

Jerry Colonna [00:00:00]:

Well, I wanna say, really, at the start of this, at the top of this, it's a blessing to be with you guys and to have been on this journey for these many months now. And thank you for holding that space, not just in this moment, but all along that time.

Marshall [00:00:18]:

Welcome to the Reunion Podcast. You're listening to episode 0, a candid conversation between me, Mr.P, And Jerry Colonna, as we introduce the Reunion podcast and our 3 month journey together, capturing intergenerational and intersectional stories of ancestry, Origin, and the longing to belong.

Jerry Colonna [00:00:47]:

How do we introduce ourselves? Right? There's the resume. There's the bio. There's the curriculum vitae. Obviously, my name is Jerry, Jerry Colonna. But I think that the thing that would be most appropriate is to talk about the fact that Many years ago, I went to a desert. And in that desert, I spent 4 days on a water-only fast. And when I left that desert, I left with a name. And that name is Holder of Stories of the Heart.

Jerry Colonna [00:01:27]:

And so, what am I who am I really, P, I'm a holder. That's who I am. That's what I do. That's how I exist in the world.

Marshall [00:01:43]:

You are a holder. I am Marshall. Marshall Pollard. Creatives of all ages, including yourself, have called me mister p. I was an elementary school teacher that turned into a a network builder. And, you know, Jerry and I met because of the start of a men's group, which has changed both of our lives. But like you, Jerry, I am a few things including here and just very, Like I said at the jump, I'm just really glad to be here. But when you said I am a holder, it made me, I am a circle maker.

Marshall [00:02:17]:

And, you know, Jerry mentioned Spn in the background. I think it's important to know that this brotherhood is bigger than just me and Jerry. It's bigger than just me, Jerry, and Spn who is my brother and partner, in this creative storytelling work, but it's also a group of men, like Ashanti and Gaurav, and, y'all helped me out and, Sean and, many many others. So Carl, Mustafa, people who have become warriors alongside us, that prompted our brotherhood and prompted this idea of As men as men of color, and our brother Jerry, it's important to create

spaces where we hold stories and, You know, how to grow, how to be a part of this journey of reunion, which is what you have prompted, in in in the midst of our brotherhood. Right? You're not on reboot anymore. Right. That book is what prompted our relationship. Now we're in this moment of reunion.

Marshall [00:03:14]:

And I would love to hear, as we've gone from a men's group to this journey of figuring out how to sit with stories, how to hold stories, for people. We obviously show up in different ways, me and you, but, I would love for you to share, you know, how do we get into this reunion together?

Jerry Colonna [00:03:34]:

I'll start at the beginning if you will. I'll frame it a little bit. When I wrote The book that actually brought at least the 3 of us together, if not the whole group together. I was asserting something important, something that I still believe, and something that I was trying to teach that I teach to clients all the time. And it's a simplistic way to frame it, but it's that better humans make better leaders. And I often call that simplistic and I kinda Joke, well, duh. Right? But the challenge is that, if it's so obvious, why is it that we struggle to have good leadership? Why do we have people holding power who hurt people all the time? And what I assert is that our inability to process in a healthy way, that which formed us.

Jerry Colonna [00:04:36]:

Is it the root of that toxic leadership? And our inability to turn around and confront the demons, instead of just running from the demons, ends up hurting people who have less power. And I wrote that book primarily with the people who might have identified themselves as my clients in mind. And then this bizarre, Beautiful phenomena happened. And Spn's first messages to me, which were about 3 years ago this weekend. It started coming through, and it's a perfect his messages to me are a perfect example of what I'm talking about. I started to experience this phenomena of people reading this book and seeing their own story in the story. And there was something really powerful about me going first, sharing parts of my own story that seemed to open up a dialogue. So 3 things started to motivate me and caused me to consider writing a new book.

Jerry Colonna [00:05:50]:

The first was this phenomena that people of all different experiences, people from different bodies, people who love differently than I love, people who identify differently from the way I identify. And I identify as white, straight, cisgender, male, somehow found a connection with the material that I was sharing. And that seemed worthy of exploring. That seemed worthy in honor of Holder. Pause. Wow. There's something universal that got tapped into in an unconscious way. I guess the way all creatives do.

Jerry Colonna [00:06:35]:

You set something forth, and all of a sudden, something happens. So that was one thing. The second thing that happened was the murder of George Floyd, which is 3 years ago this weekend. And it's not like, oh, wow. Jerry discovered systemic racism. But there's something about those 8 and a half, 9 minutes of a man dying under the knee of a white police officer, begging for his breath, begging for his mama. That in the middle of a pandemic was an undeniable force. And I remember saying to myself, I have to respond. It's my moral obligation.

Jerry Colonna [00:07:37]:

And the third thing that happened was the realization that better humans make better leaders is insufficient. It may be true, but it's not enough because you cannot define yourself as a better human unless you understand the universality of your story is my story. And unless you understand that until and unless all humans feel love, safety, and most important, belonging, then you are not leading anything. You are not utilizing your power. You are not making a difference in the world. That is your moral and ethical responsibility. And for me, That is the essence of what I tried to do in *Reunion* the book. That's what I tried to do was to make the connection between the work that I have done that has formed so much of the last 20 years of my life and the work that I know I am called to do going forward, which is to make make those connections.

Marshall [00:08:48]:

Yes. Let's talk about that. Right? There's Work to be done. And to be honest, that's what got me into this work with you.

Jerry Colonna [00:08:59]:

Mhmm.

Marshall [00:08:59]:

Is that there is work to be done, and we've wrestled with that because we come from very different positions at the work. Right? And, you know, I have been critical to be completely honest with people who began to do work in light of the murder of George Floyd. Mhmm. But what I know to be true about you having been connected to you prior to that moment, right, is that your work has started long before that. I say that because I think it's important that we are all coming at this, Jerry and I both, from very different worlds, from lived experiences, from everyday realities in this same work of reunion. That what if, Jerry, what if we all belong to one another? Amen. What if that was a truth? A universal truth, which is so far from my experience of what I experience every day in Southeast DC when I look out my windows, when I buried

students year after year where our young people have lists of those who, in a gun obsessive world, who they might have already lost due to gun violence.

Marshall [00:10:08]:

Right? We live in a world where reunion doesn't seem anywhere close from my vantage point, But at the same exact time, I can't imagine continuing in a world where the amount of disconnection is so pervasive. The amount of othering, the saying that these people deserve access to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, and others have to work just, you know, a little bit harder to get it. And so I'm curious. What is that work in your mind? What is when we think about the word reunion or the journey, leadership, and the longing to belong, what is that work? What is that journey?

Jerry Colonna [00:10:41]:

Well, I'll bring your attention to the word that is the title of the book and really the title of what we're trying to do with this podcast, which is reunion. It's not union. And implicit in that word is almost a nostalgic memory for the time in which we were in union. You know, I hit upon that title and then discovered the poem by the late bell hooks. May God rest her soul. In which she says, *"When angels speak of love, all things are union and reunion. There is no separation. There is no end to paradise."*

Jerry Colonna [00:11:33]:

And I had hit upon the word. It was probably bubbling within my subconscious. And then I read that poem, and I was flawed. And what strikes me even as I quote the first lines from that poem again and again, is her brilliant opening line, "when angels speak of love." Because I realized that there's storytelling implicit in that. There's love implicit in that. And what she's laid what she laid out for us is a pathway. What she's saying to us is that if we allow angels, and I would argue the better angels of our nature, the angels, our ancestors remembered.

Jerry Colonna [00:12:37]:

What she's telling us is when those folks speak of love, all things are union and reunion. What she's saying is that the process of overcoming division, forms of apartheid, forms of separateness, forms of saying my country, you know, you have to do it my way or your assimilation into this land if you're an immigrant must be under these certain circumstances. That the way to overcome that is this reunion. And so that begs the question, what is reunion? What is that process? What is this thing that you and I are talking back and forth about? And I would argue, first and foremost, it's reunion with those of our past whom we have dismembered. Or who have been dismembered by the societies and the communities in which they endeavor to live and love and breathe. Second, the reunion with the parts of ourselves. Here we go back to that work and reboot.

Jerry Colonna [00:14:02]:

The parts of ourselves that we have disowned and turned into toxic nature. And then lastly, and because of we've done that work, reunion with each other. Where disagreement is not conflict, it's just disagreement. Where difference doesn't have to be plastered over with bullshit myths of sameness, but it can be elevated and celebrated. Where even difference becomes a force for unification and union. And at the heart of all that, and I'm speaking to a master storyteller, so you know the truth of this at the heart of all of that are stories. That's how we that's how angels speak of love is through stories. And all we have to do is freaking listen to each other, but, like, with real heart.

Marshall [00:15:14]:

As I read Reunion, I was one of very, very lucky person to take a sneak peek into these words that I hear you saying. Words have become a part of my own experience. What does it mean to remember who or what has been dismembered from my own journey? Right? When I look back on my life, I was able to do that and start to remember and ask questions of people who I literally don't know who got me here and what that journey was of getting me here to be able to be breathing and to consider doing the same for my own descendants. Right? That language of remembering who and what has been dismembered. This idea that doing so, it begins to when I lit when I read about your story and the the stories of your mother and your father and their stories, I mean, just the intrigue that it led to me to begin to start to think about my own story. And you mentioned that by doing so, when we create enough space, right, when enough of us are able to remember how we got here, and if we can create enough space to say that you if I can do it, you can do it.

Marshall [00:16:35]:

If I can consider my journey of getting here, and that means that I have to consider your journey and how your people got to this moment through love, safety, and belonging. And so I often think about, this, you know, motif. I don't know if it's called a motif, but I'll be using language for things that are not really that. So, but, anyways, it's something that was handed to me, and it's this idea of a candle. It's actually my next tattoo too, but it's this idea of a candle and this idea that we're all in a dark room and we all have candles. Right? We all have some form of magic or light that we could that could be ignited. And I'm the only one with a lighter, and I like mine because I wanna be lit. I wanna you know, I want my light to shine. Let it shine. And I choose not to light your candle. It's darker for me too.

Jerry Colonna [00:17:29]:

Yeah.

Marshall [00:17:29]:

Right. It's darker for me too. I am impacted by your lack of being able to express light. If my story exists if my ancestor's story exists, and I want it to be respected. I want it to be accepted in this whole thing of Americanism, then I have to be able to say that that's true for another person. And if I do, right, there might be enough light for a reunion. There might be enough light to say we all belong here, and we have to figure out how to exist together, to love one another to be safe with one another. So I think I I gotta ask you about, like, this seems necessary, but is it possible? Is reunion possible given the legacies of oppression that we have experienced as citizens of this country in particular, the United States of America, but also the world. I mean, the world has been...

Jerry Colonna [00:18:26]:

The world sucks.

Marshall [00:18:27]:

You know? Love, safety, and belonging has not been a theme of world history in my opinion.

Jerry Colonna [00:18:32]:

No. So two things I would say. First, I love your metaphor about the candle. And the thing to always remember about candles in the darkness like that is that when I take my candle, My lit candle, and I touch your unlit candle and light it. I haven't diminished anything in my candle. And I think that that's incredibly important patient of that metaphor. Because when we share stories, the room gets brighter. There is no diminishment.

Jerry Colonna [00:19:04]:

And that's contrary to the programming. The programming is, if I allow love, safety, and belonging for you, I'm somehow gonna be diminished myself, and that's just a lie. And it's a lie that is in service to the systems of oppression. It is not in service of humanity. So that's thing one. But thing two to your question about, is it possible? And the answer is probably not in our lifetimes, But for comfort and inspiration, I take that teaching, to quote in the *Reunion* the book, I take that teaching from the Talmud.

Jerry Colonna [00:19:52]:

And the teaching goes like this. You are not obligated to finish the work. But neither are you at liberty to neglect the work. We are obligated to do the work regardless of whether or not we think the work will be completed. Because if we hold back from doing what is necessary to create systemic belonging in the world, then we are overtly complicit in the oppression of others

who do not look like us, however we identify. So the time is long passed to shrug our shoulders and say it's too hard. We may not get there, but we are obligated to try. Period.

Marshall [00:20:59]:

You know, I think what is to be explored is what's at stake. What if we don't?

Jerry Colonna [00:21:03]:

Right?

Marshall [00:21:05]:

What if we don't go on this journey together?

Jerry Colonna [00:21:08]:

Right. Right.

Marshall [00:21:10]:

What if people are satisfied with the current status of love, safety, and belonging that they have access to? We're wanting to sit with these stories, but what about folks who are like, look. I'm good with what I've got.

Jerry Colonna [00:21:21]:

Yeah. Yeah. So in Chapter 5 of *Reunion*, Chapter 5 is called the *Wages of Separation*. And I wrote that chapter the first draft of that chapter when I was, in San Francisco visiting, one of my kids. My oldest son, Sam. And, I kept turning over this notion again and again and again. It had occurred just, just a few weeks, maybe a week or two after the shooting in Uvalde, Texas. At Robb Elementary School.

Jerry Colonna [00:22:05]:

And while it didn't make the final edit, The first line of that chapter is, I originally drafted it, was "*They've not yet finished burying the babies in Uvalde, Texas.*" What I talk about is the cost of separation and the wages of separation. And I use the term wages because I invoke Saint Paul in which he said that the wages of sin are death. The wages of separation are death. I mean, babies are dying. And I cannot think of any other way to wake people up more dramatically than to point at the deaths of children. Those are far from the only wages being paid.

Jerry Colonna [00:23:01]:

But at what point do we say, enough? At what point, What are we willing to allow to happen? Whether it's to a transgender woman, a black EMT worker asleep in her bedroom with a no-knock warrant, a 16-year-old boy ringing the wrong doorbell. And let us not kid ourselves. These are all interrelated and interconnected. It's all rooted in this profound fear of someone who is not like me. The other. And there's a through line that goes from the denial of civil rights, to the denial of health care, to the denial of human rights, to book banning and censorship, and attacking a department store because they have T-shirts with the rainbows and the word pride on them. This is all connected, And it's all in service to a mindset that has given expression in colonization. It's given mindset in in in expression of extractive capitalism, exploitation of other human beings.

Jerry Colonna [00:24:46]:

I'm trying to speak in the most common denominator language possible. And if we don't do this work, it is only going to get worse. And I owe it to my descendants to say I tried. You, listener, oh, it's your descendants to say that you tried to try to put your shoulder to the wheel and push that wheel, push that cart, push that to the next level. We are better than this. We are capable of better than this.

Marshall [00:25:32]:

We are capable of more. Some of us are paying a price for our lack of capability more than others. Absolutely. And what I've read about the *Reunion* book is it is an example, with some guidance, but an example of, how do we dig into our stories of how our ancestors and their ancestors got to this moment when we are experiencing this separation, how did we all experience this thing that we have all contributed to? And how do we remind ourselves that if we continue to participate, we are culpable and that we don't have to be? We don't have to continue to participate. But unless we find ourselves in rooms and spaces for that full body listening, The holding of the stories of people who have gotten into a circle and who deserve to experience love and safety and belonging no matter how they show up point blank, period, because they are human just like you and me.

Jerry Colonna [00:26:37]:

That's right.

Marshall [00:26:37]:

That's not the world. That's not just the air I breathe in, but through listening to stories of ancestry, origin, and the longing, the experience, the journey of our individual and collective belonging, maybe we can make rooms brighter. We can create new air. Can start seeing things a little bit differently because of actually how we got here. This is not a brand-new movement.

It's not that's not the point, but it is a responsibility for us to maybe add the stories to that movement of connection, of reunion.

And that's what brings us to the podcast. And, you know, Spn and I, who has have been mentioned, is you know, we're part of a lifestyle of cultivating untold stories. That is at the heartbeat of our storytelling agency, Staydrmn, and and it's been amazing to work alongside Reboot and Jerry and your team to commit to this creation of space for stories to be told. But I told Jerry, I said, if we're not, you know, living out this lifestyle of cultivating what's been untold, If the stories that we're sitting with are not intergenerational, not intersectional, not representing different experiences in this journey of reunion, then we're not really in for it. And that's just not Jerry. So it was cool to just immediately say, hey. How do we start, you know, inviting people from all over the country, from different walks of life?

Marshall [00:28:08]:

I wanted to ask you, who are these people that were a part of the reunion podcast, and what was your experience like with them, Jerry?

Jerry Colonna [00:28:16]:

Well, there's Daryl, Leticia, Grant, and Erika. And you all will get to know their stories through the magic of curated storytelling. And in a sense, what you and Spn helped create was a narrative arc that in my mind, best embodied that phrase, "your story is my story." Not only did I experience hearing their stories and feeling that same resonance, but I think they heard each other's stories and felt that resonance. It's like it's this weird phenomenon. It's like we live with a false kind of separation because we see people, Based on our projection of what that identity means. Right? And then what happens is you start to really hear their story. And it's not that they no are no longer different, but you now feel connected.

Jerry Colonna [00:29:46]:

Right. And the metaphor I like to use is like fingers on a hand. Each finger is individual and separate. But all of a sudden, you start to see the hand where the fingers are connected. And that, that's life-giving. That is powerful.

So hearing each of their individual stories, the stories of the experience, with Leticia talking about her family's movement into the United States. And the restaurant and how important the restaurant was to the family, right, brought me back. I mean, I didn't mention it at the time, but brought me back to being a child in Brooklyn, where I had an uncle, who had a restaurant, and it was the place that we all went to to celebrate. And all of a sudden, it's not the same, but it's similar. And it becomes this currency of understanding and empathy for that experience.

Marshall [00:30:49]:

Over 8 weeks, in 16 different hours of whole group sessions, independent field activities that allowed Leticia and Grant and Erica and Daryl an explore their ancestry, where their people are from, how do they get to the cities and the homes that they were raised in, the routines that they were taught about what it meant to be loved, to find love, safety, to belong to the place and to the people that they happen to be born into. I feel the same way, Jerry, after all those weeks of meeting on Tuesdays and, you know, having opportunities listen to these stories that were somewhat connected to your book in terms of the types of stories that we were seeking and helping to give shape to of how to explore your ancestry and different activities to do. And so it was powerful to have those weeks to culminate in a in-person feast in DC where we met each other for the first time. And, Jerry, I'm thankful that your pen, this work that you are, committed to, that you believe is the way you participate in what you're calling a reunion and what we can more of us can begin to call, included the listening to these Intersectional, intergenerational stories. It has sharpened my own understanding of who I am, where I come from, and how to show up in this journey of being connected to self and to others.

Jerry Colonna [00:32:23]:

I think, first and foremost, listening to these stories are really powerful. My hope is that you might be going for a run with headphones in your ears and listening to this podcast. And then you turn around and you go, wow. That's my story too. You know, to hear Leticia or to hear Grant say something that then brings you into your own story. And from that place, begin to spend the currency of empathy. From that place, begin to see the other person, not through the gauze of the projection that you have over who they are and how they present, but through the reality of what their story is.

Marshall [00:33:17]:

Jerry, this journey of listening to stories is just beginning. Right? And we know that the book that you've written is, less of a guide and more of an example. And I know you've been intentional about not being the sage on the stage, but that you are participating in this thing of sitting with stories, your own story, just as you are encouraging others to do. So I'm curious for individuals who do long for belonging, who do want to participate in the journey of Reunion, where do they find, Reunion, the book, and then how might they tap into the podcast?

Jerry Colonna [00:33:54]:

The first thing I would say, though, is that the way to think about *Reunion*, the book is it's a it's a literary workshop, if you will. Right? What I attempt to do in *Reunion* doesn't work without reader participation. It is a book, but it's an experience. And as such, this is why we put so much care and concern into the podcast the accompanying podcast because the podcast itself is also a participation experience. The audience needs to participate in it, even if it's in the inner journey. You can access both of those at reunion.reboot.io. You'll be able to preorder the book, and we

love preorders because that means good things.

Jerry Colonna [00:34:52]:

But you'll also be able to download the episodes, listen to the episodes, and equally important, be able to experience extra essays, reading guides, journaling prompts, all sorts of material to really turn this from a sort of passive experience into an active engagement in the reunion process itself. So I look forward to hearing from you. I look forward to you participating in that workshop.

Marshall [00:35:22]:

To sitting with your story. It's always a pleasure to do that with you and to know, Jerry, that you sit with mine, that it's not something I feel is one-sided, and so thank you for this time, for this conversation to be reminded to myself of where we've been, Right? But also where we're going, as we think about systemic belonging in some new ways to put this systemic othering behind us, y'all. We got to. So, Jerry, thank you again for your time. Listeners, I'm excited to participate with you.

Jerry Colonna [00:35:59]:

Thank you, P and thank you for your care and your concern and your fierce regard for quality and the experience of storytelling, Your love made manifest in that way.

Marshall [00:36:15]:

Thank you, dear brother.

Thank you for joining me and Jerry for episode 0 of the Reunion Podcast. If you're willing to join us in this journey towards Reunion, We encourage you to sit with more stories of ancestry, origin, and the longing to belong in the first two episodes of the Reunion podcast. You can take a listen at reunion.reboot.io and wherever you stream your podcasts.