

Bill Gates and Rashida Jones Ask Big Questions

EPISODE 02: Is inequality inevitable?

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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: 2020's brought to light a lot of issues. One that I'm really concerned about is inequality. It seems like inequality is being completely exacerbated by COVID-19. We keep hearing about the disparity between rich and poor and that it is getting wider and wider.

But before we start talking about that, it's clear that both of us are so lucky in so many ways for the opportunities we've been given, what we were born into. But, Bill, in what ways did the world set you up for success?

BILL GATES: I was born in the United States where you generally have stability, not war, food availability, you don't have famine. I was born where there was a school that I went to. My fear of violence was very low. I could sit and read. I had a fantastic upbringing because of the role model of my parents and then I went to college. I didn't finish college, but I was there. That developed me intellectually quite dramatically from where I was when I left high school.

RASHIDA JONES: I know for myself, I was born to parents who were incredibly successful and healthy and kept me safe. I think about my dad who, born in Chicago in the '30s, black, poor, he had to push his way out to success and opportunity. I'm not sure if I had to battle really kind of simple needs, whether it was being hungry or trying to make money, if I would've been able to be successful in the field that I'm successful in. My dad will always be an outlier when it comes to a black man in America. Both you and my dad exceeded expectation, in terms of what was possible. But then there are some things that just feel inevitably unequal.

Do you think in this country or even in the world, is inequality inevitable?

BILL GATES: The system that tries to equalize all outcomes is communism. That system, in terms of incentives and freedom of choice and rewarding hard work and innovation has worked very poorly. Some of the most miserable lives, shortest lives, in the world are where we have that ideology still in place. That's failed. How you combine a desire to have some mobility, safety net, and yet encourage hard work and innovation, that every country's still struggling to find that balance.

RASHIDA JONES: Do you think that people have a moral obligation to take responsibility for the issue of inequality?

BILL GATES: When I was married, my mom quoted the saying, "To whom much is given, much is expected." and the idea that those who are lucky can understand these systems and make them more progressive.

The greatest inequity is to be born in a poor country and there you have a 20% chance of dying before the age of five. You have about a 50% chance that you don't get enough food for your brain or your body to fully develop. You're likely to live in very unstable conditions. There's this very dramatic divide and that's, by far, where most children are born. They're born in poor countries...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...not in rich countries. Things are better today in terms of inequity than in the past. The picture of poverty in the '60s was people who really didn't have enough to eat, no air conditioning, certainly no way of connecting up with information in a deep way.

RASHIDA JONES: Is that not accurate? That the wealth gap is actually growing in this country?

BILL GATES: Not meaningfully. The global wealth gap keeps getting smaller because the poor countries like India, Brazil, Mexico, they're getting wealthier faster than the rich countries are. If you take all of humanity, we are closing that wealth gap again and again, and again. That's a constant thing. The absolute level keeps going up as well. How long you live, how many people survive, how many people are literate, reduction of malnutrition. There are some societies where because of the tax policies, they allow the professional class, the top 10% to take a lot of the wealth. Appropriately there's a lot of debate in virtually all the rich countries about more progressive tax policies.

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

BILL GATES: There's a lot of room, when you say the dilemma is you still want to have there be opportunity in people to dream, there's a lot of room to make the system more progressive

without taking it so far that the motivation to be, I'd like to study hard and be a doctor, I'd like to study hard and invent something. You can collect a lot more without interfering with that aspiration.

RASHIDA JONES: Do you think there's a better version of capitalism because it feels like this is sort of a failure of free market capitalism, right? That the gap is so giant and that people are sold this idea of opportunity, but then really just a small percentage of people make tons and tons of money with no cap or they literally don't have to ever give back to anybody else and they evade taxes, all this stuff. Is there a better version of this?

BILL GATES: You're painting a more negative picture than I think is valid.

RASHIDA JONES: I know that's my job Bill.

BILL GATES: Yes, every country other than very few is capitalistic at this point and how you build the two key things, the safety net and the opportunity for mobility, the Nordic countries tend to do very well on these measures and say, South America actually doesn't do very well on these measures. The U.S. would sit somewhere in-between.

RASHIDA JONES: How are we the richest country in the world and we don't have universal healthcare and free education yet. How is that possible?

BILL GATES: We do have free education up through high school.

RASHIDA JONES: But how do we not have free college and universal healthcare and we're the richest country in the world?

BILL GATES: Why should college be free? Those are the people who are going to make a lot of money. I mean, that is a very regressive upper-class thing...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...to say, I get to go to Harvard and the middle-class taxation will pay for that.

RASHIDA JONES: Okay. I hear that, I hear that. But what about universal healthcare? If we're talking about baseline quality of health, the idea of being sick and having to pay for the entirety of your life, because you happen to be sick, seems like the first thing you can tackle as a country.

BILL GATES: I spend a lot of time thinking about the U.S. healthcare system and it can be way, way better, particularly the issue you're raising, the access for people who are low-income. Our medical care system for people who are 65 and older actually works pretty well.

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

BILL GATES: Medicare, medicare advantage is one of the healthiest parts of our health care system. But we really do need to make it more efficient because the increase in medical costs is starving out other areas of government spending, including education...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...including welfare type programs. So yes, the healthcare system and certain aspects of our educational results would be at the top of the list...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...where you'd say, why haven't we made more progress on those two?

RASHIDA JONES: Let's be specific about inequality at this moment in time. Bill, is there any way we can recover from the economic effects of this pandemic?

BILL GATES: The government programs can take and offset some of this increased inequity. But yes, it is tragic how this epidemic has taken every dimension of inequity: income, race, rich country versus poor country, service worker versus office worker. Almost every dimension, the person who was in the tougher situation to begin with has been far more negatively affected than the person in the other situation.

RASHIDA JONES: I want to talk about solutions. Are there solutions to this? I'm actually really looking forward to talking to Raj Chetty about this, because he looks at these huge divisions between the rich and the poor and then uses data to test this great American hypothesis about upward social mobility and is it possible, is it real?

BILL GATES: One of the things Raj Chetty does is he looks at if you divide society up by income level into five parts, the bottom fifth, the next fifth and so on, and you say, "Okay, your parents are in a certain one of those quintiles, what's the chance, in terms of the children, that they'll be in another quintile?" If you're born into the bottom quintile, what's the chance you'll make it as a child of that parent...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...into the top quintile. That's this economic mobility map. You'd like as a society for there to be a pretty high chance that you can be mobile. But the top 20% who are children of professionals, managers, lawyers, they are getting a stable childhood.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: They're getting far more educational resources; tutors, specialists to help out and so they are way more likely, as children of those parents, to be in that top quintile. It's interesting to track where in the U.S. is there income mobility? Look at it by geography, by race, by what goes on in terms of education. We're not as mobile a society as we'd like to be.

RASHIDA JONES: That's the thing is that there's an expectation. The American dream is an expectation that everybody who's American has access to upward mobility, and that's what people have been sold for a really long time. But it seems to me, from what you're saying and Raj's work, that maybe that's a bit of a lie and that maybe we have to accept that there are certain restrictions where people do have more upward mobility in some places and less in other places simply because of where they were born.

BILL GATES: It's numeric, although we're talking about people's lives. You're not going to get to a point where your parents' situation doesn't bias the outcome for you. That is the bottom 20%, we won't have 20% of those kids getting into the top 20%. I mean we believe, and the science on this is very strong, is that the intellectual potential is there across the board. You're not tapping into that for your bottom two or three quintiles and the public school system is the agent of mobility.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: Not the only one, but it's...

RASHIDA JONES: Right. The most readily available.

BILL GATES: ...so powerful. Public colleges, we do subsidize society; education. Thank goodness the mobility we have is driven off of that. Maybe we need to do more. If you grow up in a single-parent household, are there mentors? Does the government help with these things?

RASHIDA JONES: Raj is the perfect person to talk to about this so I want to bring in Raj Chetty. He is a professor of public economics at Harvard University. He is the youngest tenured faculty member in the history of the department.

Hi, Raj.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Hi, Rashida.

RASHIDA JONES: You know Bill.

BILL GATES: Hey.

RASHIDA JONES: Good to see you again, Bill.

BILL GATES: Good to see you.

RASHIDA JONES: Tell me a little bit about how the two of you met.

BILL GATES: Our foundation, having a broader view of mobility was important to us. Raj was doing some really breakthrough work on assembling the data and giving us that idea of if you're born in this quintile, what's the chance your children end up in some other quintile? Then trying to work backwards and say, okay, what is it about your location, your education, certain things around you that cause that? We had a deep curiosity, and Raj has really pioneered some insights into understanding certainly what's going on today, which hopefully leads to interventions.

RASHIDA JONES: You are the youngest tenured professor at Harvard which is meaningful to me as a graduate. How old are you, Raj?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): I'm now 41, but I was young at the time. [*laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*] You're still young, you're still young. You're younger than me. I know you have an interesting story too, so let's talk about you and where you came from and why are you so successful? Is it because of you or is it because of where you were born and your parents?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Thanks for starting there, Rashida. I think a lot of the work we do is inspired by our own personal stories and hearing you and Bill talk kind of puts that very much the case. In my family, my parents were born in quite low-income villages in India. We're very lucky to happen to be given the opportunity to complete high school, get a chance to go onto college. At that time, in many developing countries you might know people had tended to have larger families with lots of siblings and they would pick one kid to get more education because you couldn't afford to send everyone.

It so happened that my dad was picked in his family and my mom, this was especially unusual as a woman, she ended up becoming the first woman to become a doctor in our community in south India.

RASHIDA JONES: Wow.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): That completely paved the pathway for myself and my sisters to then come to the U.S. and have a set of opportunities that have been completely different from what our cousins have had.

RASHIDA JONES: I just have to point out that the two of you have these incredible superhero moms. Raj, and you too Bill, you said your mom was really the one who got you excited about things. But these were women who kind of defied the odds of their time and then managed to be working moms. I'm just putting it out there; that it feels like there's some sort of data you should collect around that, Raj. *[laughs]*

BILL GATES: *[laughs]*

RASHIDA JONES: I also wanted to ask you both about the American dream because this is something that I'm super interested in. As the product of immigrant Jews on one side and then, on the other side slaves and then some slave owners mixed in there, I feel like I am the American dream because who would have thought this person made up of all of those things would make somebody who was successful. But in a way that's a bit of a bad thing to perpetuate because, I was born into privilege. What are your feelings about the American dream? What is the American dream? Is it real? Has it changed? Do we need to let go of that idea entirely?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): I would certainly say, at least in terms of an aspiration, what I think America stands for a lot of people in the U.S., immigrants around the world. I know when I was in India as a kid I always thought of America as kind of the place where you could do anything if you could just get there. As I started to study those issues myself, I think of myself as kind of trying to study the signs of opportunity using big data. When you really look at the data, it's disappointing, I think, relative to what I had hoped and what I think a lot of people view as the ideal image. America does not in fact give many kids a great chance of rising up, particularly kids born into lower income families in certain neighborhoods, and so forth. Now, in a relative sense, compared to other lower income countries, of course there are still great opportunities in America relative to growing up in a very low-income country. But compared to many places in Europe or Scandinavian countries, it's not so clear.

BILL GATES: I wonder if you asked people if your parents were in that bottom quintile, what's the chance the child will make the top quintile? I wonder if you surveyed the public, would

they guess that's 2%, 3%? Actually, it's nowhere near 20%, and that's probably too high a goal, probably unachievable. But it's not zero.

RASHIDA JONES: But it's not 100. That's the lie that we're told is that people have a 100% possibility to move their status.

BILL GATES: No, you have the possibility. The adversity, there are some people who are amazing who are forged by that very tough stuff.

BILL GATES: Now, it's a small percentage.

RASHIDA JONES: They're outliers. Yes.

BILL GATES: They get celebrated.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. I think they get celebrated in hopes that other people will feel like they too can be that person, and that to me is the lie, right? Because they don't represent a group; they're outliers. They are the aberration in a way that it fills people with hope in a way that I think is actually destructive, because there's an expectation that you can do that.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): I think that's right. In particular, I think people don't necessarily appreciate the very sharp differences in your odds of rising up based on the schools you happen to attend or which neighborhood you grew up in or the color of your skin. Which is, in the U.S., an enormously important factor in determining your chances.

RASHIDA JONES: We're sitting here, we're three people, very successful people by anybody's standards and would you say, Raj, do you think that us three not having the opportunity and the neighborhood and the education that we had, did we just win the embryonic lottery? Is there another version of our lives where we were born somewhere else where we do just as well? How likely would that have been?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): I'll speak to that for myself. To me, I completely feel like I won the lottery. The way I think about that most saliently is I have many cousins, who I was referring to earlier, all of whom were all named for our maternal grandfather. We all have the same name, Raj.

RASHIDA JONES: Raj, the Raj's. You could start a band.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): [*laughs*] That's right. We grew up in different places so we often referred to by kind of Boston Raj, Singapore Raj, and so forth.

RASHIDA JONES: *[laughs]*

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): When I just look at how our lives have shaped out, everyone's happy in their own life course and doing the best they can, but the opportunities we've had are just so dramatically different that to me it just underscores that this is about chance, really.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): And taking advantages of the opportunities you're given, of course, but those opportunities are central.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. Let's talk a little bit more about your data and what you've found. You look at very, very kind of small, focused neighborhoods and have found that even a couple blocks away, the opportunity map would look completely different. I'm a Los Angeles native, and so I'm very aware of the drastic difference in opportunity and wealth like just in my own city. Can you give us an example of the most kind of dramatic side by side opportunity?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Let's go to LA and let me just give you a bit of context on how we do this type of analysis. What we do in our group is track big data. So this is data coming from anonymized tax and census records in this case. The power of that is you can trace the roots of things like poverty and incarceration back to the neighborhoods where kids grew up by essentially following millions of kids over their childhood and linking them to their parents and their neighborhoods and so forth. Let me give you an example from LA. Central LA, which I'm sure, you are familiar with, traditionally a relatively high poverty area with lots of challenges over time. I want to pick one neighborhood that I think captures the point well. Watts, which is a very high poverty area, public housing projects and so forth. Here's a statistic that I found shocking when we first saw it in the data. If you look at a Black man who grows up in Watts in a low-income family, there's a 45% chance that he's incarcerated on a single day. The date of the 2010 census when we're measuring the statistic. If you think about then what that means over time, what are the odds that that child ends up incarcerated at some point in their lifetime? It would be like 60-70%. You basically have no shot at that point, right? Because even after you come out of incarceration, of course that leaves a mark on your record. That makes future employment difficult and so forth.

RASHIDA JONES: It changes your whole trajectory.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): It changes your whole trajectory. On the one hand, you might react to that by saying, I kind of know being from LA, it's a tough neighborhood. I know there are challenges there. Maybe not that extreme, but here is a statistic that might be surprising to you, Rashida. If you go a couple of miles south to Compton, which is a different neighborhood than

Watts, but I don't think you would think of it as a super affluent place, etc. But if you look at that same number in Compton, it's about 6.5% as opposed to 45%.

RASHIDA JONES: Wow.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Kind of a factor of 10 difference in terms of the odds that kids end up incarcerated. What's more, if you look at kids who move between these different types of neighborhoods, every extra year that you spend growing up in a place like Compton as opposed to Watts, dramatically changes your life trajectory.

RASHIDA JONES: Wow.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): The reason I give you that contrast is if I were to tell you, Beverley Hills is very different from Watts. That's fine.

RASHIDA JONES: You'd get it, right.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): The point is even among what might look like relatively similar areas, there are kind of points of light.

RASHIDA JONES: That's super fascinating and I don't think a lot of people know that. I wonder does your data cover, I know this is output related, but why that is?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Yes.

RASHIDA JONES: Why are those statistics so staggering?

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): That's exactly the puzzle we're trying to solve. To me, that's the way to unblock the science of opportunity. What I think is very interesting about this variation is not merely that it exists, but that it can give us clues to figure out what is different about Watts relative to Compton. Or what is different about a city like Salt Lake City, which tends to have higher rates of upward mobility versus a place like Atlanta, which has some of the lowest rates of upward mobility in America.

BILL GATES: Most of those people getting incarcerated, just percentage wise, are people who didn't finish high school so the high school dropout rate probably does correlate to some of these other figures.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Absolutely.

RASHIDA JONES: How do you take the data, and then, solve for these issues? Tell us how to fix it basically is what I'm asking.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): The way I think about it is the data can help us think of a medical analogy. It can help us in terms of diagnosing what some of the challenges are. It can suggest potential treatments or potential policy changes that we can make. I think the way we should approach this is try interventions on the ground. I'll give you one example. In Seattle we've been recently running a large-scale pilot with the local housing authority to try to basically come up with innovative ways to reduce the amount of segregation in the city.

One major challenge that I think limits opportunity and increases inequality in America is as you both know our cities are incredibly segregated. Black Americans and White Americans live in different parts of the city. Low-income folks and high-income folks live in different parts of the city. We spend a lot of money in the U.S. government to try to combat this issue. About \$45 billion a year on affordable housing programs intended to give low-income families access to higher opportunity neighborhoods. When we look at that data overlaid on our statistics on your chances of climbing the income ladder, you find that most people who are getting that assistance from the government are still living in low opportunity neighborhoods. They're not taking that \$1500 a month of rental assistance in Seattle...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): ...and finding a place to live in a neighborhood where their kids will thrive. What we did with the Seattle housing authority when we noticed this pattern is teamed up with them and said can we figure out why that's happening? Can we maybe provide a set of services, a sort of a broker who would help you find housing in a different neighborhood?

RASHIDA JONES: To support the process.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): To support the process. Right.

RASHIDA JONES: Feel confident making that decision.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Exactly. What we found, we ran it as a randomized trial, what we found is really remarkable, which is in the group that got the assistance, more than 60% of families moved to high opportunity areas in Seattle where we estimate that their kids will go on to earn an additional \$200,000 over their lifetimes...

RASHIDA JONES: Wow. Wow.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): ...as a result of making these moves, versus only 15% in the control group that didn't get that assistance.

RASHIDA JONES: Wow. You have to have that in order for it to have any kind of impact.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Exactly. I think there are two main takeaways then. In light of this evidence, there is now bipartisan support in Congress for expanding this type of approach. Why bipartisan support? Everybody wants to spend money as efficiently as possible. There might be a debate about should we have 40 billion or 50 billion on housing vouchers, but why not spend the money more effectively to get better outcomes?

I think the second thing it teaches us, and this relates I think to a broader set of issues that we were all discussing, what I found over time in thinking about government programs to tackle issues of inequality and poverty, is that it's not always about the total dollars that we spend, but the way in which you implement the program is extremely important. I can give you the same billions of dollars of housing vouchers to millions of families across America and I can have very different effects depending upon whether that end line implementation, somebody to guide you through the process and actually generate a good outcome. It's just like the teacher kind of logic, right?

BILL GATES: Most of our money in the U.S. goes into education. Although at a macro scale that education system is still quite weak, hasn't improved much even as more resources have gone into it, I'm still hopeful that whether it's teacher training, the culture in a school, in some cases more school days, longer school days, involving the parents in smarter ways. I think we can do a lot there. The broader picture is the school alone isn't enough and people attack someone who says, "Oh, it's just the schools." They are certainly right. That neighborhood, the stress of that neighborhood, the examples in the neighborhood is also a pretty powerful effect. How we intervene at scale even here is very tricky.

RASHIDA JONES: But how does housing play into that?

BILL GATES: Large public housing is one of the greatest failures ever.

RASHIDA JONES: Big time.

BILL GATES: I'm still surprised that somebody doesn't come along and say, "No, we can do large public housing and do it right" because the ability to have services nearby, the cost per apartment, there's lots of benefits that caused people to think, "Okay, let's build these at large scale." But the culture, the crime was just overwhelming.

RASHIDA JONES: The density.

BILL GATES: It's essentially been abandoned. We've been blind, and in an era of AI and big data, government deserves to benefit and Raj's work is among the first and including working with the census bureau to try and look at things over time and it's kind of stunning, but this is the first time we've seen this type of data.

RASHIDA JONES: That's cool because I'm so scared of big data and I'm happy that at least there's a good application for it here where we can actually help people.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): I actually think it can be very positive if handled in the right way. We're not trying to study one person and use their information. For folks listening I would say that's the way that we should be using data, for all of our benefit.

RASHIDA JONES: Thank you, Raj, so much. Your work is fascinating. I hope that you can change the world.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Thank you.

RASHIDA JONES: It's been a pleasure and good luck with everything.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Thank you. Thanks Bill.

BILL GATES: Thanks.

RAJ CHETTY (GUEST): Take care.

RASHIDA JONES: We talked to Raj about the data piece, but I want to turn to our next guest. Mayor Aja Brown, the youngest mayor in the history of Compton. Raj told us a bit about Compton, but now we're going to hear what's actually happening on the ground.

Let's talk to Aja Brown.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Hello.

RASHIDA JONES: Hi! Nice to meet you, I'm Rashida.

BILL GATES: Hi, Mayor Brown.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Hello, Bill. [*Laughs*] Pleasure to meet you both.

RASHIDA JONES: Give us a little bit about your background and how you ended up coming back to Compton.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Absolutely. My grandmother moved from Houston, Texas to Watts first in the early sixties and then a couple of years later, she was able to buy her first home in Compton. She went on to be a registered nurse. Unfortunately, my grandmother was later murdered and my mother moved my brother and I to Pasadena, which is where I grew up. After finishing college and studying urban planning, economic development, I knew that I wanted to dedicate my career and life to really changing outcomes for people and creating more opportunity through policy. Through a variety of reasons, but really I call it providence from God, I was actually invited to a Bible study in Compton and I hadn't been there since I was a kid and I started going there. Then I started doing work in the community and to make a long story short we bought a house there and then later I was recruited to come work for Compton's redevelopment agency, leading up their capital projects. After working for a couple of years, I saw that the city had so much potential, but that it would never reach its full trajectory without a change in leadership. After talking to other folks, I eventually stepped out on faith and ran for mayor and obviously I'm now in this role.

RASHIDA JONES: The unemployment rate when you took office was 18% and now it's down to 6.2%. Your gang intervention program has this wonderful outcome where homicides have decreased by 64% in Compton. This is incredibly impressive and speaks I think to what we were saying, what is the possibility for change. How did you do that? How did you know that could be done?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): First I recognize that my mother raised me with the quality of education and exposure. She exposed me to so much and I knew that the outcomes of people in communities like Compton is not predicated on their talent or their ability, it's really about their exposure, access and opportunity. I knew that if we create strategic policies, in programs that would change trajectories of people, that we can have a different set of outcomes. With gang intervention, I didn't have the luxury of having a robust budget. When I came into office, we had a \$43 million deficit, so I couldn't hire more police officers to combat crime. I had to work directly and look at the source of the problem. I went directly to the causal factor of violence in the community. I asked members if I could sit down and speak with them. We came into a community center on a Sunday and 80-100 men and women came in and I had everyone pull up a chair and we just started talking about what we wanted for our families and how we could change our community and really create a better environment for our kids. I committed to them that if they stop the violence, that I would focus on bringing new companies and opportunities to Compton to provide them with job opportunities, which is what they said they

needed. They said that their backgrounds and just lack of opportunity for them is really what caused them to feel like they were hopeless and had to make desperate decisions to survive. Fast forwarding to that, we were able to bring a UPS fulfillment center, a Best Buy and so we created about a thousand jobs. We had a community benefits agreement that mandated 35% local hire. I worked directly with the companies to allow our gang intervention workers in that population to actually be eligible for these jobs. There were gang members that started out in our program after going through life skills, programs, leadership development, they were all mandatory requirements before gaining access to these employment opportunities. They were ready. They seized the opportunity. They are still working in construction today. Literally a few weeks ago, I took my daughter to a ranch in Compton, which one of the former gang members purchased and he still is working in construction. I knew that by creating these opportunities and really addressing the policies that prevent access, that we could really change and transform our community.

RASHIDA JONES: It's so impressive. Bill, do you have any thoughts about how important leadership is when we're talking about inequality?

BILL GATES: I think we can learn from heroes. There are school principals that are unbelievable. There are churches that are embracing all the families who belong to that community and helping them find a positive path. There are people like Aja that are tapping all the resources. Economic development, that is fantastic to be able to do that. As mayor, you have the police, you have some zoning economic development. Is education outside of your control? What are the levers that are available to you?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): The school district has a separate elected body and entity so don't control the school district.

BILL GATES: Is it a Compton school district?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Yes.

BILL GATES: You can partner with them even though they're not under your supervision?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Absolutely. One example, we worked with Dr. Dre to invest and create a performing arts center with our school district so I continue to bring resources their way toward the broader vision.

RASHIDA JONES: It's great, it's great.

BILL GATES: That's cool.

BILL GATES: He made a lot of money off of headphones.

RASHIDA JONES: That's right. We're not wearing them right now.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Shame, shame. [*laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: It must be great to have this list of very successful people who grew up in Compton that hopefully continue to give back to the community, right?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Absolutely. They do in really powerful ways.

RASHIDA JONES: What about the Compton cowboys?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Yes. I was just talking with one this morning. [*laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: Do you know about that, Bill?

BILL GATES: No.

RASHIDA JONES: It's so cool.

BILL GATES: In looking at the map I would not think there would be cowboys there.

RASHIDA JONES: No, there's cowboys.

RASHIDA JONES: Aja, tell him about the cowboys.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Yes, we have a very strong and historic cowboy population, black cowboys, Latino cowboys. There is a whole area in Compton called Richland Farms. The whole city is actually an agricultural zone historically but there is a very robust population here, and on any given day you can walk down the street and see a horse going down the train track or across the street. It's really beautiful and diverse, and they're really a strong pillar in the community. They also have a youth enrichment program that provides access and opportunities to kids.

RASHIDA JONES: What would you say to other people who are maybe in your position in terms of being creative about resources, in terms of being creative about starting programs? What

would be your advice to somebody who feels slightly at odds either with the amount of money they don't have available to them, or they feel demoralized by the state of their city or town? What would you say to them?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Number one, people have all of the power, and I've seen people create amazing change with zero resources, just a vision and ability to go out there and make things happen. When people see that you're sincere and really committed to affecting change, then they're attracted to that, and resources literally can come from every direction. I share with people that, becoming mayor, most people will assume I have a full-blown team and I have a robust budget, but I literally came in with nothing. I had one employee and then I later was able to add a secretary. I do not have a specific budget so every single thing that we've done has been through partnership and through outside investment and inside investment as well.

RASHIDA JONES: Just reflecting on your life, and your career, you're so young, there's a lot to reflect on, but you have so much to come. Do you think your life would have been different had you grown up in Compton? Was there something about coming back to Compton that you think changes your perspective?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Absolutely. I think I would be different. Obviously, your environment influences your propensity to be able to dream and to have access to different experiences and even to dictate what you believe is possible. It desensitizes certain areas of what you experience. Obviously, Compton having really had challenges with crime and violence and my own family being touched, I think that I would have had a greater sensitivity to conditions.

I think I came back with a fresh perspective and even a higher level of expectation about what our community should be. I just wasn't satisfied with the status quo and I didn't see the same hopelessness that other people have seen, and I saw problems that's true opportunities. I say all the time that from an urban planning and economic development perspective, Compton is just such fertile ground. We're directly located in the center of Los Angeles County. We're surrounded by four major freeways. We have light rail that goes directly through our city. Heavy rail. We're literally just a beacon of opportunity in so many different ways. I saw a place that just had been neglected and that needed a lot of love, vision, and investment.

RASHIDA JONES: Wow. Mayor Brown, you are a complete inspiration. Before we go, do you any have questions for me or any questions for Bill?

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): *[laughs]*

RASHIDA JONES: Come on now.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): I do. I'd like to know what do you all envision spending your time, and your efforts and energies doing to effect change, because obviously, none of us are satisfied with where we are.

RASHIDA JONES: That's a great question. Bill?

BILL GATES: Most of my time right now is to bring the pandemic to a close, both by having vaccines and better treatments, because every way you look at inequity, office worker versus manual worker, black versus white, low-income versus high-income, inner-city school versus suburban school, this has been a setback. Those who have it the toughest have paid the greatest price here, including even in the number of deaths. I hope by the end of next year, we're largely through the pandemic. I do think progressive politics will get a boost that will collect more in taxes, will use data systems to be able to track outcomes. A lot of our foundation's money will be more on the education piece because we're deep in that. We fully acknowledge that that alone isn't enough to transform a community, but it certainly is a necessary piece.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Very important cornerstone, for sure.

RASHIDA JONES: I probably have less resources to dedicate but emotionally my time and my psyche feel like this is a real sobering moment for this country, and for the world, obviously, COVID-19 has been and the lockdown, and it being a pandemic, but I'm hoping that the direction of the energy is a much-overdue, needed reckoning with the deep wound of this country and the history of black Americans in this country, and specifically, black women in this country. To change the narrative and to change the trajectory for black women in this country, I think this is the opportunity. This is the moment to finally do it in a way that is going to heal.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Yes.

RASHIDA JONES: I hope.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Yes. Beautiful, and I agree wholeheartedly, that now is the time, and we definitely need a lot of healing.

RASHIDA JONES: Thank you so much for joining us, Mayor Brown. This was incredibly informative, and we wish you the best of luck. The work you're doing is incredible. Just keep on keeping on.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Thank you all so much. It's an honor to meet you both and to speak with you. Take care.

BILL GATES: All right. Thanks, Mayor Brown.

RASHIDA JONES: Thank you so much.

MAYOR AJA BROWN (GUEST): Bye-bye.

RASHIDA JONES: This conversation was fascinating and eye-opening and provocative, as always, and I know it's a conversation that we're going to be having for years to come.

BILL GATES: Inequality troubles us all. We want to raise the average, but feel like it's a just society, and we are still far short of that.

RASHIDA JONES: Can I just ask before we go, in terms of that, I know you feel responsible, in some respects, for creating a just society, but what do you think that is in you? Why not just not participate in other people's quality of life?

BILL GATES: I've seen enough success that even problems that discourage other people, I'm willing to be optimistic about, partly bringing the tools of data to say, "Okay, some areas, like Compton, are doing better," and help explain that, and let's make Watts more like Compton. Whenever I see that kind of variance, I say, "Okay, there's hope." It's not just that Pasadena does well. Compton with its resources has this incarceration rate, which is a very tragic figure, is dramatically better in that community, and that is so beneficial.

RASHIDA JONES: I will say, my takeaway today is that big data can be used for good, and that it sounds like the work Raj is doing is the first of its kind, and if we can actually take this and give it to government and to give it to leaders and thought leaders and spiritual leaders and actual political leaders, there is a possibility for immense change.

BILL GATES: Absolutely.

RASHIDA JONES: All right, I'm optimistic today.

BILL GATES: All right.

RASHIDA JONES: I can't believe it. You did it, Bill.

BILL GATES: Oh, good.

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, Raj Chetty and Mayor Aja Brown, 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.

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