

## THE TALK

### A Ten Minute Meeting By Eric Coble and Darius Stubbs

*(CURTIS, black, and DAVID, white, sit in two chairs with perhaps a table between them. A coffee shop. They are at least acquaintances/co-workers/could be friends)*

DAVID

I can't imagine, I can't even imagine, but I have to, you know, as a fellow human being, I have to at least try, but how I can I - the African-American experience is so far beyond me, so far and so deep, you know? - it goes so deep, such pain and rage and resilience - right? The resilience? I was reading a thing on *Huffington Post* last week about how teaching resilience to young people is so crucial, you know, and I was like: the only people who should be teaching resilience are African-Americans, they've lived it, are living it, you know? I mean, Jews and Latinos and women and gays, all minorities, they're all living it, but not the same way, not in America, it'll never be the same as for African-Americans — and that's what I want to find out, what are you resilient-ing against? You know, you personally, what in the culture now are you having to overcome, your mountains, your daily- your hourly mountains - that's what I'll never really know, but I need to know, you know, as a fellow human being.  
As an ally.

*(Beat. Curtis nods. About to reply)*

DAVID (Continued)

'Cause that's the only way I can truly be an ally, right, is to understand, or get as close as I can to understanding. There was this terrific article in *The New Yorker* about empathy? And how we're actually hard-wired to pick up- to mirror the feelings of other people, and we actually have to train ourselves to ignore other people's pain, like develop the skill - isn't that fascinating? And awful? And like I'm just trying to just-

*(Gestures)*

-pull off this armor, all this decades of iron armor put on me by culture and history, you know, and now I'm asking you to help me pull it off - and it's not your job, I totally get that, it's my job as a white straight male to deal with my armor. But I can only do my job by having empathy, which means you sharing your story and helping me do my job, which is so ironic, right, and... unfair. The whole thing is unfair. But that's what I need to know - what are your unfairnesses, your injustices - that's the first step. Listening. Listening, open and listening.

*(Beat. Curtis nods. Waits to see if he can jump in... looks like it. Starts to speak-)*

DAVID (Continued)

And I'm sorry, just one more thing, I want you to be totally honest. We can't get anywhere unless we both go right down to the core, right, the murky buried scary shit core. That's what I want. And I want to share my shit with you. But only after you've shared your shit with me - white people have been sharing their scary shit for 400 years, right?

DAVID (Continued)

Let's shut up and take shit for once! And that's what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna shut up now and stop blabbing and listen - I'm gonna listen, I'm so sorry for going on and on, I'm sorry, you go. Go.

*(Curtis immediately starts to speak-)*

DAVID (Continued)

And I'm sorry, I just need to apologize again - I just, not just for... the-

*(Gestures behind him)*

-history, everything - but for rattling on just now, I am a total jerk, I'm sorry. That's gotta be one of the hardest things about being black is white people barreling over you, right, and here I was doing it, just totally unconsciously doing it, Jesus, I can't- I am so sorry. You see how far we have to go? How far I have to go - you don't have to go anywhere, you're there, right? I was listening to a podcast about the Ten Hardest Things About Being Black In America, and I'm like - Yes! But Curtis! I need to hear Curtis' Ten Hardest Things! And I will- let me just say this and I'll shut up, I'm gonna shut up, but I've been thinking about this - because even though I will never understand in my soul what it is to be black, I have read a lot and I think that on some level, when I've taken in this diet of dozens of African-American stories and thinkers and biographies, that that collection of knowledge may almost possibly be equal to one personal perspective. You know? You know like, you're one reviewer of a movie I haven't seen and never will see - but if I go to Rotten Tomatoes, there's 200 reviews of that movie, and read all those and that collected knowledge may be of equal value - maybe - to your one personal review. You know? But I still need that one personal review, your review, and you're here now and I'm here now and we should just totally-

*(Curtis quickly, firmly yet gently, puts one finger on David's lips to silence him. David is surprised. Shuts up. Beat. They hold this. David takes this in. Curtis removes his finger)*

DAVID

I'm

*(Curtis holds up a finger for silence. David stops. Beat.)*

DAVID

I just

*(Curtis holds up finger. David stops again. They hold... David consciously not speaking...)*

CURTIS

You don't have to apologize. It's not your fault. It's not *your* fault. Product of your culture. Your generation.

You know, it's difficult to know what to do about this so-called race problem in America. I mean we are inundated with it every day. Especially if we consume social media. Which most of us do. And we are inundated, just drowning in pictures and videos of dead or dying black bodies.

## CURTIS (Continued)

I can't even watch half the stuff that comes up on my feed. Broken black bodies. Dead black bodies. Faces that look my mother, my sister, my cousins. Nieces and nephews. Just drowning in it. When you find the latest news story or viral video of a black teenage girl who gets taken down in broad daylight by an armed police officer twice her size, what do you do? Post the story on Facebook? Let everybody else know that they should know about it? Then what you do? Scroll down and watch a cat video? Get distracted by a quiz about what flavor potato chip you really are? I mean, what else can you do? Right? Product of your culture. You consume black death like entertainment, but couch it in the language of empathy. Like we all do.

I don't think you really want to hear my shit.

*(David starts to object)*

No.

You want other people to hear you say that you want to hear my shit. It's the chic and socially acceptable thing to do. But you don't really want to hear it. Not until it's boiled down and softened. The "African-American Experience" seasoned with that highly palatable *New York Times* flavor. I mean, reading about the "African-American experience" is a little easier than facing the flesh and blood reality of being black in America. Right? Heh, "African-American experience" sounds like a safari ride at Disney World. It's a little easier to get the cream of wheat version of the fallacy of the black monolith. The "African American Experience". And we all get fed that shit, all of us, black, white, whatever. The thing is, when you're brown, when you're black, you've got context for that junk food. We still get it shoved down our throats, but we recognize who's doing the shoving. And it ain't us. And it probably ain't anybody who looks like us. I've got context. You don't. You don't have context because you've got no skin in the game. You've got no skin in the game and you're never going to. Even though we are all made to believe that the fight is black vs. white, you're never going to have any skin in the game. You don't actually have to fight because you are white and an American. You don't have to fight for respectability or consideration. It is assumed that you have it. You have nothing to fight for, so as long as we continue to convince ourselves that the only real fight is black vs. white, you will have no skin in the game. As long as the mainstream picture of black people is relegated to stories about poverty, dropout rates and murder by police, you're never going to have any skin in the game. As long as we use phrases like black-on-black crime but never say anything about white on white crime, you're never gonna have any skin in the game. You're only going to be a witness to the beat down. A voyeur in a genocidal orgy from which you and your children and your children's children will continue to benefit. And there's nothing you can do about it.

## DAVID

But don't you think...

## CURTIS

Nothing. You can do about it. I mean...unless you actually want to shut up and listen. How about this, the next time you're at a social function, a party a fundraiser, whatever, find the oldest person of color in the room, go up to them and ask them if you can ask them a question. Ask them if you can ask. Then ask them a question about their life, any question, and then shut up and listen. Then thank them for answering and walk away. Then, find the youngest person of color in the room and do that again. Then do it again. Then do it again, any and every chance you get. You want to be an ally? Listen to the people you want to foster ally-ship with. Listen and carry their stories with you all the time.

## CURTIS (Continued)

Carry them like the counterweight to the farina stories about what black people's lives are like. Yeah. Do that. Tell me about the African-American experience then.

*(Curtis gets up from the table)*

DAVID

Hey, I didn't...I didn't mean to offend you.

CURTIS

Yeah. I know you didn't.

*(Curtis leaves)*

*(David stares after him)*