was looking at how people think about history different. And it's taken this idea that history is a fact, history happened, but that doesn't mean that we think about it the same, that there are different motivations to how we want to think about certain history or history generally. And so this research was looking at that in the context of thinking about anti-Black racism or histories of anti-Black racism. And part of it was looking at racial differences and what might explain it, what are some factors that could influence it? And for me, I was, again, going back to the sports part about really just giving voice to Black perspectives and Black psychology was this idea that has stayed with me about feeling a sense of connection to one's ancestors and especially when engaging with these histories.

0:50:21.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And it came from some of the work I was doing in undergrad. I worked on the MLK's paper project, which is basically a huge research endeavor at Stanford University that's creating volumes of the lives of Martin Luther King Jr. It was something that Curtis Scott King had tasked the researchers at Stanford to do, like folks on researching, going through newspaper clippings, letters that people had sent in, letters that Curtis Scott King had given to try and map out his everyday, like where was he at on a day-to-day basis and like printing these huge journals of his life. I was not great at that. So they put me translating these written documents to online format. So I was actually able to read and listen to transcripts.

0:51:00.3 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And there was one that stood out to me and I still couldn't let it go. MLK was traveling, I think a tour, and the thing was in Alabama and it was a letter from the leader of the KKK there to MLK saying, "Hey, I don't think you should come here partially because there's a segment of us, of younger people who are trying to prove themselves in our group that I can't guarantee your safety." And it was this weird moment where he was warning MLK. And so it was this mind blowing to me to see that there was actually written letters about "Looking out for MLK," but saying, no, just beware that I can't promise that there's safe passing. But what stood out to me was it was written to MLK in 1958 and that was the year that my parents were born. And I was just like, I was like, wait, wait, it just clicked for me. For some reason I was like, yeah my parents were born, they were a few months old.

0:51:46.1 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: At this time where MLK has been written this letter too, and it just started clicking broader. Like, they were only ten years old when MLK was assassinated. And so they were also born before Black people had the protected right to vote. And so all of that started making the history feel more real and serve as, yo, my connection to this history is literally to my parents. And that stayed with me. And thinking of when I was learning history in other places in Undergrad, it was like, oh, I can place myself in these different moments partially because I could see or think about my parents or my grandparents and so that was one of the things that influenced this project, where I was thinking about, like, for Black people. When we're learning about these different histories, are we thinking about our connection? And are we feeling this as a connection to our ancestors or just older, familiar others that give us a sense of connection? And is that playing a role into why we might see these histories as happening yesterday, not that long ago?

0:52:46.3 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Whereas when talking about Black history to White people, I remember clearly talking about slavery, people are like, why are we still talking about that? That happened so long ago. And it's just like, not really, again, my parents, when they were born, if they were old enough, they couldn't have voted. That's literally one generation and so that then makes you think about what is the shifts that have happened in my parents lifetime? They literally lived that. And so that can't be that long ago because they're still here. So that was part of the research question. And thinking about for Black people, how does that play a role in our perceptions of history? But then also to think about for White people, they likely might not be trying to think about their ancestors when engaging with these history, because now that bring up questions, what were my ancestors doing? And two, built into our individualism, where you're made to think about yourself as separate from others. You're a product of your own work ethic.

0:53:33.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And so it started clicking some of those things about is that individualism the way to distance from one's ancestors and from Black communities, other communities of colors? Thinking about very valuing of one's ancestors and acknowledging that where I'm at today is because of them. And yes, I work hard, but I wouldn't have had the rights I had if it wasn't for people marching. And that being a tie to the past, that sets the background for this entire project where I was looking at differences in how long ago did Black and White Americans perceive the Tulsa Race Massacre to happen? And also, two, how long did people perceive the consequences of the massacre, the Tulsa Race Massacre, this is the moment in US history where a prospering Black town full of Black businesses and economic prosperity and, "American hard work" being real about it spurred resentment amongst White people. And they burned it down and they killed people and they went and murdered Black people and did very little to help Black people actually get back on their feet, which Black people did on their own.

0:54:31.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: So we exposed Black and White Americans to this history. And this was back before there was this huge acknowledgement of the Tulsa Race Massacre in late 2020 and early 2021, what became more well known because of the centennial year, "of the massacre". I don't know it's a weird thing to call it centennial. It's just like it's 100 years since they massacred people. Centennial sounds like a celebration. And so we expose people to this history, learning about the prosperity of the Greenwood District, but also to its destruction and Tulsa Race Massacre. And we asked people very simple questions like how long ago in the past does this feel like this happened? In more or less words? And people rated it. And we asked questions about how closely you feel to see your ancestors before and after they watched the video. And also what impact might the destruction of the Greenwood District have had on the descendants of the Greenwood District, now the Black descendants, like grandchildren, great grandchildren. What we found was that Black people saw this history as having been closer to the present than did White people.

0:55:31.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And part of that was explained because Black people also felt when engaging with history, they felt closer to their ancestors. And that explained seeing and representing that history as temporarily closer to the present psychologically. And the one other thing that I thought was really interesting was that Black people and White people, they showed agreement on how much direct impact the massacre had on the town's adults, but the agreement stopped at that point. Black people continued to express like this had high impact on the town's children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, or White people decreasingly said that this had an impact on their ability to generate wealth or accumulate wealth. It's an interesting question to think about, because at any rate, any destruction of somebody's wealth has an 100% impact on the subsequent wealth that they get. That's just how money works and compound interests and things like that, nature work.

0:56:22.7 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: But it was interesting to see that discounting when it got to later generations, which is showing that, again, thinking about what is the long-standing consequences of these histories of anti-Black racism on the ability of Black people just to accumulate. Well, and that was a really big finding. The psychological outcomes for White people were also just as interesting, but it was unexpected. And what we found was that White people were simultaneously feeling close to their ancestors, but distancing their history. And that's something that is still being explored now, but it in many ways reflects where we're at as society. And it was funny because it took me a while to make sense of some of the patterns we were seeing. And yeah, I think thinking about policy was helpful in that because we see a lot of folks who are pushing very hard against "Critical race theory" being taught in schools. Which I was making a point to say it isn't like critical race theory is barely being taught in grad schools. You have to fit it a very specific grad program.

0:57:20.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: But also, too, are the ones very similarly showing high support for respecting the legacy of the Confederacy. And so it's an interesting dual holding of trying to value one's familial legacy, but also to distance the more racist parts of that legacy. And yeah, it's research that we're still, it is dissertation. So it's like breaking the ground in many ways. There's a lot of different directions to go with it. And it's one of the more exciting research agenda pieces that I have, in part because, again, giving voice to Black American psychology has been worthy of study in its own right.

0:57:54.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: So were all of the participants in that study people who, as far as they knew, had family in America in that time? Did you look at maybe at qualitatively, who these participants were thinking of when they were thinking about their ancestors? Or was it explicitly ancestors who might have been involved in that specific event?

0:58:12.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: That's a great question. So we didn't ask about generation status. How long has your family been here in the US. Which I think is something that, from a follow-up perspective, is a direction that I'm definitely interested in going. And no, we weren't thinking about specific connection to the events. And again, part of that was prioritising. Thinking about this from how Black Americans might be thinking about their connection to this history. So often because of very explicit practices in the US of family separation, going way back to slavery, there are more... More flexibility and sense of familial connection.

0:58:49.3 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: There is like fictive kinship networks and my dad is one of the ones who... He meets a Black person and he's just like, "We related at some point." And so it's this idea that feeling a connection to past ancestors broadly in part because of the ability to actually know the direct people you're connected to have been taken away from a lot of Black people. You have even ancestry tests right now. They can tell you a guess of how much this country or region of the African continent you might come from, but the ability to actually trace your ancestry back more than a few generations, many Black people don't have access to.

0:59:22.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And I would guess a majority, but I can for sure say many. And so part of that is thinking about you don't necessarily have to have had ancestors that were part of Tulsa, but for me, I know my grandpa was born 12 years later in Texas, but still knowing that there was some ancestor that's close or thinking about my connection to him in the present and then also to his proximity in the past of just being alive at the time still does the work of bringing that history closer.

0:59:52.8 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Even if I might not know I have relations to folks in Tulsa. Fun side note, I did a road trip through Tulsa along with my mom and we met a random guy on the street. He was a tour guide. He had descended from folks who were in the Tulsa race massacre and him and my mom actually did end up having a cousin in common. So I guess my dad knows what he's talking about. But that potential possibility makes this idea of not necessarily needing to know one specific connection. But I do think for White Americans it... Because it is a potentially threatening history, I think that sense of knowing or not knowing might be a little bit more impactful for how they are thinking about their history. This is at this point way beyond what the data shows and what it has. But I think from thinking about threat and other research that looks at how are people thinking about history that... Or pass around when they feel unjustly blamed for there is a... Often a reactance to thinking about the history as having some proximity to the present. And I think that could definitely be something that could impact folks who have more of a potential perpetrator, or oppressor relationship to past atrocities.

1:00:56.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah. I wonder if part of that kind of contradictory result that you found with the White Americans could be that they feel close to their ancestors 'cause they know exactly who they are and maybe because they have that kind of privilege of knowing who they are and they are like, "They weren't there so this has nothing to do with me." Those questions might not even be connected to them. Maybe there is no sense of what you were describing with your dad of that kind of kinship with other White people. I think there's a lot of research showing that White people never really had to think about Whiteness before, 'cause they don't have to think about themselves in terms of group, they just get to think of themselves as individuals 'cause that's all that they are normally seen as in the world.

1:01:32.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah, I think that definitely could be a thing though. The one part that makes me wonder though is that it was interesting that it was White participants who had the strongest anti-Black attitudes, who felt the closest to their ancestors. But then also too were pushing the history the furthest to the past. So, yeah, it could be like, "I know what my ancestors were up to. I know they weren't involved in that." But it still was interesting that their history, at least based on how it was being distanced, at least they know that their history was threatening. And again, it's this double motivation. 'Cause... To be honest, everybody wants to feel good about who we are related to. You got folks you might... Don't talk to in your family because I think they weird, or they did some shady stuff. And so I think the thing about time passing is that your memory of things can be malleable and you can check out the good things and maybe push some of the negative stuff to the past, or at least to the recesses.

1:02:27.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: But it does seem that there is some gymnastics going on to make sense of being able to feel I want to feel a sense of connection to my family members because that might be an important sense of self and identity. But it would be interesting to think about what you said earlier, qualitatively. Like "What parts are you holding onto?" One of the things that also stood out, they are still finding their roots. When Ben Affleck found out that his ancestors were slave owners and he was like, "Scratch that from the record." And so I think especially in the US because that is one of the few systems of racism that we all agreed to was bad [chuckle] wanting to not feel connected or not feel personally implicated or not feel descendant from folks who very explicitly participated in these very blatant racist acts or institutions. And because the history is a fact, but the way we represent it isn't factual, it's very subjective. It allows us some malleability. And that's what I think that those results are picking up on, but it's something to still be explored.

1:03:28.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: Did you look at positive or celebratory history at all? Like the Greenwood District pre-massacre or maybe some big advances in civil rights legislation, for example, something I'm thinking with these White participants who are the ones who hold the most anti-Black attitudes, who are the ones who are simultaneously feeling very close to their ancestors, yet pushing that history away? Is that, I'm wondering if maybe to them the history of the Tulsa race massacre might not actually be seen as negative, whereas for the Black participants, they obviously are seeing this history as clearly negative and also have likely witnessed the after-effects of things like the Tulsa race massacre and other obstacles to Black people accumulating wealth and accumulating generational wealth and just being able to thrive in society.

1:04:20.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So I'm wondering then if they looked at celebratory history, because celebratory history might be seen as more in line with current goals of racial equity, but perhaps bringing it up might just show how far away that goal feels. So bringing up that history that maybe happened in the sixties or a hundred years ago, or whenever it is, bringing that history up might just also make salient the fact that that goal of racial equity is so far away. So I'm wondering whether Black participants might perceive then celebratory history or positive history like Black Wall Street, pre-destruction. Do they see that as further away than something negative?

1:05:05.5 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: That's a great question. There was one study where we tried to test that with the Black Wall Street, where we talked about the prosperity, and then at the very end we had a small section on the Tulsa Race Massacre, but we had to talk about Tulsa Race massacre. There is no way to talk about the Greenwood District without a person going like, "Oh, what happened to the Greenwood District? Why is it not here anymore? Well, racism. But we did actually more directly to your final show people in more recent history, "Speeches from 1963", one of which was very clearly racist, which was George Wallace's the Segregation Forever Speech, which is very clear, we don't like Black people. We want segregation forever, and people cheered.

1:05:44.6 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And then we showed another group of participants, parts of MLK's I Have a Dream Speech that a lot of White people like to pull the colour blindness part out of it, "Oh, he said we should all be expiring, our children holding hands of each other, regardless of race." And ignore the fact that he talked about issues of race and racism, but we found actually that anti-Black attitudes predicted the distance of history only when it was about the history that was very explicitly anti-Black, so it was when listening to the George Wallace Segregation Forever Speech, that's when we find Anti-Black racism actually predicted that.

1:06:19.2 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Saying that history is further away, so those White Americans with stronger anti-Black sentiments they are endorsing that. They saw that history is happening further in a distant past than those who endorsed it less. We found though, with the history, that was like, MLK's I Have a Dream Speech, there was no effect of level of anti-Black attitudes on how far away that history was perceived. So again, it was something unique about being confronted with histories of anti-Black racism that is eliciting those folks who are higher on anti-Black attitudes in the present to push their histories further to that.

1:06:54.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: Did you measure Black people's responses to the celebratory history as well?

1:06:57.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: No, so this was only a study with White participants in this one...

1:07:01.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: That would be cool. That would be really cool to see the difference.

1:07:03.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: Yeah, again, there is just so many different places to go with this.

1:07:08.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: Do you want to actually finish by just sharing some of the work that you're working on now and the directions that you're looking at?

1:07:16.0 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: What am I working on next? Besides self-care, again, the research on Black Americans gun attitude is something that is super exciting for me, in part because there is not a lot of research on social site that is trying to centre through that, and I think shaking off all of what is currently known about what impacts gun attitude is an interesting practice while going through some of the data, 'cause we expect certain patterns and you just... That doesn't actually make sense. And maybe this is why it's not showing up in the same way, but what is actually happening?

1:07:47.9 Dr. Gerald Higginbotham: And so it really is this broader exploration of... And trying to understand what are the different factors that are influencing Blacks. 'Cause that... As in part of that is looking towards history, part of that is looking towards what do we know about public opinion. And there are some interesting things in that regards, but it just feels like completely throwing everything to the side and just saying, "Let's understand it for... In this particular cultural context, so what does it mean to be Black in America at this moment?" And so that's really exciting. We have some research looking at voting that I'm excited about, just thinking about what aspects of... How much does voting access restrictions impact you? How does that play into your support for these different voter policies? And then also just trying to still... I guess at the beginning of the answers to practice, okay. And to make sure that I am giving myself, in my own help the efforts I mean the attention that I am giving this research, because again, that is also on a higher practice, which should be, but isn't.

[music]

1:09:02.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: Thank you to Dr. Gerald Higginbotham, for joining us in this episode, our intro and outro music is Nobody Stayed for the DJ by Glassio. Our transition music is Back For More also by Glassio. Minds Matter is mixed, edited and created by Beth Fisher. She's the Australian one and me Ava Ma de Sousa. We'll be back in two weeks with a brand new episode of Minds Matter. In the meantime, find all our episodes and show notes on mindsmatterpodcast.com.