

**Paul:** I'm Paul Gallery. I'm the stewardship coordinator with The Nature Conservancy in the Mohawk Valley, Hudson Valley in the Catskill region of New York, and I'm sitting here with Lydia. Lydia, can you introduce yourself to us?

**Lydia:** Yeah, Shé:kon sewakwekon, Lydia iónkiats. Hi everyone, my name is Lydia. I'm the Executive Director of Hunters of Color and we're here today to talk about an event that we did actually last year 2021 and I think Paul was the mastermind behind that event at Nature Conservancy. And so I'm really excited to be able to recap just one of my favorite events that I've ever been a part of, and I was grateful to be invited by The Nature Conservancy to do that.

**Paul:** Yeah, and we were grateful that you guys, you know answered a random phone call from some people in New York. So, you know, this event was hunting based. And so is your organization and I just wanted to—I know there's a lot of different ways in which people view hunting and I wanted to know if you could talk a little bit about what hunting means to you and how you got into hunting.

**Lydia:** Yeah, and I think that I probably should have said this in the introduction too when I came out just speaking weird, making weird sounds in a language that a lot of people don't speak anymore. But especially in that region Paul, you mentioned the Mohawk Valley, the Hudson Valley, that whole region is Mohawk land and ancestral land of my tribe, the Kanien'kehá:ka the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois. And so for me, hunting dates back to you know, just how we've survived in that region of New York, and now in Canada for forever since you know, since Skywoman fell from the sky as our creation story tells us.

And so for me, hunting is a relationship with the land and a connection to nature that is really beautiful and really sacred and it's an agreement that we have with the natural world that we take care of nature and she'll take care of us. You know the Earth, our mother as we say in our in our opening address, the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén, just how we can as hunters appreciate so much more than just, you know, seeing things in nature, but actually taking part in nature and playing a role in the ecology. So to me hunting is really, really vital and really important to culture—to sustainability. If people choose to eat meat, which you know, you don't have to, but if you choose to eat meat it is the most sustainable way to do so. And as you know in New York with all the deer you have out there to be able to play a role in that ecology is really important too. So that's what hunting means to me as an Indigenous person.

And as proud Mohawk being able to partake in hunting on Mohawk land really meant the world to me and to be able to share that with our with our nonprofit was just you know beyond words that I ever thought I'd be able to do in my life. So thanks for that opportunity again.

**Paul:** Yeah, that's amazing. And you mentioned your nonprofit, and so could you just tell me a little bit about Hunters of Color and how that organization got started? I understand it was a coalition of some people, some friends that got together and decided to make an organization. I'd like to know that story a little bit deeper.

**Lydia:** Yeah, absolutely. So Hunters of Color is the nonprofit where I'm the Executive Director and one of the co-founders, there's actually three of us founders. As I mentioned, I am Indigenous, I'm Mohawk, wolf clan, Walker-Mohawk Band of Six Nations of the Grand River, and my co-founders for Hunters of Color are also pretty diverse individuals. Jimmy Flatt is one of our co-founders and he is the child of immigrants. His dad's family comes from the Philippines and the Pacific Islands near the Philippines and his mom is from Venezuela. And then our third co-founder, his name is Thomas Tyner, and Thomas is Black and he grew up in Oregon as did I and that's where I'm calling from right now—the Chepenafa Band of the Kalapuya land out here in Oregon. And Thomas grew up in Oregon in the state that's only 2.2 percent Black. But for all of us, it kind of came together because we met in college at Oregon State University—go Beavers!—and Thomas and Jimmy hit it off right away just through hunting and we always talked about, you know, getting together just to hunt together. Most of us, you know, we're outdoors, we're already outdoors people, Jimmy, Thomas and I, and it was interesting though when Jimmy and Thomas started talking about what it was like to be hunters of color, to be people of color who hunt. Because as I mentioned, you know, Oregon as a state is not very diverse, but it's something that Thomas said he really started to notice when he was out on the mountain. He said that you know at archery events, for example, we have some really cool 3D archery events out here. That's when he noticed that he was he was the only Black person on the mountain fairly often whenever he was hunting. And then Jimmy said the same kind of thing. He grew up in California near the Bay Area, which is the second most diverse part of the United States, second only to New York City I believe, but he grew up in a very diverse part of the country. And then he said that diversity just went away when he was out hunting, especially in the Bay Area there's a lot of duck hunting, deer hunting, and he said that he just wouldn't you know, all of his friends when he would try to get them to go hunting with him, they'd say "no man, we don't do that, that's not for us. You know, we can go hiking or something but we're not, we're not gonna go hunting," and even so much as to say, "you know, that's a white person's sport." And so Jimmy, who has all this diversity in his background was really hurt by that. You know, why should anything belong to any one race, you know, any one ethnicity or any one background, especially anything in nature?

You know, we believe that nature is a human right. Nature and the access to nature and equitable access to the outdoors—that that those are human rights. And so all of us kind of came together with these backgrounds. As I mentioned, I'm Mohawk—my dad's Indigenous, my mom is white—and I had this weird confluence of identities in myself where my mom who grew up in a rural town out in the outskirts of nowhere, Oregon, you know who grew up eating wild game, hunting and fishing, her family was always hunting and fishing just to put food on the table. It was a way of life. You know, it's how you ate. And then my dad, who grew up in a city, had the opposite experience where he still to this day has never fired a gun, you know, he grew up in a place where firearms were not seen as a tool with a means to an end to procure meat for your family, but as a weapon that had traumatized a lot of communities. And so I had these like really interesting very different identities juxtaposed growing up and in my parents and so I brought that to the table and Jimmy and Thomas brought their own experiences and all of us together, long story long, that's how Hunters of Color came to be just from our own experiences as outdoors people.

**Paul:** That's awesome Lydia. That's a really great origin story and I think it's perfectly lengthed, you know, it gets into the diversity inherent in your guys' lives and what you're bringing and showing in representation to the larger hunting community, and that's awesome. And I mean you know, I think the numbers show it too, right? I can't remember the exact statistics but isn't there a census, isn't there census data out there about how monochrome the hunting community is?

**Lydia:** Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for remembering that. Data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from all licensed hunters, everyone who's buying a hunting license up until the point where the data was collected, that showed that 97% of all hunters identify as white or Caucasian.

And that was shocking in and of itself, but also not that surprising based on our own experiences, right? But shocking in that in a country as diverse as the United States, in a country that literally—it's all indigenous land. We all come from hunters at some point, all of our ancestors hunted—how we got to a point where there's so little diversity in hunting itself was really troubling. And so that's where Jimmy, who when he picked up the phone to call Thomas and talked to him about this article he just read, Jimmy is an engineer by trade and so he sees this, you know, 97% of hunters are white, you know juxtaposed to the fact that only 63 or 64% of our nation identify as white. So there's some problem there, right? There's some kind of inequity or some kind of some kind of accessibility issue and Jimmy as an engineer by trade wants to figure out what the problem is. And so he picked up the phone and called Thomas to say, you know, in August 2019, “this is what we need to do, we need to we need to do something about this problem,” because it is an issue. You know, clearly, we don't get to a point where there's so little diversity in any situation on accident.

And so our goal with Hunters of Color was to look into some of those reasons, look into some of those barriers for entry for BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, People of Color—and to break those barriers down and create equitable and accessible opportunities for people of color to get into hunting. And one of the biggest barriers, there's a whole list of them on our website at [huntersofcolor.org](http://huntersofcolor.org), but one of the biggest barriers is land access because 98% of all privately owned land in the United States is owned by white Americans according to the USDA. And so that was an instant, you know, no-brainer. One of the biggest issues we're gonna have to tackle to create equitable, accessible opportunities is land access. Which is why when we got the phone call about The Nature Conservancy being willing to open up this land for our programming for people of color, it was like a light turned on, you know, it was like, “ah, here we go.” Here's an opportunity to really make a difference and make an impact in a place where in equity has happened, in a place where you know, as I said, it's all Indigenous land and between that and between redlining and Indigenous people being pushed off of our ancestral lands, the fact that The Nature Conservancy has that power to be able to say here come hunt, you know, here come run this programming on Mohawk land. That was really powerful. I think it all ended up working out together. You didn't know I was Mohawk, but it ended up working

out together really well. And it was just really one of the best weekends I can remember in a long time.

**Paul:** That's awesome. Yeah, it was for me too. That event was really something special. You know it was, it was a coming together of a year-long planning process. And you know, you guys also at the same time, that was not the only thing you were focused on, so thank you for giving us the time and energy that you did to make it such a success. And I was wondering like, you know, it was it was a big weekend. There was a lot of emotion, there was a lot that happened. What moments really stood out to you from that experience?

**Lydia:** Oh, yeah, that is hard to think of just one, just one experience. But I mentioned earlier the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén which is the opening address, the Thanksgiving address that we, as actually Haudenosaunee the whole Confederacy, have shared since we were given the Great Law of Peace which elders, you know point back to thousands of years ago, some Elders say a thousand years ago. But a tradition, an opening address of gratitude and Thanksgiving address that it's sometimes called, that I was actually able to share that we as Haudenosaunee when we gather in groups of two or three or more we say this Thanksgiving address, and so it felt very appropriate to come together and give these greetings to the natural world—the words that come before all else—these greetings to recognize, you know, the land that we're on and to show gratitude to the plants and the animals.

I think that being able to share that around a campfire the first night where Paul and Paul's partner Libby, you know, making pizza. It was just such a, it was such a beautiful like entry into the weekend that just showed, I think, a reverence for the land and for what our goals were to connect to the land and be connected to nature and also to each other just being able to sit around that fire and share that and opening address with you all and with the land and sharing the sharing the pizza as well (awesome little pizza oven that you all have!). That was probably one of my favorite moments.

**Paul:** Yeah. It's so tough to like pick one specific thing. I think it's a, the talking about the address, like that that for me too, it was tone setting for the entire weekend and it was, to be able to share and to be humbled, feeling so humbled that you would share that with us. And then also, you mentioned the making of dinners and I have like this in my head memory of Jimmy handing me a bag of corn flour and being like, “okay, you're gonna make arepas and I know you don't know how but like here we go.” And there's just this Venezuelan music playing in the in the cabin and we were like, and I learned to make arepas with you know, 20 other people or whatever. And I just had this vision of like Jimmy at the grill, like this big smile and all of the conversations that came out of that and all the smiles that came out of, you know, sharing in that food and that culture together. That was like such a takeaway for me of the importance of the work and the importance of sharing these experiences.

**Lydia:** Yeah. I think that that night too making arepas and I think it was really beautiful to be able to share in part of Jimmy's culture, too. You know, we're making arepas and you know, we're kind of all dancing to salsa music. Paul's over here making the Harina P.A.N. into the

arepas and it was so fun. But yeah, I think being able to share in that culture, too, and being able to be in community with such diverse people being able to share, you know traditions from all of our backgrounds. That's something that, you know, it's part of why it's so important for Hunters of Color to exist because as long as we, as long as there ever is anything that's monochrome, monoracial, or lacking in diversity, you know, we're lacking in that, in that flavor. We're lacking in that culture. We're lacking in diversity of thought and problem-solving skills. And so I'm glad that those are two, you know, very culturally specific things that we were able to share that weekend that stood out to both you and I.

And I do want to share, before we move on a little bit, but in the opening address, we actually do give thanks to the animals. And so that's Teiethinonwaratons ne Kontiriiio, which is like, we give thanks, we see the animals, we recognize the animals. And just being able to do that the same way that you know, my family, my ancestors have done for thousands of years in that same part of the world. I think really does set the tone and shows that we're here as part of nature. We're not here to dominate or to, or to you know—we're not out here just to kill things. You know, there can be so much of that negative, negativity in even mainstream hunting culture, and a lot of that is what we're trying to break down, those narratives that we are just being a part of nature and that we love and care for nature in our own way as hunters. So I'm glad that you thought that set the tone also, Paul.

**Paul:** Yeah, I mean, how could it not you know. I'm coming from it from a perspective of somebody who cares about the land and thinking about land holistically and so it really was. It felt it felt like we were coming home—I don't know how to explain that other than to say that.

And I think part of taking care of land is stewardship, right, or conservation as we're calling it nowadays, and that's something that I know the Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been stewarding and keeping the landscape for time immemorial. And maybe you could talk a little bit about how Hunters of Color, how that influences, that legacy of stewardship and conservation influences Hunters of Colors' mission and the work that you guys do.

**Lydia:** Yeah, absolutely. Well first and foremost, I think that it's really important to point out that hunting in the United States—we're talking about, you know, the kind of hunting that we do, Paul does, that Hunters of Color does—hunting in the U.S. alone contributes \$1.6 billion a year to conservation causes. And that's through the Pittman-Robertson Act, that's through the other acts in fishing and boating that money when you buy licenses actually contributes directly to conservation causes. And so a lot of people don't know that that's how most states actually get the majority of their funding for their DNR departments, or Departments Fish and Wildlife.

And so it's clear to us that it's really important for Hunters of Color to emphasize that part of hunting and that part of outdoor recreation that this, that hunting and fishing and boating, are some of the only things that are actually when you're outdoors partaking in nature and recreation, you're actually giving back also just by doing the act of buying the license and hunting or fishing. And so that's really important for us to highlight especially as our nation becomes more and more diverse and as less and less people do hunt. So, you know by the year

2044 the U.S. Census says that that the U.S. will be majority BIPOC, majority people of color. And so if we're going to continue to seek conservation dollars through things like hunting and fishing, we need to make sure that people of color have access to those things in an equitable fashion.

So that's first and foremost, but then also conservation as an idea, even the North American model of wildlife conservation, all of these things are, you know, were built around the same group of people with the same, you know mentality and the same thoughts and mind from a very Western standpoint. Whereas, you know, in Indigenous relationship with the land, we don't say conservation necessarily, you know, it's a relationship with the land. And we believe at Hunters of Color that conservation as we call it today is actually just Indigenous knowledge. It's the way that we've interacted with the planet, the agreements that we've had with the planet, with our mother the Earth, and with the animals and the plants that we believe that through reinstating those truths about who we are as Onkwehonwe, who we are as people in relationship with the land is how we get back to a healthy planet.

So I think that for us, at Hunters of Color, conservation is the idea of racial healing because it relies on and requires us to center not only, center Indigenous thought and practice but to allow and to empower and to share power and privilege with Indigenous people leading conservation efforts.

**Paul:** You mentioned the North America model of you know, wildlife management and sort of this history we have, this Western history of sort of the I guess you could call it the European management of the wildlife in this country, and it's often touted as the greatest wildlife management system in the world. And this is probably super controversial to say this but I think that maybe the Indigenous managers of wildlife that existed here for thousands and thousands of years before the European colonization did a much better job.

I mean this, couldn't it be argued that the species that were here that were stewarded for so long. I mean the Europeans showed up and we drove almost everything to extinction, realized that we needed rules, and then even the rules sometimes, you know, we still lost species in that time period. And I don't know. I mean, what do you think about that?

**Lydia:** Yeah, absolutely. And there's a whole, I mean you can read, there's a scholar named Mateen Hessami who has written an article called "Indigenizing the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation," and he's an Indigenous hunter actually in British Columbia. But there's been a lot of looking into how the North American model of wildlife conservation works for certain people and doesn't work for other groups of people. And so beyond all that even, and beyond some problematic history with the North American model of wildlife conservation, just the idea of conservation as a whole is so Western, is so colonial, is so European and foreign even to Indigenous leadership because we had no need for conservation, because it was, we wouldn't take to a point where animals or plants couldn't come back. You know, we wouldn't have these problems of overhunting and fishing when we were able to govern for thousands of years before European contact. And I think that that's really important in understanding, you

know, and as I say relationship with the land, and as we talk to people who are probably not hunters who are listening to this that that's our goal. Our goal is to restore that care, that loving care and loving kindness and community with nature, communion with nature.

And yeah, I think you're absolutely right that, you know, there's something, there's a wisdom that's passed down I think in most tribal communities, but certainly amongst Haudenosaunee that you don't take the first of anything you see and you don't take the last of anything you see, if that's the foraging, if that's mushrooms, if that's hunting, you know, not "If that's the only deer I've seen I'm gonna shoot it," you know that kind of thing. There's wisdom that's passed down that is just an understanding. It's if you don't do that, if you don't take the first or the last you'll never take the last, you know, you'll never you'll never be the person that drives a species or a plant or something to extinction. But I think that there are a lot of people who don't understand that connection between hunters and nature or that connection between hunting and conservation or even think that hunting is antithetical to conservation. But what do you as a hunter in that region in New York, how do you feel that hunting is important? And how do you as a hunter, you know, navigate all of these different ideas?

**Paul:** There's a lot of different reasons why I hunt. But conservation or you know, essentially a relationship to the land, is how I like to think about it. That is my primary reason—it is where I derive my, that type of sustenance. So if I want to eat meat I will harvest it myself or I will take it myself. And I think that probably the most important thing hunting does for me and what I think it could do for everyone is help nourish that relationship to the land, because if you are aware, you care, and I think that to me is like the beating heart of conservation is caring and wanting to take care of. And so if you can connect somebody to nature in a way, in a life-sustaining way through food or, you know, that really creates an unbreakable connection to the land and something that's so powerful. And so to me that's like the one of the huge, or one of the largest things that hunting can do for people.

But there's also, I mean—and we could talk about the science too, right?—I mean, there's also this aspect of, you know, in New York we deal with massive overpopulation of deer. And, you know, there are certainly hunters in New York who think there are still not enough deer out there, but that's not the case and you know as a land manager part of what I do is working on deer control, and how do we protect our forests, and the issue there is obviously there's so many deer, they eat a lot of food and that food just happens to be the next generation of our forests. Not only are hunters actively helping to control those deer populations, but they're also innately aware of those issues and willing to work to protect those forests, to protect those deer herds. And so I think that's also another way to think about it. But those are kind of the two ways that I connect conservation and hunting.

**Lydia:** Yeah, I always say you can't care about something you don't know about. I think the part of that is the connection that hunters have with the land that is so unique and so beautiful to be able to look at it holistically as not just beauty of nature, but also our place in it.

**Paul:** I did want to talk a little bit more about the event that we put on. You know, we touched on lack of diversity within the hunting community, but you also touched on the fact that this country is not going to be predominantly one color in the future. And can you talk a little bit about the reception that Hunters of Color has gotten from people of color about engaging?

**Lydia:** Yeah, absolutely. And that is, I think, that's been one of the saddest things to hear and to see is "no we don't do that, you know, hunting's not for us, hunting's not for me," and that's been really sad because it's clearly, it's a myth. It's not true. And as I've mentioned, as I always say, all of our ancestors were hunters, successful hunters at some point or else we wouldn't be here today.

And you know, so often, too, we see barriers to entry for people who have immigrated to this country, for example, who maybe hunted where they, in their home countries and they immigrate here and the laws are difficult and different in every state and maybe there's language barriers. And also there's so much pressure on immigrants. So I think that one of the big things in what we're working on is being able to create equitable opportunities for people who are immigrants, regardless of immigration status, and to be able to keep those connections, those cultural ties to hunting. As you as you witnessed, you know, we made arepas when we were on this hunting trip and we make venison arepas, you know, as Jimmy's family would in Venezuela. And so, anyways, that's one thing that's really important to us when we talk about interest and barriers for BIPOC communities is the immigrant community and how we really want to make that more equitable and accessible for immigrant communities that are so important in the diversity of our country and in the building of our country.

And also when we talk about BIPOC communities, and there is that, you know, like "oh that's not for us," at the same time, even though that sentiment, those myths do exist, at the same time a study was done in 2018 by a group called America's Wildlife Values. And they found that young BIPOC have more interest in learning how to hunt than even young white folks do. And so as the younger generation, you know, isn't hunting as much, there's clearly more draw towards hunting from 18% of Indigenous youth that they polled are interested in hunting, 16% of Black youth that they polled are interested in hunting, 15% of Latino or Hispanic youth are interested in hunting and then it was 12% of white youth and 11% of Asian youth. So as a whole, you know, the BIPOC, or the young BIPOC, are more interested in learning how to hunt. So for us that just shows the need to create spaces, to create access to say, you know, we recognize these barriers like land access and we're going to work with The Nature Conservancy to open up areas of access. And so that's why this event was really, really huge to us.

You know, the hunters that came on the event are part of our mentorship program which we have, you know, as I mentioned nationwide. You know, when they showed up, a lot of folks didn't have hunting gear because why would you, you know, as a new hunter? A lot of these folks don't have access to, you know, properties to hunt and that all, you know, leads back to these barriers to entry that we're able to break down through our mentorship program, through relationships and connections with people like you, Paul, at The Nature Conservancy.



And this event I think was really important in a lot of aspects, but being able to access land and being able to access tools that our hunters were familiar with, or comfortable with I should say, our hunters would be comfortable with, because as I mentioned earlier, I come from, you know, my dad who's Indigenous my mom who's white, in a very, very different outlook on hunting and a different outlook on firearms, which have been something that, you know, as anyone who lives in BIPOC communities can tell you that that's a big area of contention.

We even, you know, we had a question from a community member a few, about a year ago, who said "how are you going to expect people to come into hunting and use firearms when they come from communities that have been traumatized by firearms, or traumatized by illicit use of firearms?" And it was, it's a great question, super important. And our first goal of course is to, is safety at all times. And our second goal also is to be able to use firearms as a tool and change that narrative and show people like my dad, for example, that when we use firearms we're doing so to procure meat for our families, to provide for our loved ones to have that connection with nature that we're talking about earlier. And also, we, you know, more than anything tell people you don't have to actually use firearms. You don't have to hunt with a rifle in order to go hunting. And so we were we were conscientious in this, for this event and made the decision to use crossbows. And, you know, we've since got our mentees set up with upright bows, which is actually my preferred, and actually Jimmy, our co-founder Jimmy's preferred method of hunting anyways. And for a whole, I'm sure we go into a ton of that, a whole list of reasons why I prefer upright bow and why we prefer bow hunting to rifle hunting, but we were really conscientious about that, and I think I think that that made it more accessible to people who may or may not be comfortable with firearms. And I think that's really important to show that you don't have to, you know. My family didn't use firearms until the 1500, 1600s, you know, and we did all right deer hunting up in New York. So it's something that we'd really like to be able to show people, too, that that is an option and that is how we how we handled this event.

**Paul:** That's awesome. There was a lot less deer back then, too, so that's pretty impressive, you know, the reason that The Nature Conservancy was here is, there were a lot of reasons, but one of them was land access and we've talked on that a lot. But also there's a lot of barriers to access and there's a lot of difficulties that Hunters of Color face, both the organization and the community. And I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about some of those difficulties, or you know, the reasons those barriers that people of color get specifically when trying to be outdoors.

**Lydia:** Oftentimes people will ask us, "do people of color actually experience barriers to entry than, say, you know a young white hunter who's looking to get into hunting that hasn't had access?" And so I think that the reason for existing as even in our name, Hunters of Color, is because the answer is yes, there are barriers to entry that are unique to BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, People of Color—and one of those of course is land access, but you have to, in order to understand these barriers and to even have hope for the future, you need to see the history.

I have a degree in history from Oregon State University. And so all of this, to me, is just looking at the history of how we got to this place where 97% of hunters are white. And first and foremost, you know, we have the removal of Indigenous peoples from our land, and then we have redlining, where you know, not only when Black Americans were emancipated and made the move from the south up to the north or even the other migration moving into urban centers for jobs. The USDA actually had legally outlined laws to where people of color, especially Black people, could move into certain neighborhoods where they, so they wouldn't decrease the value of white neighborhoods. And that racism and that redlining that went into building our communities, you know, people who live in New York, for example, are well aware of the segregation still in towns and cities, even in New York City itself, and so, that didn't happen on accident.

And that, in being able to understand that background you understand then that that nice property that had the access to the hunting lands or that property that had a couple acres on it, that wasn't set aside for people of color, that was set aside for the people the USDA thought would make the neighborhoods appreciate more, and that was set aside for white Americans, and so even that redlining. And then the same, too, we see in the West Coast with the creation of Chinatowns where Asian people were not allowed to live in certain parts of town—that wasn't an accident either.

And so what we see, that redlining, and the lack of access to property, huntable property or huntable land, or even access to land through private property, that's a huge barrier to entry that I think The Nature Conservancy is well aware of and which is why you, Paul, birthed this idea for an equitable hunting program. But then some of the other barriers to entry really quick here as I know, I'm sorry, there's so many and it's hard for me to not dive into every single one, but some of the other barriers to entry are, for example, safety. When we talk about things like feeling comfortable around firearms. We talk about things like feeling comfortable going into a predominantly white space. Hunting is currently dominated by, you know, 97% white and 89% male. Um, and so as women of color, even, as an added level of safety there and accessing spaces that you don't know, you know, you don't know if people are going to be accepting, or kind, or anti-racist, and you don't know if you're going to be safe when you get there, you might not have cell service. So things like that that are actual fears as barriers to entry for BIPOC communities.

And then on top of that the historical generational traumas that have gone into all of our, you know, it's actually scientific now, we've talked about generational trauma for a long time. But now science in our genomes are actually telling us, you know through epigenetics, there are things that are passed down from generation to generation that we didn't really understand through DNA before, we didn't understand it in our genome. But things like generational trauma that are passed down from distrust of the outdoors are distrust of white Americans treating non-white Americans differently in the outdoors and horrible, horrible histories of being pushed off of our ancestral lands and in a distrust there of things being taken from us and even in Black communities and Latino communities of lynchings in the outdoors—things that have caused heavy and great generational traumas to be passed down through the outdoors

that makes sense that we would have more fear, or at least like trepidations, when it comes to accessing the outdoors.

And so those are just some of the barriers, the other, another barrier that I will mention quickly is that 86% of all the wealth in the United States is also owned by white Americans. And so hunting isn't cheap, especially if you live somewhere where you have to buy land access like in the south or Texas, for example, we're 98% of the land is private. You know, where there are areas in this country that have more public land or more Nature Conservancy land where people can go hunt. There are some places where that just isn't the case. And so anyways, those are some of the barriers to entry that we talk about and some of the things that once we understand those barriers, our work is dedicated to breaking down those barriers and to making the outdoors for everyone by recognizing the problems and trying to fix them as best we can.

**Paul:** Thanks for talking about that a little bit. I think it's important that we understand those barriers because, I know you said you spent a lot of time talking about it, but the more we understand barriers it just gives us actions that we can take right to conquer or overcome those barriers or assist. So thank you, I appreciate it.

**Lydia:** I just want to say thank you again for this opportunity. We had such a great time out on The Nature Conservancy's land there in New York and I wanted to ask you, have been meaning to ask you, because it is important, why do you care? You know, why did you invite Hunters of Color out? How did that process happen? And why is it important to you to see more equity in the outdoors?

**Paul:** You know it came from I think just wanting to understand allyship better and figure out what I truly, you know, what allyship truly was and how to actually engage in it. And I come from a background of doers—I like doing things. I'm not big on talking about things. And so I think that was sort of the reason why I wanted to do something but also as somebody who engages in the hunting community, and just in in today's society, the issues around racism, around all of the isms, are obvious to those who look.

And again, I'm not someone that wants to stand by and talk about something—I want to do something. And so to see those injustices and do nothing wasn't an option. So this seemed like an opportunity. Here we are, The Nature Conservancy, as one of the largest private landowners in the country, and it seemed like a pretty small thing to be able to open up a preserve to this type of hunting and so I decided to take action because it seems like a relatively low lift and the need was extremely, was extremely important.

**Lydia:** Yeah, thank you Paul for recognizing that need and recognizing that issue and taking action. I think that that's what is super important when it comes to being an ally, you know, it's more than just your words. You got to, you got to walk the walk if you're gonna talk the talk, and that can be hard to know where to begin. So I commend you for, you know, going out on a

limb and for, you know, wanting to make a difference in your own sphere of influence because that's where it all starts. You know, anyone can change the world. It just has to start in your in your heart and in your circle. So it's okay to not know where to begin. It's okay to have questions, okay to not understand, you know.

We always say that understanding, mutual understanding, is not a prerequisite for empathy or for respect. The main thing is we're talking about people, and we're talking about nature, and those are things that we can absolutely come together on and that's, I believe, what The Nature Conservancy allowed us to do and allowed us to create that community that's still going strong. I believe you're taking some folks on a rabbit hunt perhaps at some point?

**Paul:** Yeah next weekend. We're going out for some rabbit.

**Lydia:** Awesome, that's great. Yeah and then being able to transfer that then into the pride that comes with providing food for their families. So thanks so much, Paul, for doing that and keeping the fire stoked under this hunt that we did back in November 2021 and looking forward to the next opportunity.

Really grateful for the mentees and their bravery to come out and grateful to be able to have something like Hunters of Color where we're intentional about making anti-racist spaces for people to come access the outdoors and we'll hopefully continue to do that with The Nature Conservancy.