

## **#59 - The Human Truth Behind America's Migration Machine with Jason De León**

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Jason De León

(0:00) I never thought that spending seven years with smugglers would teach me a great deal about myself, about how I have grappled with trauma, how I've tried to mask it and hide it. (0:11) And, you know, working on that book forced me to deal with a lot of things that I'd been sort of running from for most of my life. (0:17) And it kind of put me on this journey of self-discovery, rediscovery, and self-improvement, which were things that if you'd asked me about this 20 years ago, I would have said, everything is fine, right?

Marcus Arredondo

(0:29) Today's guest is Professor Jason DeLeón, anthropologist, MacArthur Fellow, National Book Award winner, director of the Kotzin Institute of Archeology at UCLA, and the author of *Soldiers and Kings, Survival and Hope in the World of Human Smuggling*. (0:43) What stood out during our conversation was his honesty. (0:46) He jokes that he's a bad liar, but that openness is what enabled those he traveled with to trust him. (0:51) We talk about the humanity behind smuggling, the dangers and systems that shape both migrants and their guides, and the emotional weight of documenting trauma while balancing the responsibilities of fatherhood. (1:01) Jason's journey reminds us that empathy involves complexity, and that meaningful change requires us to acknowledge uncomfortable realities. (1:08) Let's start the show. (1:10) Jason, thank you for coming on. (1:12) Welcome. (1:13) Thank you for having me. (1:13) Excited to be here. (1:14) So I stumbled on you at a Culver City book fair. (1:18) You're on a panel, and I was taken by a lot of your words. (1:21) I had not, but have since, read *Soldiers and Kings*, which I want to talk a lot about, but I want to kick this off. (1:27) First of all, you have a long list of accolades, including a MacArthur Genius Fellow, which is the common trait. (1:34) So I want to talk a little bit about that, but you, I think, are you just coming back from New Orleans? (1:37) Did you receive an award there for something, the Anthropology Association?

Jason De León

(1:43) I did. (1:43) I just got an award from, yeah, from the American Anthropological Association.

Marcus Arredondo

(1:47) Congratulations. (1:47) So I want to just kick off that, which is, of all these awards that you're winning off of the back of the book, I would imagine that springboarded a lot of this beyond the work that you've already done. (2:00) First of all, how is it to be getting the recognition you are? (2:03) Because I sort of, having insight through reading *Soldiers and Kings*, I sort of see you as an artist cloaked in anthropologist's body, so to speak.

Jason De León

(2:13) Yeah, I mean, I think, I don't ever want to sound like a jerk, but I've grown increasingly uncomfortable with recognition. (2:24) And I think it's partly because I'm not someone who ever, nothing that I've ever done has been, I think because of that, it's a sort of this desire, there's just these things that I need to do. (2:38) And it's been really wonderful that they've gotten recognition. (2:42) But yeah, I don't know, I mean, I just had a great meeting in New Orleans, and I was given an award, I gave the keynote address. (2:49) But it's also like, I don't know, I'm like my worst critic, and I just never think that I'm even supposed to be here. (2:55) And so when I get this recognition for stuff, you know, it's always awkward. (2:59) And thank you for that label as like artists kind of playing anthropologist, or, you know, I think in a lot of ways, that probably is true. (3:10) I mean, for me, the work is inspired by music, by art, by film, by writing. (3:18) And I think I've been lucky to find anthropology to kind of pursue things that I'm interested in. (3:23) But at the same time, it allows me to bring in a lot of those other sort of influences. (3:27) But I think, you know, for me, the artist kind of component for this whole thing is just this desire to do this thing, no matter, I'd be doing this thing if no one was recognizing it. (3:38) I mean, I do it because I love it. (3:40) I never did it because I thought I was going to be very successful at doing it. (3:43) I never did it because I thought I would make money doing it. (3:45) But it was one of these things that I needed to do for me. (3:49) And, you know, prior to this, I, you know, I was a college dropout many times. (3:54) And I wanted to pursue music. (3:56) I mean, that was the thing that I really needed to do, even if I was not going to be successful. (4:02) You know, for me, the success was the actual doing of it. (4:04) And that's kind of the same with anthropology. (4:06) It's like, I love my job. (4:07) I'm committed to these issues. (4:09) It's this thing that gets me up in the morning to keep kind of doing it. (4:12) I feel very lucky to be getting recognized by these different places. (4:16) But I think all people who commit themselves fully to something, whether it's art or music or anthropology, I mean, I wish there were more awards for people to get recognized. (4:26) And so that, you know, I feel a little guilty about a lot of this stuff sometimes. (4:31) And partly also because, and I said this in the beginning of my keynote, was like, I really hope that that award and the awards that I've received, it's not so much about me as a person and the things that I've done, but really recognizing the value of the stories and the people that I've tried very, very hard to highlight. (4:47) I mean, I really think that those are the folks who should be getting this award in some way, shape or form. (4:53) And I just feel very lucky to be the kind of facilitator for the conversations around things like migration.

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Marcus Arredondo

(5:00) So there's a lot to unpack that in what you said. (5:02) I appreciate that response tremendously, because first of all, I love at the end of the book, you actually give us insight into your Spotify list that you were listening to while you're writing the book, that it was unorthodox. (5:12) Your acknowledgments are awesome. (5:13) I want to talk a little bit about your editor, because your writing is beautiful and sort of, we could push that more later to the conversation. (5:22) But in the book, the thing that I was taken by is, I don't remember any history books being this riveting. (5:28) And a lot of that is a testament to your own writing, but your writing is a reflection, I think, of how effectively you're able to tap into how well you are to listen, how good of a listener you are. (5:40) And there's a number of different directions I want to go into this, because I think, if I'm not mistaken, were you in the sun, were you an army brat, traveling quite a bit growing up? (5:50) So I couldn't help but draw maybe a parallel between identifying with some element of displacement and finding comfort in whatever surroundings you might have, because that's all you knew. (6:04) You didn't have the luxury of sort of being in one area. (6:09) But the ability you had to capture these characters in such vivid ways, and for the benefit of (6:15) the audience, which will unearth further, but you follow on trains, in towns, in gang-infested (6:24) areas, the migration trail, primarily from

Honduras all the way up to the southern border (6:29) of the U.S. (6:30) And you highlight through vignettes scattered throughout the book of a handful of characters (6:37) in different places within the hierarchy, their loved ones.(6:42) You talk about photographs, you talk about death, you talk about the illusion of death, meaning in a lot of cases you assumed because somebody fell off the face of the earth, you could not contact them, and you heard through the grapevine that they had passed away. (6:56) And then you come to find out later that they are very much alive. (6:59) I'm sort of going in a number of directions, because I'm curious where you're going to go with this.(7:03) How do you balance a couple of things, and I'll sort of narrow this down, but two things stood out. (7:09) One, you were in some really harrowing positions, and in some ways I couldn't help but feel that you probably didn't know how harrowing they were when you first got into it. (7:18) And as you got more and more indoctrinated into that culture, you started to realize how much danger there really was.(7:25) How were you so effective at discerning who to trust, and actually being able to obtain the trust of those people as effectively an interloper, number one. (7:36) I think that's a skill set that's really sort of stood out to me. (7:41) And then the second thing is, as it relates to the awards you're getting, and I really (7:46) appreciate it, especially towards the end of the book, you talk about the dichotomy (7:50) of writing these stories, but also being really connected to these people, having an empathy (7:57) for them, having a relationship with them, and the imbalance, the struggle to go from (8:06) these really dire situations to an academic life or a life of privilege, how you reconciled (8:12) that. (8:12) So those are two distinct ideas, but I was really interested in talking to you a little bit about that, because as an anthropologist, you have insight into how cultures deal with these dilemmas better than almost anyone else, except those that are in those cultures.(8:30) And it's entirely because of you and people like you that we're able to absorb that in some familiar way. (8:39) So that has to give some solace to you, and when you get these recognitions that without you, these stories are not being told.

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Jason De León

(8:47) No, thank you for that. (8:48) I really appreciate it. (8:51) That's oftentimes the thing that keeps me going, is knowing that it takes a lot to understand these things.(8:59) It takes a certain kind of person and certain kinds of commitments. (9:03) I really appreciate that, and I really value the opportunities that I've been given to do these things. (9:12) I think getting back to the beginning of the first question, I think will get us to the last part as well.(9:22) I think in the beginning, or with all of this, trust is so important. (9:30) I think that as a reader, when I read ethnographies, when I read anthropology, when I read journalism and there's other things, I'm always trying to think, I'm always trying to vet whether or not I believe the narrator. (9:43) Do I believe them?(9:44) Do I trust them as a reader? (9:46) Do the people that they are writing about seem to trust them? (9:49) Those are, for me, are all very important questions.(9:52) I think that when you read something and you're like, wow, this person really did seem to have access and it doesn't feel superficial, it feels actually quite deep. (10:01) For me, it signals just how much energy and trust and all the things that are needed that this person has put into accessing these stories. (10:10) For me, it's always been about being fully present and fully honest with every aspect of my life.(10:21) I don't really necessarily know where that comes from, but I'm an overshare. (10:27) I'm a terrible liar. (10:30) I have a hard time faking anything.(10:33) For me, with anthropology or trying to understand other people's lives, I'm there because I really want to be there. (10:43) I'm there to give as much as I possibly can to them. (10:46) I'm there to be as honest about my motivations and to really just try to understand where people are coming from.(10:53) That's just how I live my life. (10:54) If I wasn't doing anthropology, I'd be doing this with my—I thought I would always teach high school US history. (11:02) Whatever it is I would be doing, I've always found that this is who I am, is that when I talk to people, when I meet people, I'm

like, I really want to be there and I want to take in as much of them as I can to understand their perspective.(11:14) Partly through that is giving some element or as much of myself to them as well. (11:20) It's like being fully present and being completely honest all the time, which is incredibly draining. (11:28) Sometimes it really kills me, but I don't really know any other way to live.(11:32) I'm very lucky that I found anthropology because it seems that this is a place where those characteristics I think can be really, really helpful. (11:43) At the same time, it's this thing of I'm able to do the work that I do because I want to be fully present, because I want to give a lot of myself to the people that I write about. (11:52) I'm working through things with them, and then I'm taking these stories and I'm extracting this information.(11:59) I'm taking these important memories, these lives that people are sharing with me, and then I'm going and doing something else with them. (12:05) Something else is I'm trying to share those stories with the world so that people can be as affected by them as I am, but also it's this really extractive process. (12:16) For me, there is this definite imbalance between the world that I occupy when I'm an anthropologist and doing the work, and then the world I occupy as an academic, as a public speaker, as a public intellectual, whatever people want to call me, where I have to go now and play some other kind of role.(12:34) I think in that too, I also try to just be really honest. (12:38) When students ask me, they say, well, how do you do this work, or how do you go back and forth? (12:42) I say, it really sucks.(12:43) I fucking hate it. (12:44) I hate the fact that I benefit disproportionately from these experiences that people are sharing with me, and then they're not getting these accolades. (12:52) They're not getting all of the praise that I'm getting.(12:56) Part of my job then is to recognize that, is to call it out, and also just to let people know that I'm deeply uncomfortable with it. (13:03) I hope through the discomfort, it's not to say that I don't appreciate these things, but it's really just to remind people of like, oh, we're talking about him because he's talking about this other thing in a way that makes me feel connected to it. (13:17) For me, it's the way that I really have dealt with that imbalance, is then when I'm talking about these things publicly, when I'm engaging with the people who are the beneficiaries of this translation, is to remind them of what's actually at stake, and why I'm there, and to kind of tell them too, don't believe the hype.(13:39) I've never believed the hype. (13:40) My favorite thing about the MacArthur Award, people say, like colloquially, it's called the Genius Award. (13:47) I always like to tell people that my first official act as a MacArthur Genius was the morning after the award was announced, I locked myself out of my hotel room in my pajamas in the hallway, and had to go downstairs and get let back into my room.(14:01) But it's constantly like trying to navigate those two worlds in a way that I never want to lose sight of what's at stake in either one.

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Marcus Arredondo

(14:10) Let's go back to the book, because I think the MacArthur Award is what effectively afforded you this opportunity in many respects, right? (14:17) To be able to be traveling down there and to actually, you actually talk about this relationship that you have with Kingston as someone that comes to mind, where they start hitting you up for money in ways that are unfair, and they take advantage of some of that trust. (14:34) And that's a really challenging thing I can imagine being in.(14:38) I mean, I've had family and friends who don't know any better. (14:41) They're certainly not in as dire straits as many of the people that you write about. (14:46) But it casts an odd shadow over the relationship you have.(14:50) And I'm just curious, how do you, you know, between you also, you talk about, for example, when you were at the safe house, and I think just outside of Mexico City, and you go from that sort of environment to, you know, where you and your family are staying 30 minutes away in sort of an upper class residential neighborhood. (15:11) And I just can't imagine, you know, the back and forth between, I'm just sort of refreshing my memory from these little vignettes that you share. (15:19) For example, when you were in

Michigan, and you get a notice of someone who died, I don't know if that was maybe Papo that died.(15:30) So, I'm just curious, like, how do you work through that aspect of these relationships and telling those stories, and then having to do your normal familial job, you know, of being present?

Jason De León

(15:43) Well, I was already, I was three years into this project when the MacArthur Award happened. (15:48) Okay. (15:49) So, I was already, you know, I think, and really the MacArthur Award was really more about my first book, Land of Open Graves.(15:55) I think that's kind of what put me on people's radars. (15:59) By the time the award, when I got in 2017, yeah, I was already on year three of the Soldiers and Kings kind of project. (16:07) And really, I think with all those, more so with the second one, with my first book, my youngest, my oldest was born probably four years into that project.(16:19) And by the time Soldiers and Kings really got going, then I had two kids at home. (16:26) And, you know, as they got older, and as I was having to kind of go back and forth, I mean, I think I sort of went into Soldiers and Kings, you know, as you say, like a bit naive about stuff, and as things sort of unfolded to me, it became more and more clear how dangerous things were getting. (16:42) And it was all, I mean, just how dangerous things were in general, but also how dangerous things were getting as things got worse in Mexico.(16:50) And, you know, probably by year four of that project, I was really struggling then with the back and forth. (16:56) And, you know, you spend three straight days in a safe house, barely sleeping, and then you go back home and have to change diapers and do all the kind of normal sort of family things. (17:07) That got really difficult, you know, and given how old my kids are now, and what I know now, I mean, this isn't a project that I would start if I hadn't started Fresh Tomorrow.(17:16) But, you know, at the same time, you know, I think it's part of one of the unique things about anthropology is that, you know, this is sort of what we kind of signed up for. (17:28) And, you know, it helps that my wife is an anthropologist, and so she sort of understands what I'm doing, what the kind of requirements are. (17:36) But yeah, I mean, I think what you'll see is, if you look at, like, the body of work of different anthropologists, I think you can see as they age, the projects kind of evolve alongside, you know, the maturation process of those individuals.(17:52) But for me now, you know, now that my kids are, you know, nine and 12, it's really thinking about, well, what are projects that I can do that I feel really good about, that I'm excited about, that don't put me in unnecessary kind of harm's way, that allow for a better kind of, you know, homework kind of balance. (18:10) But yeah, it's really tricky. (18:13) And yeah, I mean, I don't want to say that having a family is limiting.(18:18) I think having a, for me, having a family is really just puts a lot of stuff into perspective.

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Marcus Arredondo

(18:23) Sure. (18:24) I want to explore that. (18:25) But I think just for the benefit of the audience, I'm hoping to dig in a little bit more about the human smuggling chain here.(18:31) And so I think it's become a hot button issue, I think, under this administration. (18:36) I know you've got strong feelings about sort of what's happening, which I want to provide enough room for you to sort of talk about that. (18:44) But I want to ask, you know, what you do really well here, and I hate to dumb it down to something like Breaking Bad or even Sopranos, where on paper, many of these characters can be despicable, detestable individuals, but you do an amazing job of humanizing them through their own stories and through show, not telling right of who they are, how they navigate their own families.(19:09) There's a hero's journey involved in a lot of these men, because for better or worse, they were trapped into a life that they couldn't otherwise escape. (19:19) And as they got further and further embedded, they found or

at least sought opportunities to get out of these circumstances. (19:26) And I think it's very easy for the public to headline these events as and sort of just label in black and white coloring.(19:36) And I don't think that affords the complexity that's required here. (19:41) And so I'm just going to read this phrase and I'm hoping that might kick you off to sort of help us understand what you think the public most misunderstands about this process and and how this all comes about. (19:53) But the passage I'm referring to is cracking down on human smuggling is largely impossible for the simple fact that is the beast with many heads.(20:01) Granted, there are certain individuals who sit at the top of unstable criminal hierarchies, but their positions are fleeting and they are easily replaced following arrest or death. (20:10) The same is true of the grunts who do the bulk of the dirty work involved in getting immigrants from point A to point Z. (20:18) And so I'll sort of leave that with you as a as an offering to help break down what you think most people get they mistake about this process.

Jason De León

(20:28) Yeah, I mean, I think. (20:30) If you hear that someone's writing a book about smugglers. (20:35) Like most people would just assume, OK, well, I tell me all about the bad guys, right?(20:40) Tell me all the things that I already know about this thing, but just tell them maybe in more graphic detail. (20:47) And I think. (20:49) For me, the goal really is to say, here's a book about smugglers and people should know that, one, nobody chooses to be a smuggler.(20:56) They don't wake up one morning, go, man, you know what I've always longed to be is this. (21:00) And two, it's never black and nothing in this world most of the time is black or white. (21:08) There's so much gray area.(21:10) And yet we need things to be simplified. (21:11) We need, you know, because it's, you know, and maybe this is what anthropology does really well. (21:16) We complicate.(21:18) Seemingly straightforward things, and I think not just a bit, but I think because a lot of the world is complicated and we need to kind of understand these things. (21:25) I mean, I think about. (21:27) The conversations that we've been having about gender and gender identity in the last five years in this country.(21:34) Anthropologists have been having that conversation for a very, very long time and just trying to get people up to speed to say, you know what, we live in this supposedly binary world that we've just assumed has existed for the history of our species. (21:45) But in fact, it's a it's it's a cultural construct that's very new and that the world is a very diverse place. (21:50) And we need to understand that because even if it challenges us, I mean, I think we really need to be challenged consistently because because we're oftentimes we're building off of assumptions that maybe aren't grounded in a reality or that's not what we're not well informed.(22:08) I think nobody is perfectly informed about everything. (22:10) And so there's always room for us to kind of learn things. (22:13) And for me, with the with the smugglers.(22:15) It really, you know, there's a lot of different messages kind of layered in the (22:20) book, but I think maybe for sometimes for a general audience, I just want to say, (22:25) look, I want you to understand who smugglers are, what they do, what their lives (22:29) are like, how they ended up there, all the many things that have shaped their (22:32) experiences that are oftentimes deeply connected to U.S. (22:38) political interventions, economic interventions.(22:40) And what happens if we stop if we, the American consumer, stop seeing smugglers as the bad guy and instead begin to see them as migrants, see them and how a lot of their employers see them as service providers, that these people need to get from one place to another. (22:56) And then these folks are providing that service. (22:58) And this doesn't happen in an economic or cultural vacuum because we, the consumer, the American consumer, the food that I eat on a daily basis passes through the hands of migrants.(23:09) And those migrants didn't just land here from a spaceship, right? (23:12) They were brought here oftentimes by smugglers. (23:15) And so if we think about those connections and we suddenly go, well, if the smuggler is the bad guy, I'm kind of related to this bad guy because I'm the one who is helping to fuel the system.(23:26) And I'm the one who's buying, who needs the food on the table and needs someone to pick that food. (23:31) And so these folks are, are in some ways, the food that's on my table has been, has been brought here partly through the work of smugglers that I'm paying for in different, in different

kinds of ways. (23:41) And so I think when we, when we started kind of doing that, it just gets things a lot more complicated.(23:45) And I think the goal is to not tell people how to think about the world. (23:50) And I think this is the problem with writing stories about migration, about borders, and I tell people this all the time. (23:55) I said, we don't need more stories about the border.(23:57) We don't need more stories about migration. (23:59) We've got a million of those and it's all the same tropes. (24:02) It's all the same narrative over and over again.(24:04) And I think what we need is more stories about people who happen to be migrants, who happen to be smugglers, who happen to be crossing borders, who happen to be connected to these things in different ways, but who we can understand as being representative of, of much larger kinds of issues. (24:20) Because I think if you understand the whole system and how it works and its complexities, then you go, well, wait, if that's really what's going on, why would a border wall solve, you know, how was a border wall going to solve climate change, right? (24:32) How was a border wall going to solve labor shortages in labor markets that most Americans don't even want to, you know, don't even want to think about much less participate in.(24:40) And so that's sort of how I think about my job is to, is to give people some food for thought so that they can take a step back and then decide how they want to feel. (24:48) But, you know, rather than, I mean, there's a lot of stuff out there that just tells you, you know, smugglers, bad migrants, good, you know, or whatever, what you like, you can seek out those things and get, and get a very simple narrative. (24:57) And, you know, I really just want people to, to engage with the world in a, in a more realistic way where they can then walk away and feel like they're, they're in a conversation with me and that they can figure out how they want to move forward with, with what new information they've just maybe taken on.

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Marcus Arredondo

(25:11) Tell me more about how many of these smugglers get involved.

Jason De León

(25:16) Yeah. (25:16) You know, I didn't, in the beginning, I had really no idea how people got involved in smuggling. (25:21) I mean, I, I just thought, I don't know, you're a dirtbag.(25:24) And then you just kind of do dirtbag kinds of things. (25:28) And, you know, so many of the guys that I worked with came from, I mean, everyone that I worked with came from poverty, like immense poverty, no education, you know, they were struggling to put food on the table. (25:39) They were little kids, you know, there was no food on the table.(25:41) So they had to leave. (25:43) All of them were failed migrants, you know, so people who didn't have a safety net in some other place to receive them. (25:48) They didn't have skills to enter a kind of normal workforce.(25:53) They had been raised on the streets. (25:54) They had been raised around a lot of violence. (25:56) They had, they were really struggling with a lot of trauma and, you know, they fall in with, you know, these criminal organizations that value certain things.(26:04) Right. (26:05) Being, I mean, a lot of, I think a lot of these guys are also incredibly street smart, business smart. (26:10) They're savvy in any other industry.(26:12) They would probably also be quite successful except that just happens. (26:15) They don't have the social capital to be in those, in those places. (26:18) So they're just now doing it on the streets.(26:20) And, you know, if you raised on the streets and then suddenly someone comes to you and says, Hey, I'll pay you some money if you help me survive on the streets to get where I need to go. (26:29) Then suddenly people go, well, wait, all of the fucked up baggage I've been carrying with me now suddenly is an, is an economic asset, is a resource. (26:37) And so those guys end up falling in with these different, these different criminal organizations so that they can do this stuff and, you know, and they do it, they do it quite well, unfortunately they live very short, often very short

lives and, you know, they don't make a lot of money.(26:50) It seems like they make a lot of money, but, you know, they're living oftentimes quite worse, worse off than the people that they're, that they're trying to help. (26:57) But yeah, it's a pretty miserable industry that just grinds up young people and, and, and spits them out. (27:04) And, you know, these guys try to get into it because the money comes much quicker for them doing this than in any other, any other industry that they might even remotely attempt to access.(27:13) I mean, someone like Kingston, who I write about, you know, he said to me at one point, you know, he was like an orphan by nine, he was living on the streets. (27:21) He was in gangs. (27:22) He was selling drugs.(27:23) He was doing all kinds of violent stuff. (27:25) He gets kidnapped by the military, gets forced to join the Honduran military. (27:28) He joins a gang.(27:29) He ends up selling drugs, being in, going to prison. (27:32) All these things happen to him. (27:34) And then he says to me at one point, well, what did you think I was going to become?(27:38) Right. (27:39) You know, this is, this is my experience. (27:40) And, you know, and I try, I mean, in the book, you know, and this is where the kind of money thing comes in where I'm like, I feel so guilty at one point.(27:47) I'm like, dude, I can, maybe I can help you get out of this. (27:50) And he's, you know, he says, I want to go straight. (27:52) I want to like, I'm going to start a business, but you know, he's pretty antisocial and just struggles to be a normal, like, you know, to be someone on the street who's not, you know, going to immediately have a switch flipped and then, and things are going to get crazy.(28:06) But yeah, a lot of those guys really, I mean, not all of them, but there were some that you could see that they were never going to be able to get out of it. (28:11) And there are others who, you know, I think we're searching for something else and hoping that, that being involved in smuggling would at least pay enough money to get them to where they want it to go and then they could try to walk away from it. (28:22) But it's a tough thing.

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Marcus Arredondo

(28:24) Yeah. (28:24) I mean, so a couple of things that stood out to me, first of all, I'm glad that you brought that up because I couldn't help but find most of these men who you're highlighting in this book, because they tend to be the smugglers are actually really enterprising. (28:36) If they, they are entrepreneurs in many, in many respects and you, and you make it pretty clear that this is a result of sort of capitalism gone wrong in a lot of respects in, in Central America primarily.(28:51) But as a result of many things that North America is doing and what ends up happening is that these families get extorted just like any mafia sort of related film you've seen where you got to pay a VIG, which is oftentimes like 40% of your income when they can barely, their maximum income that they're making doesn't put a roof over their head. (29:11) So to give up 40% of what you're making is sort of, it's ridiculous. (29:15) It's, it's unfounded.(29:16) And so there's no other alternative other than to either flee or get indoctrinated into that system. (29:23) And you even gave a statistic that I think in Honduras, 60% of the population is at a poverty level. (29:30) And maybe there was expectations post COVID that it could potentially get up to 75%.(29:35) And when it's that high, I mean, the thing that was really staggering to me was just that there was, it's not, you know, I think it's hard for Americans to understand like, yeah, you know, there's not much hope for them, but they're not really working hard. (29:48) It's like, no, every door is closed to them other than this world, which it seemed abundantly clear that most of these kids end up in this world where they're trying to just get out, survive so that their family doesn't get killed based on this threat that, you know, the gangs end up having on them. (30:07) They end up going down this road where they see things they can't unsee, and it starts to change their psyche and how they view the world.(30:15) And it's, it becomes an increasingly difficult battle from my perspective. (30:19) It seemed like where they, they carry this threat of wanting to get out of the world that they're in. (30:27) But the further in they go, the harder it gets to do that.(30:31) And then they acquire criminal records and it becomes, they can't even survive in

Mexico. (30:37) And I'm just curious. (30:38) So you've talked about this and elsewhere as well, but this seems like a, in a lot of ways, the by-product.(30:44) You, you witnessed a significant change during the time you were riding this. (30:48) It seemed like in the safety of that migration trail, it meaning that when you finished it, it seemed significantly more dangerous than it was. (30:56) When you first started.(30:57) And I know that you've written about the PTD, the prevention through deterrence that the U S had put out in the mid nineties, how has the U S policy influenced the safety of that migration?

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Jason De León

(31:13) You know, I think that for decades, the U S we have lived in this, this some really kind of hypocritical kind of place around migrants. (31:27) I mean, and you know, my, my first book, land of open graves is really (31:30) about migrants who die along the U S Mexico border and the way in which (31:33) the, the federal government was weaponizing the desert was trying to (31:37) find all of these kind of create all these like sort of natural or, or (31:40) utilize nature as a weapon against migrants to kill, to stop them through, (31:44) through death and, and part of this was about, you know, this, we're going (31:49) to be really tough on borders. (31:50) There's always this conflation of, of terrorism with migration, which it's completely a complete fabrication, but we've been doing this thing where we say, we really hate migrants.(32:01) We'll kill them at the border if we can buy through dehydration, through exhaustion, through all this stuff. (32:06) And, but if you can get here, then we're going to turn a blind eye and let you do all the things that we don't want to do as American workers. (32:16) Right?(32:16) So we ignore you. (32:17) And right now, what we're seeing happening in this country is, is with the, with the mass deportations, people are starting to feel it in their pocketbook, we will feel us in our pocketbooks probably going for the next 10 to 15, 20 years. (32:29) And it's also totally unsustainable.(32:31) I mean, this like blitzkrieg that we're on right now of terrorizing undocumented folks is going to have a lot. (32:38) I mean, one, it's it, I mean, I, I, I have issues with it on a variety of both a personal and an intellectual. (32:44) There's a bunch of different reasons, but I think at the same time to people (32:51) who haven't, who have never cared about immigration, starting to feel it in (32:56) their pocketbooks and then kind of realizing like, oh, wait, the reason (33:00) that food costs, what it costs in this country is because of undocumented (33:03) labor, the reason that, I mean, like when people talk about the halts in (33:07) construction, they talk about these halts in a lot of other industries (33:10) and going, well, what's going on?(33:11) Well, we're terrorizing the workers who do all those things. (33:14) And, um, yeah, I mean, so it's, uh, but at the same time, like we only notice them when they, when our lives become disrupted, because most of the time we don't care about them when they die at the U S Mexico border, because we never see that no one's, you know, we're not paying attention. (33:29) It's happening in the middle of nowhere.(33:30) And then once they get here, you know, I'm not sitting down to a meal and going, well, I wonder who got paid to pick these tomatoes and who got paid to pick this. (33:38) Like, what did they, what did they get paid? (33:39) You know, all of those things.(33:40) I mean, if, if we had an app, right. (33:43) That if I, every time I sat down to eat, I had to scan my food to get a sense of where that food came from or the clothes that I'm wearing came from. (33:50) Um, you know, I think that would potentially change a lot of people's perspectives on like, well, wait, how are we killing them in one place, ignoring them in another, and then still directly benefiting from them, you know, um, on a daily basis.(34:03) Um, but the federal, but the U S government, I mean, you know, my land of open graves is really about what we were doing at the U S Mexico border. (34:09) I think that soldiers and Kings is really about these binational or, or these international attempts to slow migration to the United States by, by conscripting Mexico and other places to kind of stop that labor. (34:20) But you know, people, people don't want to migrate Hondurans.(34:25) Don't, I mean, nobody, nobody wants the American dream in the way in which Americans kind of imagine,

like they're going to come here and steal my jobs. (34:32) And they're going to become an American. (34:33) People don't want to do that.(34:34) They want to come here. (34:35) They want to earn money and be able to put food on the table back in Honduras. (34:38) And then they want to be able to go home.(34:40) And I think that, um, you know, if we really understood that, that like they're leaving because home is not sustainable, whether it's because of the drug, you can think about the drug wars in Mexico and people go, well, that's Mexico's problem and then go, well, who is supplying the weapons and who is buying all the drugs, right? (34:57) We are buying all the drugs and we, the American people are supplying the weapons. (35:01) You know, it's a, but we're, we have this like certain kind of vision of it.(35:05) You know, I think about climate change in Honduras. (35:07) Honduras is not driving climate change. (35:09) The U S is, and yet it's really impacting these other places, forcing them to leave those, those countries.(35:14) And, you know, I'm a big fan of investing in these, in these other countries, because I think it would one help people to kind of stay where they really want to stay. (35:23) I think it would be better for the global economy in general, be better for a whole range of things. (35:27) But, um, you know, we, the American people and American corporations, we'd love cheap, expendable labor.(35:33) And so the undocumented labor force is something that we've long been invested in because it just keeps the machinery going. (35:39) And whenever someone says, well, you know, Mexico is stealing our jobs, you know, Mexico's not stealing our jobs. (35:45) We're now just sending those jobs to Mexico because it's, it makes more money for American, for American, um, you know, uh, uh, business owners.(35:52) But it's this whole thing. (35:54) It's like, we love you. (35:55) We hate you.(35:56) And we ignore you. (35:56) It's all happening simultaneously, which I think for me, um, is one of the really kind of saddest things about this, about this whole thing is that we just, we need to, we need to see that and understand that. (36:05) Because I think when you start to look, think about it as those three perspectives and the simplistic narrative starts to become, um, I think, uh, a bit undermined in a lot of ways, at least that's what I would hope.

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Marcus Arredondo

(36:17) Yeah. (36:17) Cause you know, there's something, the beauty of your book is also the same thing that is incredibly dissatisfying is you allude in the epilogue about somebody asking you at a, at his keynote saying, you know, when I, well now what is the solution? (36:29) What do we do with this information?(36:31) And, you know, I support your stance being that, you know, that's not really my place. (36:36) You know, I don't know if there's a solution or what it is, but I kept (36:39) thinking, are you, and you know, in order to create policy that is both (36:44) effective and incorporates the livelihoods of those who are impacted (36:49) the most, it seems to me that people like you would have to have a seat (36:54) at the table to have, uh, an insertion of your perspective and what you've (37:00) witnessed, especially, and this might be a good opportunity for you to talk (37:02) about the undocumented migration project, because you've witnessed (37:05) firsthand, not only traveling the migration trail, but also witnessing (37:10) the aftermath and what has, uh, you know, what's left behind and the (37:14) devastation that families have to endure as a result of that. (37:18) And to dispel the, to disabuse the notion that, you know, people are, are fleeing to come steal American jobs and, and live this American dream.(37:28) They're not trying to live a dream. (37:29) They're, they're trying to escape a nightmare.

Jason De León

(37:31) Yeah. (37:31) I mean, and the American dream sucks for people. (37:36) I mean, I mean, you know, one of my favorite, um, I mean, not favorite, but one of those kind of, when I think about, you know,

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what, what does the American dream like?(37:44) In my first book, I interviewed this guy, um, who he goes through a million kind of struggles to get to, to New York from Ecuador. (37:54) I mean, just a brutal, brutal experience. (37:57) And he says, you know, when I finally get to Queens and my uncle says, okay, we're going to, I'll take you back to the apartment because we go to this one bedroom basement apartment.(38:07) There's like 14 guys living down there and it's awful. (38:11) And now suddenly I'm working 16 hour days. (38:13) I'm exhausted.(38:14) I'm like alienated. (38:15) I have no, um, I have no family here, all these kinds of things. (38:20) And he says, he goes, I didn't think what it was going to be like.(38:24) I thought I was coming here for the American dream. (38:25) And then he said something like, but when people are here, they don't post pictures on Facebook about how horrible their living conditions are or how terrible the job is or how afraid they are to walk to and from work because you're just seeing pictures of them in front of the empire state building. (38:39) And in front of the statue of Liberty, you're getting like that, that this misleading kind of thing.(38:44) And then the reality are just, are just way, way, way more, um, more, more, more troubling. (38:49) And so I think like people now understand that the American dream it's, it's not all as cracked up to be. (38:56) And it's, it's not a dream anymore.(38:57) I mean, I think the reality is they recognize what they're giving up to come here. (39:02) And I think people have to have to recognize too, that like they're giving so much, how bad must it be that they're willing to give up so many things so that they can make things better for folks back home or, or, or for themselves. (39:15) I mean, so there's, it's a huge amount of sacrifice, um, which we as, as a culture have tended to kind of whitewash because you'll see people say, well, why don't you come here?(39:23) You know, my ancestors came here legally or, you know, we have these, like these, um, kind of fairy tale revisionist histories of what, what it was like to migrate if you were Italian in the twenties or thirties or Irish or Chinese. (39:34) Right. (39:35) And, um, and it was brutal then too, but a hundred years later, we're able to, to really put a spin on it so that we can differentiate ourselves from, from these other folks.(39:43) And you're seeing it happening a lot with Mexican Americans right now and, and trying to distance themselves from people from Central America and elsewhere. (39:50) And, um, I think we need to just remind people of, of, of, of these histories, but also, you know, in terms of the policy stuff, I think that people get frustrated with me. (40:01) I know that like my editors, um, at different points for both of my books were like, what about the policy recommendations?(40:08) And I just said, I'm not your guy. (40:10) Yeah. (40:10) I don't have it because, because a recommendation, the policy recommendations that people want are relatively simplistic.(40:18) They're black and white, right? (40:19) Here's a fix. (40:20) Here's a, here's a fix.(40:22) And like, well, you know, as an anthropologist, I'll tell you if there's 2 million problems. (40:26) And so where do you, you, you have to fix them all at once, you know, or stagger them, but there's a lot happening all at the same time. (40:32) And so, um, I, and I think even if, um, I think I frustrate policymakers because I come with like my, you know, my own set of expectations that are unrealistic for the world or for that, for the policy world.(40:45) Um, and so it, for me, it's more like I want to give you information and then the people who are much better at trying to extract something that's usable can pull from that and then try to craft something that's going to be a little bit more kind of user-friendly, a little bit more nuanced. (41:01) It's never going to be as nuanced as I want it to be. (41:03) And I recognize that, which is why I'm not a politician, which is why I'm not a policymaker.(41:08) Like I will eternally be frustrated with no matter with any policy that's put forward, because I just know that there's a lot more to that, but rather than pretending that I can be in there, it's like, look, I'm giving you this stuff, try to use it if you can. (41:20) And, um, um, but it's a, you know, it's, it's a, it's a real struggle because the world is super complicated. (41:27) And it, I think that's what, why we, that's why we want the simplistic answers because it makes our head spin when we start to think about, you know, like, like, like if we looked at a plate of food and every time we did that and we saw all these things, we would stop eating, right?(41:40) Our head would just, would spin off because there's just like, oh my God, like, yeah,

all these different layers to this thing that I thought could be solved with, you know, with a border wall or deportation or whatever, you know, everything becomes undermined once you start to kind of look behind the curtain and see what's actually happening.

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Marcus Arredondo

(41:57) Talk to me a little bit about the undocumented migration project.

Jason De León

(42:01) So the undocumented migration project, the UMP is, um, it's kind of a catch all for everything that I've been doing since about 2008. (42:11) And so it's a, it's a research lab. (42:14) So it involves all of my students, undergrad and graduate students, some high school students who occasionally get involved, um, a lot of my collaborators who are at different universities.(42:21) And so we're actively doing a lot of research projects in Arizona, in Mexico, now increasingly in Europe. (42:28) Um, we do research, we do a lot of teaching, a lot of public outreach, community outreach, um, we do a lot of exhibition work, documentary work. (42:38) We're a nonprofit that does a lot of educational outreach.(42:41) We're increasingly trying to work with young people in, in migrant sending communities. (42:46) But it's kind of like the, it's like the, the, um, I don't know, the like headquarters for all the different things that we have kind of going on all at once. (42:55) And so like some days I'm like professor doing professorly kinds of things.(43:01) Other times I'm a curator, I'm a photographer, you know, I'm always trying to do a whole bunch of different things at once. (43:08) Um, partly because I get bored so easily, but also because I do think that it's important to try to connect with people in different ways. (43:14) And I think, you know, this is probably where my art just to kind of slant comes in is, is I want to find as many different ways to engage with people, whether that's through art, through music, through photography, through film, through writing.(43:25) Um, and so the UMP kind of allows me to do a lot of those things.

Marcus Arredondo

(43:29) Let's switch gears a little bit, because I would be remiss if I didn't talk at (43:32) least a little bit about how, uh, or at least ask how, what you've endured, what (43:37) you've witnessed has shaped you as a father and as an artist, where do you (43:41) see, uh, some of what you've experienced coming through and also, and as an (43:47) educator, I mean, I'll tell you, as I read the book, I really wish I could (43:51) have been taught by somebody like you because it's, uh, it, it, it brings (43:55) these, um, issues to life in a way that's dissimilar to how I learned history. (44:01) For example, it's not just dry words on the paper. (44:07) Actual people in context in quotations.

Jason De León

(44:11) Yeah, thank you. (44:12) I mean, that's, that's the goal is, you know, I think I took a lot of terrible classes as a student that turned me off to so many things and, you know, I always have wanted people to be as excited, as mad, as sad, or as moved as I have been by the world that I have gone out and been able to experience. (44:32) And so the goal for me is like, how do I transit those emotions into these other things so that people can kind of get close to it and engage with it?(44:40) Um, and I think that's kind of what the UMP really just tries to do in general is we want people to, to feel welcome into the conversation, sometimes want them to feel like they're collaborators or like they're just, or that they can just be there, I

can bring you as close as I can to this thing and not in a way that's making you feel guilty, not in a way that's like speaking down to you. (45:00) I just want you to see kind of, this is what I, this is what I saw. (45:02) And I'm, and I'm, I'm just trying to share this kind of story.(45:04) And hopefully, you know, people will be able to, to take something, something kind of, kind of from that. (45:11) And yeah, so that's, that's sort of the, the, the, the kind of long-term goal.

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Marcus Arredondo

(45:16) Um, but you had another question before that I just lost my train of thought about how has it come through in you as an artist and a father?

Jason De León

(45:22) Yeah. (45:22) And I think this whole, this whole thing has changed. (45:27) I mean, anthropology has changed me in so many different ways.(45:31) And I feel like, you know, becoming a father was really helpful to me in that I suddenly had a lot more responsibilities and, you know, I was a real fuck up for a long time, even when I was, you know, I did this keynote this week, last week in New Orleans. (45:51) And part of it was just about my own kind of journey, my own struggles (45:54) with, with depression, my struggles with, um, dealing with, with, with (45:59) childhood trauma that has deeply impacted me at my core, which I have (46:04) at oftentimes really tried to mask through self-medicating through, through (46:08) sort of risky, self-destructive kind of behavior, all of the work, I think, (46:13) as I've done it, as I've tried to be fully present for folks, as I've (46:16) tried to understand them, one of the things that's been really valuable (46:19) to me is that I think when you're fully present with other people and (46:23) trying to understand their stories, one of the things that they'll do, or (46:26) at least that I've found is that they will give me these gifts of (46:31) connecting back with me and really, you know, like I never thought that (46:35) spending seven years with smugglers would teach me a great deal about (46:39) myself, about how I have grappled with trauma, how I've tried to mask it and (46:43) hide it and, you know, working on that book forced me to deal with a lot of (46:49) things that I'd been sort of running from for most of my life. (46:51) And it kind of put me on this journey of, you know, sort of self-discovery, rediscovery and self-improvement, which were things that if you'd asked me about this 20 years ago, I would have said, everything is fine, right? (47:05) I'm a, I'm a Gen X male.(47:07) So everything is totally fine until it's not right. (47:10) It's like, I got, I run on kind of two, two speeds, like super common and super not. (47:16) And so with those guys seeing it in them and then having this recognition of kinship between us really forced me to kind of think about stuff in different ways.(47:26) And I feel like, you know, I've been a lot more open in the last couple of years talking about being a survivor of childhood, sexual abuse of being a, you know, someone who has struggled with, with self-destructive kind of behaviors. (47:40) And I talk about this stuff now, and it's funny, I've had, I had someone say recently, like, like, I'm really worried about you. (47:46) And I said, well, why is that?(47:48) It's like, well, cause you're talking about all this stuff. (47:50) And I said, well, no, that's actually a sign that I'm doing really well because I am talking about all of this stuff. (47:56) It's not manifesting itself in these other ways.(47:58) And I really attribute a great deal of that to, to working with these, with these men who share their stories with me and who helped me to kind of see what was happening for myself. (48:11) And I'm deeply grateful to them. (48:14) I will be forever.(48:15) And and that's kind of what I love about the work about what I do is that I'm not going into this thing just going, well, here I am the, the storyteller who's going to come give me all your information and I'm going to go, you know, and I will tell the people about, about what's going on. (48:29) No, it's more, I come in and go, I don't know what's happening here. (48:33) I'm really curious.(48:34) I really

want to be here and I'm hoping to be surprised. (48:37) I'm hoping to be changed, to be moved. (48:40) And through that, I hope that there will be some, some new growth and, you know, I'm a lifelong learner and I really hope that I'm also a lifelong kind of a person on a lifelong journey to, to become a better, a better person.(48:54) And, you know, we have this, you know, I remember when I was a kid and people would say like, well, he's just kind of stuck in his ways or that's just how he is. (49:01) And I kind of grew up thinking like, oh, well, it's totally fine for men to kind of be like that. (49:06) And then women just have to sit around and just kind of deal with it.(49:08) And and I'm, I'm grateful now to go. (49:12) I never want to be like that. (49:13) I never want to just go have someone to make excuses for me.(49:16) I really want to be able to try to learn and to become a better person. (49:19) And I have found that through the work and being a dad, I'm trying to become a better, all these things. (49:24) It's, it's, there's, is this reciprocity that happens with the work that, that I really love.(49:28) And it's kind of what, what keeps me doing it.

Marcus Arredondo

(49:31) That's such a beautiful response for what it's worth. (49:33) That, that reflection I witnessed as a reader, I felt the same way reading a lot of these about these men and even sort of the contradictions within the same sentence that they had. (49:43) You know, I could relate to certainly now, but definitely when I was in my early twenties and navigating my own forms of trauma, a couple of questions, cause I know that we're coming up on time.(49:55) What was your writing process like for this when you're, when you're doing this work, because you do in long days you're drinking beers, you're traveling, you're taking photos. (50:07) How do you, you, you going home and writing all this, are you recording everything, going back to the tapes and sort of listening to it or the digitized recordings? (50:16) Are you constantly taking notes?(50:17) That would seem like it would take you out of listening and maybe throw some people off. (50:21) What, what does that process look like for you?

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Jason De León

(50:24) I'm a terrible note taker. (50:26) I don't take notes. (50:28) You know, I have some colleagues who say that we do a, I do 12 hours of work and then I go home and I write for three hours.(50:32) I'm like, I go home and I go to bed. (50:33) Yeah. (50:34) You know I, you know, I record almost all the interviews that I do.(50:38) And so I've got hours and hours of, of recorded audio. (50:41) I take a lot of photos. (50:43) The photos are kind of visual notes for things.(50:45) But you know, for me, the, the, the writing process was, it was, it was more like I did the field work. (50:51) You know, it was about seven years of field work off and on COVID was sort of in the middle. (50:56) It was about five years of, is that right?(50:59) No, probably about, yeah, yeah. (51:00) Almost five years of field work, COVID and then another year of, of back and forth. (51:05) Um, but during the time, during the seven years of, of the field work that I was doing, I actually wrote very little.(51:12) There's only a few pieces that I wrote that were kind of related to the smuggling stuff during that time. (51:17) And it was partly because I really needed to kind of sit on it. (51:22) I needed to reflect a bit.(51:24) I mean, there was heavy subject matter. (51:26) People were dying. (51:27) People had died.(51:28) People were disappearing and I didn't want to dive into it too quickly. (51:33) And so it was pretty much like I did the field work for, for, for five or six years. (51:37) And then I started writing and then I just wrote for a year and a half, two years straight.(51:41) And then during the course of that, I went back a couple of times to do, to do some follow-up interviews, but I really kind of wrote everything at the very end. (51:48) Um, and that was, that's kind of my approach to a lot of this stuff is I need, I just need time to think on it and to be able to kind of, um, to sit with it, to revisit it. (51:56) You know, I was definitely smarter and thinking about things differently year one that I was year seven.(52:04)

And, um, I think I kind of knew that was going to happen. (52:06) And so I wanted to wait as long as I could so that I didn't want to rush into anything. (52:10) And I wanted to have as much time to kind of ruminate and mature before I started writing about this stuff.

Marcus Arredondo

(52:16) I'll ask, um, one second to last question, which would be, um, if your children decided to drop out as, uh, it's ironic that you're now an academic having dropped out, what would you say? (52:28) How would you approach that?

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Jason De León

(52:30) You know, I think that you have to pursue the thing that, that moves you. (52:38) The thing, I mean, like it's, and I'm very grateful. (52:41) You know, I was like the first person in my family really to go to college and to finish college and to graduate, to go to graduate school as a first person to do that.(52:49) And my mom who, you know, never was able to finish her degree, got very close, but was, you know, as an adult student was taking night classes and doing all this kind of stuff. (52:57) Um, she never put the burden on me, the kind of like immigrant parent burden of you have to be successful. (53:03) You have to be a doctor.(53:05) You have to be a lawyer. (53:06) You have to make a lot of money. (53:07) That was never, ever anything that, that, that was even remotely approached.(53:11) What she would say to me was, you should find a thing that you're really passionate about. (53:16) You should find a thing that makes you really happy and you should do that thing regardless of what other people think. (53:21) And you don't, cause you don't ever want to have a regret about not pursuing something because you just didn't think you could do it.(53:28) You know, even if you fail, at least you gave it a shot. (53:32) And so when I kept dropping out of school to play music, she never said you need to go back to school. (53:36) She never said, you know, she'd said, you got to get a job cause you're living in my house rent free.(53:40) But she never said you need to go back to school. (53:42) She was like, you should just do what, what makes you happy. (53:44) And, and that was probably the greatest gift she could have ever given me because I went out, I pursued music.(53:51) It was a beautiful disaster. (53:52) I failed and you know, and, but I also succeeded. (53:55) And I think those experiences shaped who I became later as an anthropologist.(54:00) They shaped my perspective on the world. (54:03) And, um, and I love it. (54:05) I mean, the failure that was my like early college career and my music career was probably one of the most important things that's ever happened to me.(54:12) And so, you know, my, I tell my kids now, you know, cause I have a middle schooler and they're already starting to have the conversations about, well, you need to do these activities in the summer for this, and you need to start building up your resume so that you can go to graduate, you know, you can go to college. (54:27) And I just said, look, don't listen to the hype of any of that stuff. (54:31) Obviously you need to do extracurricular kinds of things.(54:33) So, you know, but you should do the things that you're really excited about. (54:37) And I believe that if you just, if you pursue the things that bring you joy, then you're never going to fail. (54:43) Um, you know, and I've, you know, I know, you know, I have friends who, who have chased certain types of careers and I think have been really successful.(54:53) But then also kind of regret that they didn't go do these other things or now they're trying to play catch up and say, well, I've now that I'm here, I want to go back now to these things. (55:01) And so, um, I don't think it's ever too late to pursue those things, but, um, I wish someone earlier on had said, what is, what is it that you're the most passionate about and go and pursue those things? (55:10) I mean, I did a little bit with the music stuff, but within anthropology, it took me almost 10 years to find the subject matter that I, that's, that started to really

move me.(55:17) But you know, that's what I would tell my kids is like, I, you can, you can drop out and you can take time off, whatever it is, but, but you have to be doing something that is exciting and that is fulfilling.

Marcus Arredondo

(55:28) That's sage advice. (55:29) Any closing thoughts or things you think we might've missed?

Jason De León

(55:33) Um, I just saw people, you know, right now is a time where, you know, we are seeing immigration up close and personal and obviously it's very disturbing for, for many, many people and for many, many communities. (55:46) But I think people also need to know that this has been happening for a long time in a variety of different ways. (55:51) And I think understanding the history of immigration in this country and understanding the bigger picture right now is going to be really helpful moving forward when we start to have these, these, these political conversations about what is coming next and what, what is America going to look like in 10 years, in five years, in two years?(56:07) Um, I think getting educated about all of this stuff beyond the normal kind of media cycle, it's going to be really helpful so that, um, people can better be involved in, in the conversations about what's, you know, what, what the realities are, you know, on the streets of Los Angeles, in Honduras, in Mexico and, and elsewhere.

Marcus Arredondo

(56:24) Thank you. (56:25) Thank you for sharing your story. (56:26) Thank you for, um, sharing the stories you are sharing.(56:29) Uh, I will continue to follow you. (56:30) I, I, I don't want to say I look forward to your work because there's so much realness in it, but, uh, I will continue to track it because I think there were, I wish there were more teachers like you out there. (56:40) So keep doing what you're doing.(56:41) Thank you. (56:42) Oh, thank you so much. (56:43) I really appreciate it.(56:47) Thanks for listening for a detailed list of episodes and show notes, visit scales of success, podcast.com. (56:52) If you found this conversation engaging, consider signing up for our newsletter, where we go even deeper on a weekly basis, sharing exclusive insights and actionable strategies that can help you in your own journey. (57:02) We'd also appreciate if you subscribed, rated or shared today's episode, it helps us to attract more illuminating guests, adding to the list of enlightening conversations we've had with New York times, bestsellers, producers, founders, CEOs, congressmen, and other independent thinkers who are challenging the status quo.(57:18) You can also follow us for updates, extra content, and more insights from our guests. (57:23) We hope to have you back again next week for another episode of scales of success scales of success is an edge West capital production.

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