

That's All Folx Real World Episode Transcript

Katy, Erin, and Noelle:

That's All Folx.

Erin:

In That's All Folx, we're looking at our latest TV binges as a test lab for identifying and examining problematic social interactions.

Katy:

I'm Katy, and I use she and hers as my pronouns.

Erin:

I'm Erin, and my pronouns are she, hers, and hers.

Noelle:

I'm Noelle, and my pronouns are she and her.

Erin:

And we are three graduate assistants at the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, a project under the Great Lakes Equity Assistance Center. Welcome to That's All Folx.

Erin:

I'm bringing in the reality TV genre of this podcast, because originally we were going to talk about Big Brother, and there's so much to talk about there, but I actually got really excited this year because, to launch Paramount Plus they decided to bring the original cast of Real World back and do a reunion. And I'm old enough that I remember when the original Real World aired, and so I was super pumped about this. But the reason that I wanted to bring it into the podcast is because the original Real World isn't like the other, first of all, it's the first reality TV show.

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Erin:

And second of all, it's not like the other Real Worlds. They really tried to do this documentary type vibe and really raise and talk about issues that were pertinent to the time. So they have an episode where they talk about people that are homeless, the show was filmed during the Rodney King trials and the police brutality, and that they have a scene where the roommates are all watching that on television.

Erin:

And because they were trying to bring up real issues that were real to the individuals at the time, there were individuals in the house that identified as white and then as Black, and they're naturally a lot of race conversations came out of that, and then a lot of conflict surrounding race and a lot of confrontation of stereotypes that the white castmates were upholding specifically towards this one particular Black male. So in the reunion, they have the roommates come back together in the house and they play a lot of the clips from 20 years ago and have them sit around on a table and discuss it. So the scene we're going to watch is them discussing a confrontation that happened 20 years ago.

Kevin:

What I was saying to you, Becky, with all due respect, and I love you, I'm saying this, I'm sick and tired of hearing about your trips around the world. I could do that, I've been to 50 states and five to seven continents. I've written 14 books.

Becky:

Well, I got to say something about France and traveling, I have family in Europe.

Kevin:

That's fine. No one wants to hear that all the time, because guess what? The average American is living paycheck to paycheck.

Becky:

I got to live my truth just like you got to live yours.

Kevin:

You should live your truth.

Kevin:

[crosstalk 00:02:52], but what are we really doing to help people who are marginalized? You know what I mean? That's what I'm talking about.

Becky:

I don't feel badly for being who I am and for loving travel, and loving to go to Europe, and loving good food, and all these things that are considered now elitist. Those elitist things I believe everybody has a right to earn.

Katy:

A couple of things that really stood out to me from this clip that I think is interesting is when Becky mentions the elitist and you have to, everyone has the right to earn what they want, essentially. And I think a lot of people feel that way. And so, my question to you, Erin, because I feel like you have more experience in this realm, as far as research and reading, what is your initial response to that?

Erin:

Well, I don't know that I'll respond in terms of research and reading, but I just remember that complexity in teaching, I think in public education and in our country, there still is this mentality of like, "Pull yourselves up by your bootstraps". And so, it's like that, that complexity of, for me, I wanted to teach my students to be disruptive to the way things were, but also recognizing that the way are, so how do you teach students to be disruptive to the way things are, and shift them to the way things could be, but also recognizing that they need the structures of education and

college, et cetera, in order to quote and quote succeed in the current system? And that was always a struggle for me as a teacher.

Erin:

I want to tell my kids that grades don't matter. I want to tell them, "Don't stress about the standardized tests, because it doesn't matter." But that's very privileged for me to say to them, because I was always a white teacher teaching black and latinx students primarily. And so, what does it mean for me as a white teacher to say, "Grades don't matter. Standardized tests don't matter." Because my life, and my worth, and my value was never attached to my grades and to standardized test scores.

Erin:

And I remember one time I had a student who didn't want to go to college. And I always said to my students, "This is your life and your journey. So, if you don't want to go to college, don't." And I had her parents call me, and very infuriated, and was like, "Where do you get off as a white woman telling my black daughter that she doesn't have to go to college? She has to go to college. She has to go. I don't know what kind of world you're living in, and maybe you didn't need to go to college, but you did. And she has to go, or else." And so it's just, I don't know if that was your question, but that was always a complexity that I struggled with.

Katy:

Yeah, no, I think that's exactly the topic that I want to talk to, because in working in schools then, what do teachers do? What can they do? What are some things that, because it's, you're teacher in this classroom, and like you said, you're dealing with all of these issues about how to be equitable, and you know that the system is broken, as we've said before, but what are some things that teachers could do that would start changing the system? And I think about like, "Noelle, this could be even like a urine, too." What are some policies that you know of that maybe happen at the mayor's office, for example, that directly affect education?

Noelle:

I mean, when I think about policy solutions, a lot of the policies that I've seen, and this is also me still learning in this space, but a lot of the policies I see are band-aid solutions that are helping people navigate the system versus dismantling the system. And I completely understand why that is, because policy works within institutions. And so, I think it goes back to Erin's point of, well, we could say that test scores don't matter and going to college doesn't matter. But the reality is that's the system that's set up. What's the give and take there? And I think policy very much so almost upholds the system as it is, because it's helping people navigate it with what they have.

Erin:

I think too, Katy, you know this about me, I really struggle with the idea of whether or not change is actually possible. And I think that, I tend to be all or nothing sometimes, and this is a problem that I'm working on within myself. So to me, it's like, this system's broken over here, so we need to just completely throw it out and start over, and it needs to be completely different. Like, get away with standardized tests right now. Get away with grades right now. All of these oppressive structures, throw them out right now. And instead, maybe just focusing on, as Anna from Frozen would say, "The next right thing." Even though I don't like the terminology of right and wrong, but what is the next thing I can do that will move things a little bit? Instead of it being like, we have to move these really big mountains. What's the next thing I need to do?

Noelle:

I was just going to say, it's hard because I think a lot of people look at incrementalism as the opposition of radicalism, and it's like, "Yes, of course I want radical change." But I just don't know how to get there, within the structure that we have, and that structure is so concrete. It feels like sometimes, yeah. I don't know. It's like, "How do we start? Where do we go?"

Katy:

I think while you're talking, I was thinking, "Well, what could change Becky's mind in the scene?" And then I was thinking, "Wait, I'm a teacher in schools, and what are some things that have influenced me?" And I think the biggest thing that I've been thinking about now, that I've recognized is like, "It's my responsibility to start educating myself more on policy, on what's going through our state Senate." Like, "There's a bill coming up for education or state Senate now, and I wasn't even aware of it."

Katy:

And I think that, when I first started teaching at IEPY with Kathleen, she said something to me like, "Teaching is political. There's no way around it." So, you're making these choices, and when she said it, it started me thinking, everything that I'm presenting then, to students and to my colleagues, I'm making that choice based on who I am and what I believe. So, I don't know. It just made me [inaudible 00:10:51], if we took more time in our schools, with my colleagues, to start talking about policies that are happening in our state and the pros and cons to these policies, and how they're going to affect our lives, because they will, and then how they're going to affect our students lives.

Erin:

I think one small thing that teachers could do, and that I wish I did more of when I was a teacher, is really having a real conversation about just the policies in your building. An easy go-to that people always talk about is dress code. We know that dress code is racist and sexist, that is real. And we know that certain teachers enforce dress code differently than other teachers based on their positionality, based on their beliefs. So, that's one conversation that could be had about, I remember at the school I worked at, they had this campaign about positive language. They were going to spend one whole quarter rewarding kids about positive language. And I was like, "Who gets to decide what positive language is?" Because I know, if I go in the teacher's lounge right now, I can't say that I'm going to hear positive language. So, who gets to decide and how are we the authority that? So, yes, interrogating policy, sorry, I'm being long-

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winded now. But, yes, interrogating state policy and being knowledgeable about that, but also just being knowledgeable and interrogating the way local policy or building policy.

Katy:

Right.

Katy:

And I think that even what you said, exactly, and I want to clarify, I think connecting the broader policy with your school policies too, is important. Just knowing how, I think before when, while we were talking one time about gentrification, and even knowing about how that connects to your school, the schooling policy and schooling zones, as far as who tends there, transportation. Knowing that stuff, I think I'm better to confront the leadership about certain policies, because I feel like, "Hey, is this the direction we want to be going?" Like, "Is this what you want from your school? And the community around it?"

Noelle:

Yeah, so I think the big teacher takeaway from this conversation is teachers understanding how policy works at every level, from federal to building and working to make it a more equitable practice. And then also thinking about a policy can be written equitably and implemented equitably too.

Erin:

That's what I was going to say too, not to cut in. But, not only understanding policy, but then teachers recognizing and interrogating their own way of enacting policy.

Katy:

Right. And I think it goes back to Becky in that scene, just the statements that she made. I don't think she realized how connected they are to the systems that are set up that she's bought into, thinking like, "Well, it's not fair, but it's the best we have." And that's just not true.



That's All Folx

Transcript of Real World Episode



Noelle:

Yeah.

Erin:

Thanks. Thanks friends.

Noelle:

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