

LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.
JACQUI LEWIS

Kaliswa Brewster

Jackie Lewis: Hey everybody. This is Jackie Lewis, and this is a special miniseries of love period in which we're focusing on black history month. Of course, you and I know that black history is American history, but my guests are going to bring special perspectives about what it means to be black in America in these days. And I hope you enjoy these conversations. Hi Kaliswa.

Kaliswa: Hi Jackie.

Jackie Lewis: Oh, wait a minute. Did you pitch your voice down? Is that what happened?

Kaliswa: I did. I moved to my recording voice, a little sultry.

Jackie Lewis: I like it.

Kaliswa: All right. Meet me here.

Jackie Lewis: How are you doing?

Kaliswa: I mean, my default answer is great, but it's not... I mean, I don't have any tragedies going on, but I just woke up a little bit... Actually, I think I woke up fine and then had some day to day bumps that made me feel like mmm. So, I'm a little mm right now, but I'm happy to see you.

Jackie Lewis: I'm happy to see you too. People can't see us. Thank God. Because I look tired today. Do you know why?

Kaliswa: Why?

Jackie Lewis: Because I'm tired.

Kaliswa: Well, there you go. A plus B equals C.

Jackie Lewis: I'm so tired today. I'm so tired. Are you tired of the way the world just is full of funky, political, clashy, angry, not enough love, Kaliswa.

Kaliswa: Not at all.

Jackie Lewis: Not enough love.

Kaliswa: Actually, last night... Off topic from what we're talking about. Yesterday, I should say, I got a notification while I was recording something that there was a shooting in Washington state where I'm from.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: And I was like, "Oh." Every time you see that you're like, "Oh, my God. Where?" So, I go and I look it up and it was Richland, Washington where my immediate family isn't, but I was born there and I have some family there.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: And I texted some family and turns out my cousin was in the Fred Meyer where there was a shooting and she had to hide in a locker for hours.

Jackie Lewis: Are you kidding me?

Kaliswa: No. And she's fine. But I was like, "This is insane that this is the world..." I always knew that it was just a matter of time before the way that things are going, the way we don't have a lock on gun control. It was a matter of time before I was one degree from or someone in my circle. But it's wild that it happened. Now, she survived. I don't know psychologically and emotionally where she is, but she's unscathed and one person was killed and a police officer was hurt.

Kaliswa: But I do not understand a world in which I found out she was fine. And then, I just am like, "Okay." And then, I go about my day as if a shooting didn't happen to someone who was just in a grocery store. But that, to me, encapsulates where we are. When you say, "Are you tired?" Yes. But I feel like I'm so tired that I don't even process all of the things that are happening because if we processed it all, we would fall apart. It's not normal to have this much chaos and pain all around us.

Jackie Lewis: That's exactly how I feel, sweetie. Before we got together for this conversation. And I have permission, dear listener, to call Kaliswa sweetie, because she's my little sister, I'm her pastor.

Kaliswa: Yes.

Jackie Lewis: I roll that way with her. So, that sweetie is not sexist or anything, okay?

Kaliswa: No, it's a consensual sweetie.

Jackie Lewis: It's a consensual sweetie.

Kaliswa: Yes.

Jackie Lewis: When I scurrying to get to this call with you, this conversation with you, my brain was so hurting. I'm not tracking things today. I looked at my clock, at one point I was like, "Okay, yeah. I'm going to eat this sandwich and..." And then, suddenly it was five minutes into the time I was supposed to be with you. And that time just went into, Kaliswa, a flurry of emails in response to a flurry of emails, in response to a flurry of tweets, in response to a flurry of posts of just personal inconvenience and collective trauma. I had so many conversations today in which everyone is saying, "I'm not okay." So, maybe we're supposed to set a little table today for non okay-ness.

Kaliswa: I mean, I would really appreciate that as opposed to what we all often do, which is dust yourself off, get up and charge.

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: At a certain point that... What's the word? That's a bit delusional, I think.

Jackie Lewis: It is.

Kaliswa: It's how we wired.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: And I know you're very wired that way, and I am. But collectively as a culture, even people who wouldn't consider themselves, we are part of capitalism. That's part of America. It's part of now this global world, but it's not working.

Jackie Lewis: [crosstalk 00:05:13]. Let's go. Yeah.

Kaliswa: Yeah. It's not working.

Jackie Lewis: It isn't working. It is not working. And you tell the story of your cousin or your relative cousin surviving this shooting in a locker. I was home with my family in Chicago a little while ago. And my sister prompts, "Tell everybody what happened to you yesterday, Rodney." My middle brother. "Well, there was a shooting in the mall." And he was one of the people galloping out of the mall, jumping over other people, getting out of the mall and grabbing ladies and coming out of the mall. And he didn't even tell us.

Kaliswa: Right.

Jackie Lewis: And it isn't that he picked the sibling that he's best friends with. It just happened to be that day that he said, "Yeah. I was running from bullets today." And Wanda held onto it and we talk all the time and he didn't even mention it. What I mean is it was so ordinary, somehow, that it didn't come up.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: In conversations.

Kaliswa: He didn't get hurt. So, there's nothing to say.

Jackie Lewis: Exactly. Right. Oh, my God. And we are curating these episodes as a talk about black history and black present, I'm going to say, and black future. And just on top of all the things it feels to me that there's a particular dripping about being black in America, too, right? Let's talk about how people can be in their apartments and get killed.

Kaliswa: Oh, yeah.

Jackie Lewis: Oh, my God.

Kaliswa: Yeah. I think a question is... Well, I guess there's two questions and maybe they're part of the same and I don't know which direction to go in, because... There's a human question. And then, of course, there's a black question. And then, the questions are survival. And then, the questions are also, is there a way to live that's beyond survival? Is there a way to thrive and live into what you would call our own divinity, our birthright of life. And it feels like we are surviving. And I get curious because, obviously, this isn't the only dark time in the world. And beyond that, this isn't the

only... We've lived, I know you've been through things, I've been through things, but we've mostly been in the United States.

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: And for the time that we've been alive, there have not been bombs blowing, we've not been running for shelter. We've had incidents, things have happened, but it's not like we were in Afghanistan.

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: So, there's still certain amount of sheltered and privilege. Although, this is a different kind of violence.

Jackie Lewis: Yes.

Kaliswa: That this drip, like you say, are every day terrible things happening, but there's enough normalcy going on that you can push that stuff to the side and be like, "Well, what do I want for my career? How do I want my family to be? What house am I moving into?" And focus on those things as opposed to the world is sick.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah. I mean, just to circle back to the very top of, what if we set a table today for the not okay-ness, Right? I mean, I don't want to be shiny, sparkle Jackie everything's okay, Jackie in the face of all the stuff.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: I feel called to truth about it. That's what we write about in Fierce Love, that whole idea of truth telling as an act of love. And I feel so sad, Kaliswa, today. I'm so glad to see you and I feel sad that Amir Locke is dead and there's a shooting in your hometown. I saw that today and I thought, "Is that... That's your town?"

Kaliswa: It's not my town. I was born there and I have family there. Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: Because I was listening to another recording of you earlier today, proof texting, is it right? Is that what she said in this other podcast? And you described that little girl in that town.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: And the friends, the super friends of... The first generation friends you talked about in that room. I just don't want us to be these people, Kaliswa. I don't want us to be these people where whatever you would gain from using a key to go into somebody's house, which means you had collaboration to catch them at something that whatever you would gain that it's okay for them to die to gain it, is just a world that I don't want to be in. I mean, I don't want to be in that world.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: We don't want to be in that world.

Kaliswa: But it feels like your solution is... Well, actually let me not put words into your mouth. Who I know you to be, and I don't know how you are evolving or changing how you approach these things, if you are. But we say a million times, you've said it a million times, you're the one who runs into the fire.

Jackie Lewis: Yes.

Kaliswa: Are you tired of running into the fire?

Jackie Lewis: Yes.

Kaliswa: Wow. That is big. That's huge. That's whoa. Wait, what?

Jackie Lewis: Right. I'm tired of running.

Kaliswa: Jackie.

Jackie Lewis: I know. I'm tired of-

Kaliswa: What does that mean?

Jackie Lewis: I don't know.

Kaliswa: Okay. That is huge.

Jackie Lewis: I don't know. If I was going to work with you on that metaphor, running to the fire, I feel like I don't want to run in the fire. I want to make the fires stop and that's different. I feel like running into the fire means there's going to be more fires. You're going to run into that one too and run into that one too and run into that one too. And I'm trying to figure out if I can use myself differently to make there be less fires. This feels makes me feel teary to say that to you.

Kaliswa: I'm getting teary, too.

Jackie Lewis: It's like, "Please could there not be more fires?" What? I don't want there to be fires anymore. I'm so tired of the feeling that fire is normal. That's what I'm saying, babe. What are we doing that there's a fire all the time? What are we doing that the media keeps broadcasting the fires of hatred and pain and brutality? 900,000 people dead of COVID, right? Just broke, poor struggling people and a nation intends on brutalizing rights of people. And what is going on? When we say this is now we are, yes, it is. And we say we've never been here before, yes we have. And that we are here before and we do it again. We're burning books, banning books, Kaliswa. Banning animal farm.

Kaliswa: Yeah. I know.

Jackie Lewis: What? Banning the bluest eye.

Kaliswa: That's so insane.

Jackie Lewis: It's crazy town. If this was a screenplay, we could sell it and we could get rich on the zombie-

Kaliswa: Yeah. I always say nothing's crazier than reality.

Jackie Lewis: What'd you call it? Book-elypse.

Kaliswa: I don't know. Bookopalypse or something.

Jackie Lewis: Bookopalypse. I don't know. Yeah. What do you think? I don't want to run into the fires because I don't want there to be any more fires.

Kaliswa: Me too. That's how I feel. But how do you not make there fires when... I mean, I believe that the cause of this, of course, is macro in the sense that there are systems. Systems in place, whether it's policy, governments, all of that stuff. And then, racism and hatred and just all sorts of discrimination towards people's beliefs, religions, who they love, all of that stuff. And I also really do believe that a lot of it stems from a lack of self love.

Jackie Lewis: Yes.

Kaliswa: Which is really such a hard thing.

Jackie Lewis: Hard. Yeah.

Kaliswa: Hard. Yeah. Because you come into the world, I feel, and then you come into your country and then you come into wherever you're from. And it feels a lot of times that there's who you are and then there's already a standard of what is good. And so, all of us are constantly asked to calibrate toward whatever that standard is. And if you don't measure it, there are reasons to not love yourself. And then, there can be reasons if you choose to turn that lack of self love into hate or by violence, however small or big, towards other people.

Jackie Lewis: Because hurt people hurt people, wounded people.

Kaliswa: Because hurt people hurt people. And I don't know, is there a way to get out of that? I know that doesn't sound very macro, we're now going to heal the world if everybody goes to therapy or finds out how to love themselves, but I don't know how to fix the bigger problem. So, I turn to that.

Jackie Lewis: I think it's beautiful that you turn to that. And it's a great segue point, I think, from where we go from here in this conversation. Because in fact we, the people, make the systems. The systems are created by the governments, the systems, the laws, the policies, the complexes that are industrial or hospital or prison or whatever, capitalism. All of those are created by people who then live in the systems and then are broken by the systems and then raise babies in the system and then more babies that are...

Jackie Lewis: So, there's a whole interlocking series of things that happen from the big bang of the person who's in charge who hates themselves and therefore creates a world out of self-loathing, right?

Kaliswa: Or if it's not as strong as hate themselves, just pain. And I'm going to go... So, something that has been weighing on my heart just super heavily is Chesley Christ, who died by suicide just a couple of weeks ago.

Jackie Lewis: Did you know her?

Kaliswa: I didn't know her, but I've been following her super closely.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: Honestly, ever since she came onto the scene in 2019, when she won and it was the trio... Actually, it was four of them, black beauty Queens. It was Chesley, miss USA. And it was miss teen USA and miss universe. And then, a whole nother world of the pageants is miss America. And she happened to be black as well. So, it was like, "Wait a minute. What is going on?" The world is shifting and there's inclusivity. So, following her star eyes, and this is a woman who was a lawyer, from Wake Forest university, she got her law degree and her MBA the same year and was practicing law.

Kaliswa: In college, she was a track superstar. She did pageants because her mother was... Was it Mrs. North Carolina? I think I might be messing up, but she did pageants. And she just seemed to have it absolutely all. She won miss USA and nobody had a bad thing to say at her. She's just stunning, bright, light, supermodel, beauty, but brains, activists, all up about everything. E Entertainment... No, she was on Extra as a reporter. How does this woman feel like she needs to kill herself because her life isn't worth it because she's in so much pain?

Jackie Lewis: Right, that's right. How?

Kaliswa: In some of her writings she spoke about trolls and comments that she got about her being black and not deserving. Her not really being beautiful, her body tight, her hair, which was stunning. Her never actually being enough. And I'm like, "If she's not enough, what chance do we all have? If Chesley Christ isn't enough and if she believes that lie, then what world are we creating?"

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: This is one of the fires. One of the ones I don't want to run into, but one of the ones I want to make go away.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: I think... And listen, Kaliswa, Regina King's son... I mean, who knows what's happening with that? Seemingly good life and that place of despair that causes a person to die by suicide. Psychologist might say, this psychologist might say that sometimes we have such a disconnect with the false self, with the presentation that everyone's seeing, that we want to kill that presentation. We want that presentation to die. And we feel like the only way for that to die is for us to... It's you, right? You can't kill it.

Jackie Lewis: Donald Winnicott would say that that false self sometimes causes us so much pain that we think the only way out of the pain is to kill that false self. But in fact, the only way to kill it is to kill ourselves. It's an escape from the falseness, from the bullshit. I would love to dream a world... And I think you do this with your creativity. I think you do this with your art. I know you hate saying that you're an activist. I'm going to go, okay, you're not. But this place of telling stories that change the story or the place of enacting something that helps people go, "Oh, I can do that." This is what I think my calling is.

Jackie Lewis: It isn't so much run into fire, but how do we change this story so that there's not so many false selves and so much pain? And I think you do that. I think Cicely Tyson did that, one of your heroes, sheroes.

Kaliswa: Yes.

Jackie Lewis: Let's just talk about that for a minute. Let's talk together a little bit about black art creating life. Black art creating true self, authentic self. Yeah.

Kaliswa: Well, she's definitely one of my heroes and I didn't know how much of a hero of mine she was until after she passed and I got my hands on her book. As you just said, I really wrestle with using things like activist for myself, or social justice warrior, any of those things, they don't feel right for me. I think because I have such a deep admiration for people like you and one of your mentors, Ruby Sales, who truly have put their lives on the line and, or dedicated their lives in a very tangible way to making the world a better place and civil rights really being something that you have fought for.

Kaliswa: So, I'm sitting over here like, "I'm just an actor." And to me, the reason that I came to storytelling was because I felt like there was something inside of me that I wanted some truth inside of myself that I wanted to share with the world that I couldn't just as myself. And there were stories that I wanted to tell that I thought would open people's hearts up, and this is from a little girl. But when I read Cicely's book, one of the things that she talked about is when she was cast in Sounder, which was a difficult road for her to be cast in that.

Kaliswa: And they were doing the tour and people had been watching the film and a couple places people would say, "Oh, it was a good story, but I just didn't believe it." And they would say why. And she would say, "Because that was a loving relationship between a black man and a black woman and that's not real, that's an imaginary thing." And she was like, "Oh, my God." And that became her mission as an actor artist, was to change lives and minds through each and every role that she took making sure that everything that she did turned the dial towards people seeing the humanity of black people.

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: And if you look at her career, from everything that she did, whether it was a deep film or something more commercial... She never did trash, but some things...

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: Everything that she did was showing us a more full human version of a black woman than we had seen before at every stage of her life as a woman.

Jackie Lewis: Right. That's right. And inhabiting with her beautiful... Do you remember when... Maybe it was right before she died. I felt like there were posts up in the world about her. It made me post myself in my Cicely Tyson looking-

Kaliswa: Yeah. I remember, I love that.

Jackie Lewis: I was like, "I am [inaudible 00:24:23] with my short crap defer."

Kaliswa: I love that.

Jackie Lewis: She's just beautiful.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: Beautiful. And just to be honest, love, as a chocolatey brown girl growing up, her chocolatey brown self with her overbite and her big eyes... People said I looked like Diana Ross. I got stopped in bathrooms, "Are you Diana Ross?" That's how much my face was like hers when I was a younger

girl. And I used to think to myself, “Diana Ross or Cicely Tyson? Okay, I’ll take both.” Just beautiful women, right?

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: No bad choice there.

Jackie Lewis: No bad choice. But just the way that she inhabited the world, the way she inhabited the world changed the stories too, right? So, I’m wanting to ask you something that might make you annoyed, but you inhabit the world in a certain kind of way. Do you ever think of how you are changing the black story by the way you inhabit the world? Meaning the black present and the black future, Kaliswa. Do you think about that?

Kaliswa: Hmm.

Jackie Lewis: If you could see her now, her eyes did that really big way up looking way up for the answer.

Kaliswa: I’m like, “Was it up there? Is it behind me? Where’s the answer? Look under my desk.”

Jackie Lewis: She went on a search with her eyes for the answer.

Kaliswa: Is it in the laundry pile that’s over there that you can’t see? I think a lot... I do. I mean, I’ve always thought about what my story is ever since I came to this country and realized I was black.

Jackie Lewis: Can you just pause there? Because everyone doesn’t know what you mean. You came here.

Kaliswa: Yes.

Jackie Lewis: As a three year old.

Kaliswa: Yeah. I was born here and then my mom sent me to Liberia where my grandparents raised me until I was about three, a little over three. And then, I moved back here. And then, I was introduced to my parents and they raised me. And suddenly I was not in Liberia, west Africa, where there are black people and loving people all around me. And I was in the Seattle area, Bellevue Washington, where was a lot of white people and suddenly having to go to a preschool Montessori school with just white kids and just realizing my otherness.

Kaliswa: And that was just one of the most traumatic shifts, losing my grandmother who had been around me forever, she went back. And I was just with my parents who loved me and were awesome. But it was like, “What is this new world? What are these white people? Something wrong with me. I don’t look like these people.” So, I used to sit under the stairs at Montessori and cry every day. I don’t know if it was a combination of my own... It’s a funny thing, even for a kid looking back on it now because sometimes you’re like, “Is this racism? Or is this me?”

Kaliswa: Like I have as an adult. “Was that cashier being racist? Or am I sensitive?” And sometimes it’s they’re racist and sometimes you’re having a bad day and you don’t know. And when I go

back and look at the story of... I used to cry under the thing, there were all the white kids and I don't know how much of that was my own whatever insecurity as a little baby and how much of it was, they were treating me strange because I was a little black kid out of nowhere. I don't know.

Kaliswa: But regardless, I suddenly had an awareness that I'm black and nobody was having... My parents weren't like, "Black is beautiful." At home. They're immigrant, they're not doing that. So, I had to be taught that black was not awesome and then move through my life. And a lot of my teens and early 20's believing that and then having to deprogram that.

Jackie Lewis: Right. So, let me say that back. You got programmed that it's not awesome. And then, you had to unlearn that and learn how awesome it is.

Kaliswa: Yes, exactly. And now I think it's awesome and I'm so grateful. I don't want to be anything but a black woman. But that's not the story my entire life, at all.

Jackie Lewis: Right. And it's not the American story, right?

Kaliswa: It's not the American story, but depending on where you are sitting, you can think that is the American, or you can think that there's something wrong with me if I don't have the background or the culture that people think as traditionally African American, whatever that is. And then, you realize there is no traditionally African American there-

Jackie Lewis: There's more than one black

Kaliswa: There's way more than one black.

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: Even in a household there's more than one black.

Jackie Lewis: That's right.

Kaliswa: But I did not understand that for a very long time. So, I think the first step for me was owning who I am as a black woman. And feeling that that deserved space in this world, that I didn't have to shift myself into any other type of a black to be good.

Jackie Lewis: Amen. That feels to me like the beginning of a revolution. So, this woman named [crosstalk 00:29:43]. Yeah. This woman named Candice Benbow, who wrote a book called Red Lip Theology. We got to read-

Kaliswa: That sounds like your theology.

Jackie Lewis: Totally. I'm like, "Why did you steal the title of the book I was going to write next?" She's lovely. But she writes about really finding herself, finding herself in the context of black church, was her quest, if you will. "Can I find my real self in that?" And like, "Can I find my real self..." Jackie Lewis, with her hands raised, in the context of Lewis family dynamics, where I'm supposed to be shiny, perfect and beautiful and not having any issues. No issues for you.

Kaliswa: No.

Jackie Lewis: And can you find yourself, Kaliswa, in the context of how many different blacks there are and I'm going to say beautiful, if you all don't know Kaliswa, look her up and see that she is beautiful inside and out and brilliant inside and out. But you probably were not black enough in some ways, at some point in time, for the way you talk and be all sparkly and happy. No, whatever. I don't know what I'm trying to say, but you know what I'm trying to say.

Kaliswa: Yeah. For sure.

Jackie Lewis: When I was in Chicago the first time the kids were like, "You talk like a white girl." I'm like, "Okay. Do I look like I talk like a white... Do I look like a white girl?" No.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: How you be and what it is, I'm thinking about Arthur Ashe's tennis playing [crosstalk 00:31:03].

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: They're more like, "What kind of black tennis playing weasel are you?"

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: All the ways we are black, all the different ways that we are black can be problematic for a white racist nation, but sometimes problematic for each other.

Kaliswa: Completely. And I say-

Jackie Lewis: Right?

Kaliswa: Yes, it is. Absolutely.

Jackie Lewis: It's a sad thing, because it was true. It's hard. Yeah, right?

Kaliswa: It's true. It's absolutely true. I's just such a... I don't know. Not being able to recognize the truth in someone else, but I think it's because you're threatened by them. If she gets to be black too, what does that say about me?

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: And I think there's just so much work that we have to do as black people, no matter what our background is, so much to understand dynamics, no matter where you're growing up from, you have to understand how someone may be judging you when you're walking down the street. If you don't understand that, you're asking for heartbreak all the time.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: Because you're going to be disappointed when you smile and that person is like, "Oh, I'm

scared. Let me clutch my bag.”

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: And it sounds like... I mean, I don't want to put words into you, but I know that one of the first times I saw you in addition to your preaching being amazing and exactly what I needed. I was like, “I get her. I understand that woman.”

Jackie Lewis: I know.

Kaliswa: And you don't have your quirkiness on full display when you're preaching, you tone it down a bit. But I was like, “I saw enough to be like, ‘Oh, she quirky. I see that.’” The quirky in me recognizes the quirky in you. Namaste.

Jackie Lewis: I love that.

Kaliswa: I was like, “I love this quirky black woman.” And it was an example for... I mean, not that I was trying to imitate you, but it was an example that someone a little bit further down the road can hold space and be unapologetically herself. And I think the issue for me growing up was I didn't have in real time around me examples like that.

Jackie Lewis: Oh.

Kaliswa: So, that's one of the reasons why I treasure you so much.

Jackie Lewis: See how she gets there? She loves me. I love you too.

Kaliswa: I love you.

Jackie Lewis: I love you too. I too feel, in the Kaliswa dynamic, a mirror, a twin. Understood.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: And I think my hope, as we don't run the fires, because they actually burn you. You can see yourself, you can die running into the fire. But the way I want to extinguish fires, Kaliswa, in my life is to make more space for black people to be the black they are.

Kaliswa: Yeah. And I mean, I'm not Imani Perry black. I love Imani Perry, but I'm not her. I'm me.

Kaliswa: Right.

Jackie Lewis: I'm not Lisa Sharon Harper black. I'm not her, I'm me. I'm just doing some women. I'm not Hannah-Jones black, although I want to be, because I love her work. I'm me. Melissa Harris Perry, my friend and me. And so, can we be more generous, Kaliswa, to let black people be black the way they're black, rather than run into fires. I want to extinguish the fire in which black people can't be their rich, beautiful, badass selves every day.

Jackie Lewis: More ways black, all the black ways. The black classical pianist ways, the black...

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: [inaudible 00:34:48] way. The black I can cook like up a storm way. The black I'm beige black. I'm biracial black. All the blackness-ess that are the full spectrum of who we are as humans. I just want there to be more space.

Kaliswa: I agree with that.

Jackie Lewis: More space.

Kaliswa: Yeah.

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: Yeah. And I think that in some ways... So, I tend to listen a podcast or something when I'm getting ready in the morning. And I was listening to Brene Brown on one of her podcasts and she was talking about comparative suffering. And I think that that can happen in all sorts of different ways. So, for starters, I feel like... It's not like this wish to accept all blackness is just saying, "We want to see each other as people."

Jackie Lewis: Exactly. That's what it is.

Kaliswa: Just the way I can look at a white Karen and be like, "Oh, that's Karen." And then, "That's white Betty." I'm not seeing like, "Oh, that's redheaded Betty. She must be better than that Betty with the college degree. She must be different than Betty who plays basketball."

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: Can you see the human first?

Jackie Lewis: Yes. Beautiful.

Kaliswa: But then again, it's not as though this isn't happening. As an adult, most of my close friends are black women. And that's crazy considering where I grew up and there was nobody black, except if they were related to me. It's crazy beautiful because I find it so comforting to be in a sisterhood with other black women. And the reason I refer to the podcast as well is because they were talking about Holocaust survivors or people who go off to war and come home and how there can be such community and a feeling of being held when those people are together just playing cards or playing a game because they don't have to talk about the thing. They can just be people.

Jackie Lewis: That's right.

Kaliswa: You don't have to discuss your trauma. You can just be like, "Oh, we're watching a movie." Not like, "We're talking about black lives matter all day, every day." And I think when you're saying you don't want to run to the fire all the time, that's making me think, "When can we get to a place when we can just be?"

Jackie Lewis: Yeah.

Kaliswa: So we can just live. I can dream, I can write, I can go for a bike ride, I can be free. Not be here all day being like, "I'm a person. Hey, guess what? I'm a human. Hey, my life matters.

Just letting you know in case you didn't, because it seems like you don't."

Jackie Lewis: Right.

Kaliswa: [crosstalk 00:37:41] killing me all the time.

Jackie Lewis: I just want to be-

Kaliswa: Yeah. Wanted to [crosstalk 00:37:45] smell a flower.

Jackie Lewis: A human being.

Kaliswa: "Is that okay?" Doesn't seem okay right now.

Jackie Lewis: In the black future, "How will you know you're in the future? Because black people are just being."

Kaliswa: They're just here.

Jackie Lewis: That's how we'll know.

Kaliswa: They're just people. Just like everybody else, just a person. That's all, that's my goal.

Jackie Lewis: Mine too. Listen, that feels like a good hope to leave ourselves on, a good place to stop maybe. But I'd love to ask you, what do you know for sure about love? And I know you've tell me that before, but you know something different now? So, what do you know for sure about love?

Kaliswa: This is Jackie Lewis that are interviewing [crosstalk 00:38:35]. I know I love you, I'll start there.

Jackie Lewis: Start there. Okay, good.

Kaliswa: No, I really do think that love and any expression of love and whenever I feel love or give love, I drop into the present moment. I stop living in fear. I do that thing where I can actually be and live whenever there's love. Love is absolutely freeing. And I think the absence of love is death.

Jackie Lewis: That's beautiful, Kaliswa. And when I say fierce love, what comes up for you? Maybe in the context of black history, black future. Fierce love, what comes up for you?

Kaliswa: I think that this thing that black people have been able to do all over the globe. And when you think about this country and the 400 plus years of survival, that black people, despite everybody telling us that we are not beautiful, that we are not competent, that we are not human, there's this deep love. The love that comes through singing, that comes through your mama braiding your hair, that comes through shea butter on your skin, that comes through like we may not have everything, but these are the ways that we can love ourselves. And I think that is a fierce love... Love that's strong enough to survive people trying to take your human away, that is some fierce love.

Jackie Lewis: Oh, yes. I'm going to steal that.

Kaliswa: Okay, please.

Jackie Lewis: For my sermon soon. Kaliswa Brewster, I love you so much.

Kaliswa: I love you too.

Jackie Lewis: I love you. Okay, bye.

Kaliswa: Okay, bye.

Jackie Lewis: Thanks for listening to this episode of Love Period, a special series we put together for black history month. As an African American woman who grew up in this nation I think about the poet James Weldon Johnson, who says about my people. We have come over a way that with tears has been watered. I think about the tears of my ancestors watering the soil of America. Tears baptizing my hope. Tears that are often tears of joy because we've learned how to make a way out of no way. Black history, black heritage, it's everyone's history. These stories belong to all of us. And I hope, because you've listened to these episodes, you feel connected and that you'll dig and do some research about black folks in America.