

# Bill Gates and Rashida Jones Ask Big Questions

## **EPISODE 05: Can people really change?**

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**RASHIDA JONES:** Today's episode contains some salty language, courtesy of Bono, which is fine for me, but may not be suitable for all listeners.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Hi, I'm Rashida Jones.

**BILL GATES:** Hi, I'm Bill Gates.

**RASHIDA JONES:** And we're here to ask the big questions.

[singing]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Today the big question is: can people really change? Can Trump supporters learn to accept and maybe even respect President Joe Biden? Will this pandemic ever unify us, as opposed to dividing us? Talking about personal change and making change in the world and how those two things are connected. In terms of the work that you do and how you've tried to precipitate change, do you feel like there were things when you were young that were extremely important to you and that you prioritized that have changed?

**BILL GATES:** Yes, I'd say that I'm more interested in other people. I was quite self-centered when I was young. Am I talented? What can I do with my talent?

**RASHIDA JONES:** I think we all do that.

**BILL GATES:** You know, computers. But I was an extreme case.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Okay. I believe you.

**BILL GATES:** Can I write the best software? What can we do with personal computing? I definitely think age, for me, has made me think about other people way more than I was able to when I was young.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Okay, so what would 18-year-old Bill see about Bill today that would surprise him?

**BILL GATES:** I'd say, this guy is lazy.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** He takes a lot of vacations.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** He's not as sharp as he used to be.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*] That's so sad that you think your young self would look at this guy, and be like, "What is he doing? Get to work, buddy!"

**BILL GATES:** Yes, just goofing off.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** When I was 18, I didn't have high expectations for what I would do in my 60s. I didn't think of people in their 60s as being relevant to the fast-moving, high-IQ game that I was in. There weren't older people because it was kind of a new field. I wouldn't expect myself to still be at the cutting edge at all. I was pretty tough on how lazy most people were.

**RASHIDA JONES:** And now you're one of those people.

**BILL GATES:** You bet.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Congratulations.

**BILL GATES:** I'm headed off. I'm going to take the weekend off.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Whoa!

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*] How do you think you've changed over time?

**RASHIDA JONES:** I don't remember if it's a Churchill quote or something, it's, "If you're conservative when you're young, you're heartless. If you're liberal when you're older, you're stupid," or something.

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** I hope that's not it. [*laughs*] That's not it. That's a paraphrase. I think I was much more radical when I was younger about how change was possible. I remember having conversations with my dad. My dad has this kind of diplomatic vibe about him where he can kind of talk to anybody and it's such a beautiful quality that I understand and I respect so much more now as an adult than I did then because I would consider somebody, who was philosophically opposed to me when I was younger, an enemy. Now I've accepted the inherent flawed nature of being human and being on this planet, and I think there's something about that that maybe, hopefully makes me more effective in being a part of change. Maybe that's how I've changed. I'm just less radical and I'm softer on the edges in the sense that when people make mistakes, they make mistakes. I make mistakes. It's just part of being alive. We're not computers. Sorry, Bill, but we're not.

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** I was always brought up with this idea that I do have a responsibility to the world, that I can't just take and take and take and ask people to look at me and look at me and not give back. The more that I get, the more I have to give back. I think that's because I did get a lot of love and attention from two people who care a lot about the world. Just the fact that my parents were in an interracial relationship at a time when it wasn't very common was a political act within itself. I think being born from that, I feel a responsibility to continue to help evolve the conversation around identity and inequality and all that stuff. Do you feel, Bill, like you probably got to a place where you made your money and then thought, "Okay, I have to dedicate this money to other people's suffering," but is that something that was instilled in you from a very young age or was there a turning point in your success?

**BILL GATES:** No, my parents were always great role models for what my dad called showing up and being part of community activities. I knew that I was super lucky to have two great parents, to go to an amazing school and so that's partly why my naivete about, as Melinda and I took our first trip to Africa and saw the human condition there, I thought, "Boy, I, I need to learn about this."

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BILL GATES:** I have been sheltered. But I do have the role model from my parents.

**RASHIDA JONES:** What was your first trip to Africa?

**BILL GATES:** We went before we got married. It was incredible. 1993 Melinda convinced me to take a vacation at a time when I was just getting used to that.

**RASHIDA JONES:** You weren't lazy yet.

**BILL GATES:** We thought, "Oh, we'll go see animals." But in fact, what we saw were people working so hard and dealing with shortages and that kind of kicked off. We got married within a year of that and said, "Okay, one of the things we're going to do together is take this wealth and dedicate it to those things, including however much learning we can do." My parents had seeded that, as had Melinda's.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Turning more to what happened during this election. I think a lot of people became aware of how different the thought processes and the philosophies of people in this country are and I wonder, do you think you can actually change hearts and minds? Do you think there's people that can see somebody else who has completely different political views and be changed, or understand the way their enemy thinks?

**BILL GATES:** The word enemy, that's a strong word.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Okay, okay. Opponent, opponent.

**BILL GATES:** No, the polarization, you sometimes you do shake your head. But then you have to think, "Okay, there's a variety of attitudes that people have that are hard to change and drive that kind of tribal vote." But, yes, I'm worried. Every time I say I should reach out and understand that side better, I find myself falling short.

**RASHIDA JONES:** When we talk about this great polarity and the rise of nationalism all over the world, do you think that exposure is the answer to the problem? If you got to see more people in different circumstances, are you less likely to be xenophobic or nationalistic, or are you more likely to be empathetic?

**BILL GATES:** Absolutely. I think the chance of world wars is less because we get to know people from all over. The whole idea of go there, meet people from that location, understand their point of view. I hope the digital world is facilitating that, and that's why I hope we won't have conflagrations like World War II in the future. So yes, exposure is key.

**RASHIDA JONES:** I've noticed on my social media the conflict in Nigeria right now. I know about that because I have a lot of Nigerian American friends and I also have friends who just

happen to be interested in that. I do feel like that's one positive thing about social media and the internet, is that I have more access to that information because it's flowing through my group of friends and the people who do care about that kind of thing. So that's kind of a good thing. But I also think that maybe the pandemic has exacerbated this feeling because there is not as much travel. I find it very expansive to travel. I know I don't represent everybody, but we don't have that access right now. It does feel like everybody's sort of hunkering down and doubling down on their own feelings about what's right and what's worth fighting for.

**BILL GATES:** It will be good to get out again. Even though there may be less trips, those trips will be important to connect.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*] Right.

**BILL GATES:** I hope, post the pandemic, that kind of outreach is broad. After the World War, the world came together and created the United Nations and I think we'll see some of that now. We need some people speaking up for the benefits of cooperation.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Do you think that where we are now, are we so damaged that it's going to be so hard to fix? Do you think we need to go further in the extreme direction before we fix it?

**BILL GATES:** No. No, in fact I'm not a radical, a revolutionary, and I worry that people see radical solutions as the only way to move forward, whereas I see more centrist ways of being able to tackle problems. Not overnight, but I don't think the radical approach works overnight as well. The extreme views, that's a bit scary.

**RASHIDA JONES:** I wonder what it's going to be that unifies us. If it's not going to be a pandemic, and it's not going to be politics, what is it actually going to be? I believe that art can be a great unifier. I believe that humor can be a great unifier. Music can be a great unifier. Our guest today is not only a world-famous musician, but he's also worked tirelessly to use his voice and influence to impact real change in the world. I want to welcome to the show the man that Bill most wants to hug when COVID is over: Bono. Welcome, Bono.

**BONO (GUEST):** Hello there, Rashida. Hello there, Bill. I got the message that Bill wanted to mug me, not hug me.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** It's usually the other way around, so I'm very relieved and moved, actually. That shouldn't be shocking. That's the Bill Gates I know.

**RASHIDA JONES:** He may still mug you while he's hugging you.

**BONO (GUEST):** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** That's his trick, I've heard.

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** No, it's usually the other way around. People are constantly bothering this man for access to his wallet when, in fact, it's his brain is where the real resources lie. That's what I'd say.

**RASHIDA JONES:** That's nice. How did you two first meet? I want to know the meet cute story.

**BONO (GUEST):** There was a meeting in New York pre-Davos. There was some hamburgers involved. This is long before Impossible Burger and good-for-you burgers. It was definitely a bad-for-you burger situation and I thought, "I'm going to get along with this man very well."

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** Then the next night we had a meeting of activists. There was a bunch of us at the back of a restaurant. There was a knock on the door and eventually I went, opened it, and there was a rapper standing there and I recognized him to be Puffy, but Bill had no idea who this man was. When he came in and came straight up and just went, "Bill Gates, you are a mother fucker."

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** Bill just was looking at me, like, "What's going on?"

**RASHIDA JONES:** "Is that good?" [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** He said, "What you're doing on malaria is off the charts!" and we had a kind of great evening.

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** That's a very good story. We have also, full disclosure, we've known each other a very long time because our families know each other, and you're very close with my dad, who loves you, kind of, not more than me, but more than a lot of people in the world.

**BILL GATES:** *[laughs]*

**BONO (GUEST):** Can I say, Rashida, that I remember the first time I met you, and you probably don't know this, but you are one of the reasons that Ali and myself have kids. I guess you would have been maybe 11, 12, 13. I can't recall exactly. I was around in your house with Ali, and we watched you with your father and it was just a very, very affectionate occasion. You were playing with him, sort of slapping him on the face, and he's pushing you away. It was kind of like you're a nuisance and he goes, "Who's the nuisance?" I walked with Ali afterwards, and I said, "You know, maybe it is possible to have kids and be a musician, where you give yourself to your music." I mean, it was a real conversation about it because I wasn't sure I could be a good parent. A month or so later Ali was pregnant.

**RASHIDA JONES:** That is so nice and that actually is very relevant to our conversation today because we were talking about personal change and also world change, and are those things possible? And how much do you change, and how much can you change other people? Hearing you talk about how you probably had a fixed idea of what your life would be like because you're a musician, and then you have this moment, and it kind of changes your idea of whether or not you can be a father, you think you know you who are, and then the world kind of tells you differently. I want to know from you, Bono, you grew up in Ireland at a very difficult time, and you just seem like somebody who is inherently an activist. I'm not sure which came first for you, the artistry or the activism. How does how you came up, inform the kind of activist that you are?

**BONO (GUEST):** I'm sure the desire to be in a band was just megalomania starting at a very early age.

**RASHIDA JONES:** *[laughs]*

**BONO (GUEST):** You just want to be heard because probably you're being ignored at home. There's two ways you become an artist. One is by being told by your family that you're incredible and you've got something and you've got a lot of say. And the other is just being completely ignored and I'm the latter there and I've more than made up for it.

My father, even though he had a low tolerance for me, he had a lot of other smart things about him. One of them was he was deeply suspect of nationalism and he used to quote, "What is Ireland? What is Ireland but the place that keeps my feet from getting wet?"

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BONO (GUEST):** This was at a time in Ireland when a sectarian strife was pulling the country apart. We were in Ireland, North and South were nearly in civil war and he was a Catholic, my mother was a Protestant. He taught me to see through that and, indeed, to see through religion and he played a huge role in my life. He said of me, even as I did quite well with U2, he used to ask me when was I going to get a real job? And he'd say, "You know, son," he said, "you are a baritone who think he's a tenor."

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** I realized that was really true and I have been sort of stretching out of my skin ever since. But I think for me, it definitely started with a sort of sense of rage at injustice and that propelled the early punk rock of U2.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Bono, you've known Bill for a really long time, how do you think Bill has changed?

**BONO (GUEST):** I don't know if you know the Seamus Heany poem, Republic of Conscience. There's this phrase "creeping privilege" and it haunts me, actually, and I watch out for it in myself. I've never seen that in Bill Gates. It's just a strange thing. From the first days when I was trying to put my hand in his wallet like everybody else for the purposes of activism, but I've never seen that. What I have seen change, or maybe it's just that I've uncovered it but I found him to be very relaxed and funny and a dark sense of humor, which as kind of the naughty boy in the class, which I wasn't expecting.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** We'd be at meetings with finance ministers, and I can't believe Bill Gates has just whispered that in my ear.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** So maybe more relaxed about his public persona, but still pretty intense on the mission, whatever that mission is about. We argue all the time. Our manager Paul McGuinness used to always say, "You're as good as the arguments you get."



**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** And Bill Gates is pretty good in a row and we can go at it because we just want to get to the right place.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**BONO (GUEST):** I need it and I hope Bill enjoys it as much as me.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Bill, do you enjoy getting in a row with Bono?

**BILL GATES:** Absolutely. The sad thing about our meeting was that Bono had been trying to meet me for a number of years. My co-founder of Microsoft, Paul Allen, was in the music world, unlike myself and he kept saying, "Hey, Bono wants to meet with you," and I was like, "Oh, God.

He's not going to know much." So, I delayed. It was a couple years running there. Then when I met Bono and I saw his passion and his understanding of how to express the injustice of the way things were, that was so much fun. My favorite story is that Bono was saying to President Bush that something about the HIV emergency should be done and came up and said, "Yes, we're going to get at least \$5 billion a year, which will really make a difference." I was like, "You're going to get what?" [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** That is the craziest thing I have ever heard, and it came true. It actually happened and it was that audacity that it's just so why not go for it, even though something like that had never happened. We have gotten off to a great start, where sometimes our work, people see it, and it feels relevant. Sometimes the world feels like they're not paying attention at all. We get to share that sense of, "Oh, gosh. We have to keep this in front of people. How do you make it interesting? How do you activate their brain and their heart?"

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BILL GATES:** Bono's taught me a lot about that.

**RASHIDA JONES:** That's cool. I do feel Bono, you are incredibly poetic and articulate on things that maybe seem like inner machinations or behind the scenes, and bringing those things to

the general public. How much do you think talking about it is going to help inform them? Do you know what I mean?

**BONO (GUEST):** Certainly our politics is a product of storytelling. Poor storytelling brings about poor politics and I consider myself to be a top line melody person.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** It might surprise you that I don't just look for that top line melody in music. I'm looking for it in ideas, in the world of ideas. I'm looking for it in politics and activism, all over the place.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BONO (GUEST):** But Bill is also. You don't think of him as a singer, but he's also looking for that clear thought.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BONO (GUEST):** In fact, he's very singular in his focus of trying to find that thing. What's that thing that will get us through this? That we have in common. Actually the storytelling, to answer your question, Rashida, the storytelling's become really important in the last years because in a time of fables, we need truth tellers.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BONO (GUEST):** Whereas, Rashida, you and I, we look for as an actor or as a performer, Bill's not a performer. I'm a performer. I'm looking for emotional integrity of a thought. But a truth teller, it has to be intellectual honesty.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BONO (GUEST):** For this period our best story tellers are truth tellers. You don't think of Tony Fauci, who you've had on this podcast, as a singer. He's fucking Frank Sinatra to me.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Just clear cutting right to it, right?

**BONO (GUEST):** It's just that's what we need in our story telling.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**BILL GATES:** I hope that we're always smart enough to remind people that we belong to the human race. That's the nation that we should think of ourselves being part of. Bono and I went to a dinner one night in London where one of our colleagues said to us, "You know, this thing you do about saving children's lives, that's really not an interesting idea right now, that's sort of passé." I remember I got fairly angry at the dinner, saying, "How can you say that?" I mean, the person was actually trying to help us and it was kind of true that our...

**RASHIDA JONES:** The messaging.

**BILL GATES:** ...melody or whatever was not resonating.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right, right.

**BILL GATES:** He said it like, "Oh, you have to find another cause."

**RASHIDA JONES:** No one cares about children anymore.

**BILL GATES:** No dammit, we need another melody not another cause. Do you remember that, Bono?

**BONO (GUEST):** I remember it well.

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** I'm really glad that for all of the sights you've seen on the ground, in the field, that you've not lost your sense of annoyance and indeed, that's the wrong word, rage. I would call it rage.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes.

**BONO (GUEST):** The thing about if I can say this, and I am going to say it, which is people talk about Bill's capability, but I would rather talk about his character. The reason that I'm friends, as opposed to just comrades with Bill is because of the values. I think it's good that you're annoyed, Bill. That's my point. I'm the punk rocker going, "I think I know what he meant," and Bill's going, "I don't want to know what he meant."

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*] I actually have a personal question because it applies to me too. I have a much smaller fan base and maybe a much smaller circle of influence, but I do find that I get criticized sometimes for being too political or talking about things that people don't want me to talk about. They want me to shut up and act or shut up and do whatever. Bono, do you ever feel like people reach a point of fatigue when it comes to artists talking about social justice issues? Do you ever feel like it's time to shut up? I feel like that sometimes.

**BONO (GUEST):** Most of my family would concur.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BONO (GUEST):** The band would concur.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** This is an intervention. They actually called me, to call "Please stop talking."

**BONO (GUEST):** Yes is the answer. I would quite like to actually reduce my profile in this kind of way but what else use is this currency of what we've been given, this fame. I hate the word celebrity. I would say celebrity upends God's order of things and mothers and nurses. These are the really important things. You might think singers love the sound of their own voice, why else would they be out there? Actually, people will step onto a stage to try and find their voice. It's the strangest thing. You're actually trying to find out who you are. Art is an attempt to identify yourself and hopefully, when that job is done, you can fuck off.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** The eloquence to draw people in and not have it repel them because you're telling them bad news and it's about people who are far away. The eloquence to draw people in, Bono is so gifted. When he sat down with Senator Helms, when he went over to Tony Fauci's house and said, "Now's the time, we've got to get this done," It made a huge difference. The work that Bono drove through ONE in his personal voice, even saying things like, "Hey, the U.S. is an idea of equality" and that he admires that, that's gotten a lot of people to step back and say, "Okay, this is important." I'd say celebrity activism, I'd use Bono's work as exhibit A to say that it really can make a difference. Now we have a U.S. administration that will care, and we have a crisis we have got to finish off, so, no slacking off...

**BONO (GUEST):** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Not yet, not yet.

**BILL GATES:** ...any time soon.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right. I have a burning question for Bill which is, what is your favorite U2 song?

**BILL GATES:** I might say, "One," or I might say, "Sunday Bloody Sunday." There are so many good U2 songs...

**RASHIDA JONES:** It's pretty crazy.

**BILL GATES:** ...and more to come.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes.

**BONO (GUEST):** Absolutely and you can be sure, Rashida, that you'll be seeing more of the two of us in service of our activism.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Bono, thank you so much for joining us and being here with us and it's just been an absolute pleasure and please continue to do your work.

**BONO (GUEST):** Same to you, Rashida. We are ever in your debt and thanks for this podcast, both of you. This will get us through what could be a tough winter.

**BILL GATES:** Tough winter.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Thank you so much.

**BILL GATES:** Thanks, Bono. Say hi to your family.

**BONO (GUEST):** Bye, bye.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Okay, well it feels a little funny to introduce Kerry Washington because she is my friend. I feel very honored to call her my friend but I'm going to do it anyway. She's a film and television actress known for her work as Olivia Pope in *Scandal*. As well as films like *Ray*,

*Django Unchained* and *Confirmation*, where she played Anita Hill. But as much as Kerry has accomplished on screen, she devotes a lot of her time and her platform to advocating for civil liberties, voting rights, gender equality, especially empowerment of black women and girls, ending police brutality, and much, much, much more. I'm very excited to have her here today. So, welcome Kerry.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Thank you, Rashida. Thank you for having me, my dear.

**RASHIDA JONES:** This is Bill Gates.

**BILL GATES:** Hey, Kerry.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Hi, Bill Gates. [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Have you ever met, the two of you?

**BILL GATES:** Not in person. I've seen a lot of those works. I loved *Scandal*.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Thank you, thank you.

**RASHIDA JONES:** We've been talking a lot today about change and if people can really change and where change starts.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** I'll say, I bristle when somebody puts activist in front of my name and I think that's because I know so many real, on the ground, activists who've committed their life and their life's work to that. Do you consider yourself an activist? It's not a trick question, I promise, I just want to talk about it.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** [*laughs*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Do you consider yourself an activist and what does that mean to you?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Yes, I'm with you. I think that there are people who dedicate their entire lives to the work of activism. Recently when I was on the campaign trail, somebody called me an activist and I was like, "Oh, I get that. I'll take that."

**RASHIDA JONES:** Oh, activist. Sounds a little bit like a prescription for allergies but I'll take it.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** [*laughs*] Yes, exactly. Big side effects.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I do think I am really passionate about being able to impact change where I can, when I can, but I know that I'm not a full-time change maker.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Do you think that when it comes to impacting people and effecting change, because this is a question I ask myself too, we talked to Bono about this particularly. Do you feel the fatigue that people feel hearing from you on matters that are not art related? I certainly do and what do you do to battle that?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I think a big part of why I don't often feel that fatigue is that I've always done this work. For some reason, I've been really vocal about issues that determine or that involve humanity from the very beginning of my career. I don't often get a lot of pushback about it because it really is a part of how I walk in the world. I think that's really important when we start thinking about artists having more of a voice because I think sometimes what happens is, we pop up in these election years, and every four years we come around and want to have a voice and an impact, and if we're not living in that space, not to the same degree, because we don't have to be in serious get-out-the-vote mode. If we're not acknowledging the struggles of humanity and a little bit focused on change and doing good in the world in the off years, and on the off seasons, then I think people bristle at it because it feels out of context.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes, inauthentic.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** When we say to a celebrity "You should not be political," we're actually living in opposition to the reality that we all need to be political. We shouldn't tell anybody to not be engaged. Democracy requires us all. It's not a spectator sport.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Where does that come from for you? Is that from your parents? Why is that so built into the fabric of who you are?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I think so. I think my parents are both pretty engaged in the community in different ways. My dad is more of the work from within the system guy. He's on so many different boards, community boards, healthcare boards. I come from New York City, so this healthcare board in the Bronx and that community service board in Brooklyn. He does a lot of that kind of work. My mother was much more of an activist growing up. She crossed the line. When the teacher's union was picketing, she crossed the picket line because she thought that a lot of what the union was standing for was racist and sexist, and so she's always been more of an activist.

**RASHIDA JONES:** It's tough to cross that line with a union.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** When I was a kid, my public school was downstairs from the superintendent's office and the superintendent used to always say to me in the hallway, "Did your mommy drop you at school today?" I thought it was because he really liked my mom, but it's because he was terrified of her and he knew that if she was around, he was going to have to answer to some of her questions.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*] "She didn't? Great, I feel much better. Enjoy your day sweetheart."

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** [*laughs*] Exactly, exactly.

**RASHIDA JONES:** We were talking about what it means to construct a narrative and storytelling. Bono was saying he's a top melody writer, that's what he does. He kind of comes in, he distills what the issue is and tries to communicate it to the rest of the world.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Kerry, do you see your work the way that Bono does, which is essentially just trying to help communicate key issues?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I really try to think about this work strategically because I do think sometimes as artists, we get told to just have feelings about things particularly as actors. "Just sing a song about it," or "Just make a movie about it," and I think there's incredible power in that, in impacting culture through narrative. But I also think, as activists, because we're storytellers, we can hear their larger issues and translate it into words that other people can hear, particularly at somebody like you as a writer. My job as an actor, your job as an actor, we walk in other people's shoes, so, I think I'm often able to hear something and say, "How would that person hear that best?" Or "How would that community understand that issue?" Or, "What does this group of women need to hear in order to activate around that issue?"

**BILL GATES:** How integrated do you think your career and your activism are? Would you seek out certain roles because that would reinforce the values you bring to your activism?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** It's funny. It more came up for me early in my career. I started realizing that I was saying no to projects at a time when I could not afford to say no to anything. I remember saying I'd rather work three more shifts at this restaurant than take on a movie that I think is going to be bad for women or reinforce stereotypes about black people. Occasionally, I'm drawn to something because I feel, "Oh, this is a message that needs to be out



in the world." More often, the weird reality is that for me, because I'm a woman and because I'm a black person, any time that I've put myself at the center of a story or found myself at the center of a story, it's somewhat of a political act.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** My job has just been to three-dimensionalize that person and make her fully human. Which is my job as an actor anyway. But in this body it's really important because for Olivia Pope, for example, so many people said to me, "She was the black woman that I have been closest to in my life. I've never had a black woman in my house every single week at the same time and had that kind of intimacy the way I did with Olivia Pope."

**RASHIDA JONES:** For white people and black people, right?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Yes. Yes. Totally.

**RASHIDA JONES:** There is something that's inherently political about playing that role and reaching so many people, because it does just sort of fill out the spectrum of what you understand a black woman to be.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Yes, and not interpreting that to mean, "I have to be perfect," but one of the things I loved about her was she was so aspirational, but she was massively flawed.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Sleeping with somebody else's husband, all that stuff.

**RASHIDA JONES:** The president, but whatever.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Whatever. [*laughing*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*Laughing*] Yes, not just somebody else's husband. Okay. [*Laughing*] Relatable. Relatable.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** [*Laughing*] There is that.

**RASHIDA JONES:** But wanted to ask you what the things are that you are most focused on when it comes to this present moment and then your big, big wishes for the world.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I think one of the other things that Bono does so well and that I think is really important, is really shining a light on folks on the ground who are doing the work and not saying, "I have all the answers. I have all the information," but sort of saying to our community and our eyeballs, our millions of eyeballs, "I'm so happy I have your attention. Now, look over here at this other real activist," as you pointed out earlier, Rashida, "who's doing the work. Listen to her. Follow her. Let me stand next to her so that the cameras stay rolling while you take in her messaging." That's also been a big part of my commitment to the work. I do think narrative is really important. I was actually thinking this morning about, Bill, the TED Talk that you did years ago, about the next great virus, the next big challenge.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Here we are.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** And here we are, right? I think it's so important. Having that narrative at that point really helps us understand the mistakes we made and really gives us, and obviously, the folks in power, like government officials had those tools, but gives us as a public a greater understanding of what we can do differently and even how to trust science when it's presented to us.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Bill and I were speaking about this earlier. We have a very formidable divide in this country, and I don't expect you to have the answer to that, Kerry, but in the face of that...

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I expect Bill to.

**RASHIDA JONES:** I do, too.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** That's what I came here for.

**RASHIDA JONES:** I do, too.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** [*Laughing*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** In the face of that, do you think we are capable of changing hearts and minds, and what does that look like? How does that start to happen?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I really think that there's going to have to be some real transformation in our education system to help young people understand the dynamics at play

and to be able to understand the media with more authority and agency. To be able to filter out news from fiction.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Media literacy. Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Yes, exactly. We just need to have people really be seen and heard and understand that it's not a zero-sum game. That my piece of the pie doesn't take away from your piece of pie, and then make that the reality through legislation so that really people do have enough access to healthcare and education and the resources that they need, so that we don't create zero sum dynamics. There has to be a real long game to honoring all people and having all people feel seen and heard, because so much of the isms that we're dealing with, whether it's racism or sexism, it's all coming from a fear that, if I have, you won't have.

**BILL GATES:** Yes, I think Kerry's voice will be particularly important in the next few years, because even once we get people vaccinated and the pandemic in a certain sense is over, the deficits on learning where the inner city, the black students have been affected far more than other students, the inner-city businesses, the mental health challenges. It's going to take many years to remedy those things. Shining light on the heroes, some cases where things have gone well and the human story of we all suffered through this together, but some are still paying a price for it, it'll be interesting if that can draw us together. After World War II, we did come together. Is this one? Are we going to have a sense, "Okay, we conquered the health problem. Let's go after these deficits, which sadly have struck along all the lines of inequity that pre-existed the pandemic."

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** What do you think, Bill, how do you feel about the role of artists when it comes to social change?

**BILL GATES:** It's amazing how the issues that I work on can disappear. Particularly if they're over in Africa. It's just not that visible. Usually, when you have a crisis, people do kind of turn inwards. The financial crisis did that a bit. Now, with the pandemic, it'll be interesting to see. When I first met Bono, I didn't understand how critical he would be to the work that we were doing and even making it fun and bringing energy to it. The true activist can get discouraged. The fact that you reach out to them and you highlight them and you praise them, I wouldn't underestimate the value of that, because they're out there on the fringe doing the super hard work. So yes, by embracing those people, by telling the stories, including some of success, that arc of justice is definitely accelerated by artists having these values.

**RASHIDA JONES:** That's excellent advice.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** It's good to hear.

**RASHIDA JONES:** That's good, because I do think that sometimes we lose sight of that, but sometimes it is just helping to increase morale and create community.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** And people are tired.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** That's right.

**RASHIDA JONES:** You know?

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** That's right. And that's fun to remember also, because sometimes in these moments where you think, "How can I help the legal battles?"

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** "How can I be registering voters?" All of these things that are not exactly what I'm best at.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*Laughing*]

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** It's great for me to jump in and lend a hand and increase visibility, but also, what stories can I tell? How can I bring joy? How can I bring inspiration to a moment?

**RASHIDA JONES:** Cheerlead.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Yes. That's actually what I do.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes. Yes.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** It's good to remember. [*Laughing*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Kerry, it's such a pleasure to know you and to talk to you today, and thank you so much for joining us.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** I'm delighted to spend time with you both, as I'm a super fan of you both.

**BILL GATES:** Thanks.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Thank you.

**KERRY WASHINGTON (GUEST):** Bye.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Bye.

[*music*]

**BILL GATES:** That was super.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes.

**BILL GATES:** It's nice that, for them, when they measure their success, they think of not just how great they perform their art, but have they brought their values to play. That's part of who they are and they'd feel strange to have commercial success without it connecting to their values. I hope we'll see more of that. Young people are yearning for guidance on how to do more than just have financial success.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**BILL GATES:** I think artists can connect this next generation with causes that will both be fulfilling and accelerate progress.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**BILL GATES:** My optimism is showing here again.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*Laughing*] Bono talked about how you had this kind of singular vision and that's kind of what's great about you and your work. What do you think is the more important trait, to be open to change or to have a sense of this kind of thread of conviction through the course of your life?

**BILL GATES:** Movements need quite a mix of characters. I could not have sat down with Senator Helms and convinced him not to block the money for HIV in the way that Bono did by quoting from the Bible and creating a sense of common humanity.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

**BILL GATES:** That's actually pretty phenomenal that Bono has that skill. All movements need different folks and hopefully those folks do like working as a team and find that common cause. That's why it's been fun to have Bono who comes at this from a different angle than I do and yet we've resonated with each other.

**RASHIDA JONES:** In general, would you say you've changed more than you haven't over the course of your life?

**BILL GATES:** I think there's limits to how much people can change. You can mellow. You can learn other people's points of view. You can give your kids a chance to be more enlightened than you are.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right. You can see the change generationally. That feels like the big one.

**BILL GATES:** A lot of the big change sadly requires generations to go by before you don't think of the Japanese as this enemy that we fought and you see them as deeply peace loving.

**RASHIDA JONES:** With that, I think the big answer there is that change requires you to really see other people and see the big picture of something. It's impossible to envision change when you're just sitting in your own life and just seeing what you're seeing day-to-day. You have to think big. You have to think globally. You have to think generationally. Change requires so much energy and time to really stick. We have to be patient and thoughtful, and evolved, and empathetic. That's all I have to say.

**BILL GATES:** All right.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

[*music*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Over this season our series has explored questions that are fundamentally about change. Can and should we stop lying? Can society become more equal? Will things be different after COVID-19? Can we make the changes needed to stop a climate disaster? It seems to me that your optimism, Bill, is rooted in change and the belief that things will get better because people choose to make them better and have the tools to make them better. I want to ask you one last time, why should I be an optimist? Why should I believe that the world is changing for the better?

**BILL GATES:** If you look at the world 200 years ago, a third of all children died before the age of five and we didn't have electricity, we didn't have communications. Most people in the world were not literate. There has been this trend, it gets interrupted by wars or pandemics, a lot like the one we're experiencing right now. But the basic through line is that we learn together. Even in politics, the idea that the safety net should be more generous over time. Both parties, slowly but surely have taken the extra riches and tried to be a bit more fair about sharing that. I can't guarantee that it won't be a zig-zag, but between innovation and people's basic humanity, yes, I think the trend of the past we'll see, even during our lifetime, healthier, safer, somewhat more equitable world.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Okay. Well that's going to have to be proven to me.

**BILL GATES:** Good. Good.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

**BILL GATES:** No, you'll be so excited...

**RASHIDA JONES:** I hope so.

**BILL GATES:** ...because your expectations are low.

**RASHIDA JONES:** They're very low.

**BILL GATES:** That's what Warren Buffett always says about marriage is that the key is to go into it with low expectations because you'll be impressed by modest acts of kindness.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*] Or deeply suspicious. In terms of the world changing, okay, I might buy that. But my concern is that we live in a very young country. We live in this experiment that could be a failure and we could be staring down the barrel of watching the failure unravel in front of us. Why am I supposed to believe that America will continue to get better?

**BILL GATES:** America's gone through several hundred years, including a civil war, a depression, two world wars, and you would have been scared at many of those points in time that we were off track. And yet, we've done better. Poverty, education, we've improved those things. Why would our generation be the one where the basic idea of democracy falls apart? Yes, we need to stay involved to make it work, but I don't see any problem harder than the ones that were faced by our ancestors.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Even if it doesn't feel that things are getting better, the fact that the problems are less grave means that things are getting better.

**BILL GATES:** YES. I don't think we're going to have another civil war and I don't think we're going to have...

**RASHIDA JONES:** You don't?

**BILL GATES:** Nope. Civil war is a bad thing. I don't think we'll have more world wars. We had some bad episodes and I believe that we've learned from them.

**RASHIDA JONES:** I worry about the giant wealth gap. That's what I worry most and the climate crisis. Those are my two things that I'm concerned about people not being able to fix or wanting to fix, because people really like being rich. Even if it's at the expense of other people being poor.

**BILL GATES:** Well, fortunately it's not a zero-sum game.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Right.

**BILL GATES:** There has been more wealth and there will be more wealth. Yes, we should spread it around somewhat more equally without destroying the incentive system, so we don't want to go too far. But, yes, even there I'm an optimist.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Okay. I don't want to end this on a negative note...

**BILL GATES:** *(laughs)*

**RASHIDA JONES:** ...as we go into the holidays.

**BILL GATES:** Well, then you're going to have to let me do the talking.

**RASHIDA JONES:** *[laughs]* Okay. Okay, you go for it. You go for it.

**BILL GATES:** This is the upbeat podcast from Bill and Rashida. Season one, we solved big problems for you.

**RASHIDA JONES:** We solved them apparently. *[laughs]* We didn't solve them, but we did into them in a way that...



**BILL GATES:** I know.

**RASHIDA JONES:** ...I think people...

**BILL GATES:** We gave people something to think about. Hopefully some young people listening in will be part of the solution.

**RASHIDA JONES:** Yes, I have faith in the next generation and I have faith that having these conversations and having these conversations in a public way will help us to solve the problems. So that's hopeful, right?

**BILL GATES:** Very.

**RASHIDA JONES:** [*laughs*]

[*singing*]

**RASHIDA JONES:** Bill Gates and Rashida Jones Ask Big Questions is a production of The Gates Notes. It is written and produced by me and Bill. Thank you to our guests Bono and Kerry Washington for joining us today.

Our Creative Director is Ian Saunders. Our Supervising Producers are Jen Krajicek, Pia Dierking and David Sanger. Our Design Director is Anu Horsman. Our Technical Director is Alicia Salmond. And our Researcher is Brent Christofferson. Thank you to Executive Producers Lauren Spohrer, Phoebe Judge, Bridgitt Arnold and Nick Mocerri, Co-Executive Producers Kara Brown and Meghan Groob, and Producers Carl Malone and Nadia Wilson. Special thanks to Larry Cohen. Audio mixed by Rob Byers, Michael Raphael and Johnny Vince Evans. And recording by Joel Barham. Galen Huckins is our composer. Our theme song is *Talk* by Khalid.

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