The Cornbread Mafia Part 2: A Homegrown Syndicate's Code of ...

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SPEAKERS
Carl Thomas, James Higdon, Question

Carl Thomas 00:00
Okay, here we go. James Higden is a native of Lebanon, Kentucky, where he was educated by the Sisters of Loretto. He holds degrees from Senator College, Brown University and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He is the author of the nearly forgotten history of Portland, Kentucky, and works as a freelance journalist with Bilanz and politico magazine, Entrepreneur magazine, Esquire magazine and the Washington Post. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Hickton. Hi, everybody,

James Higdon 00:47
Yara the fun crowd. This is really a remarkable kind of first time ever sort of event. Never has there been a cornbread event that demanded to be held. And you guys demanded to be at a cornbread event. And so they made time for you. And here we are. So give yourself a round of applause. That's really something. And thanks so much. And in for the introduction. And the Filson is a wonderful institution, this room is fantastic. And really do consider if you're here, if this is your first time here, do consider becoming a member, especially if you’re doing your genealogy research. The resources here for research are really extraordinary. And if you’re doing history work on your family, you should stop by the Filson. And check it out. And you have to pay to come in unless you’re a member. So you might as well be a member. And then you get invited to events for free. And you don't have to get up put on the waitlist and have the second event you can go right into the first event. Now that you get a fit, there's a full crowd here Tuesday night twos really something. So the way I do this is I just kind of talk until folks get frisky enough to start asking questions. And then we do q&a until they make a stop. So you know, we've got we've got a solid hour together, so we're in good shape. So a few things sort of well, they're on my mind. Louisville Metro Council is looking to vote on D prioritizing marijuana possession. I believe that vote might be on Tuesday. So if folks don't have anything better to do, showing up at the Metro Council meeting on Tuesday might be of interest to the room. And then I'd also like to update my biography a bit. I have put the journalism in the book writing aside for the time being I have launched sort of headfirst into the hemp products,
manufacturing space. I'm the co-founder of the cornbread hemp company, which you saw downstairs on your way in. This is the new exciting sort of next chapter of cornbread, in addition to the updated version of the book that has an actual final chapter. This cornbread business is the living next chapter of what we were able to accomplish as time finally caught up with the reality of cannabis legalization in other parts of the country. The whole plant is not yet legal in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, but the hemp plant is and the cornbread hemp company is offering some of the finest products of that variety that you can find. If you didn't sample them on your way in, feel free to check them out on your way out. We're really proud of them. And that's kind of what I'm doing full time now except for coming around and talking to folks like you guys about, you know, the book and in sort of the state of things as it relates to all things cornbread. So, you know, I start off this talk, usually by sort of summarizing for the few people in the room who don't know this story, what we're all here to talk about, and that's this unique and crazy thing that happened in central Kentucky. You know, about 30 years ago, where 70 White Catholic guys from Central Kentucky, Marion Washington, Nelson counties, arrested on 3030 farms and 10 states in the Midwest, with what law enforcement said was 200 tons of marijuana. Of those 70 that were caught, none of them agreed to testify in exchange for a lesser sentence that frustrated federal law enforcement to the degree that they thought that they were going to run kingpin prosecutions against certain individuals that they wanted to that they thought were in charge of this organization. But because no one would talk they had no witnesses. So federal authorities were forced in the summer of 1989. To in June of 1989, so sort of an anniversary to hold a press conference. And at that press conference, they revealed the prosecution case against these guys from Marion County. It was the first time that the phrase cornbread mafia was uttered in public. And they basically rolled out their prosecution case against certain individuals without giving anyone an opportunity to defend themselves. And the Louisville media, the wire services, the national media, kind of ate it up from the law enforcement perspective, really painted my community with a broad brush. I was in middle school at the time. So some of my classmates, his parents, fathers, uncles, were arrested as part of this and caught up in all this stuff. We would have, you'd meet somebody and they say that their dad was away at college. And later you realize what college meant, like college it didn't seem like the college type. It was as growing up in it as as a kid was a strange experience because it was traumatizing to the community. But as a kid, it was, it was difficult to understand the nature of that trauma because at first people like my parents and my parents peers were upset with the men in this organization who brought a bad reputation a bad name, a bad series of headlines to Marion County, again, in Marion County had just spent a long time getting out of from under its last round of bad publicity and the round of bad publicity before that. Lots of people had volunteered country ham days, and Lebanon is still a really big vibrant thing happens every year on my birthday weekend and into September. And ham days was started to give Lebanon a better reputation than it had from the club 68 days to give people something to talk about about Lebanon, that wasn't the club 68. And my parents and lots of their peers volunteered their time to make ham days as good as it could be as best as it could be every year. And the headlines that we got back from Louisville, or cornbread, Mafia, cornbread, Mafia cornbread mafia. So at first, folks were upset with these guys who had had been caught up in this in this growing syndicate. And then later that animosity kind of turned towards being upset against the federal government and the media for for for casting the entire community in a bad light. And it just kind of sat poorly with people. And then they just stopped talking about it, and everyone stopped talking about it. And then it just went away, but didn't go away from me. So then I always kept thinking about because it was something that was certainly unusual and unique about where I came from. And when I went off to school, first to center and then to Brown at Brown. There was lots of very intelligent people who could not find Kentucky on a map and did not want to they they looked at me as being someone I was the first person from Kentucky that ever met. And they looked at me like with the curiosity as if
I were talking dog, right just could barely conceive of the fact that I existed. So they didn't have much to say to me or or pay attention to me, but we were hanging out. And we were talking about where we were from these cornbread stories. When I would roll them out would catch their attention. They say wait a minute, wait a minute, what? And that's a Yeah, our drug dealers had lions, your drug dealers didn't have lions. So I realized that these stories that I had from home had a currency had something that poked through the something that was was unusual enough to be worth be worth talking about a story worth telling. And I came out of brown thinking that I was going to be a writer wanted to be a writer didn't really have anything to write about. And was trying to write this story as fiction. This story as a screenplay in my imagination was just insufficient to carry the burden of the story. And certainly nothing that I imagined was nearly as good as what I ended up finding out. But finding it out telling this true story was something at the time that I thought was just completely impossible. It was just not something that I could conceive of how to do. And I got some feedback as I was sort of sharing the story. When I was living in New York No one told me, Well, this is a true story you should write as a true story. And I remember telling this person well, that's impossible. These people won't talk. It's dangerous. Like, you can't do that. Like it's it's impossible. When I was in New York for 911, and I was in New York for the invasion of Iraq, and I realized while I was there that if I was going to be a writer, I had to do something real. And I, I applied to the Columbia Journalism School, I got into the Columbia Journalism School. And while I was at Columbia, I realized it was a book writing class. There was a, we were in a group of about 200 students. But even inside of Columbia, in the in the class of 200, you had to apply directly to get into this book writing class, run by a legendary New York Times columnist and book writer named Sam Friedman. So I caught him in the hallway one day towards Christmas, and I said, I want to get in that book reading class. And he said, what's the name of your book, and I said, the cornbread mafia. And he said, Send me an email. So even after a long start, that was the beginning of putting all this together, of figuring out how to dive into federal court records and doing open records requests to state law enforcement agencies and federal law enforcement agencies, and finding out information that people didn't want me to know. And then taking that information that I shouldn't know to the people who didn't want me to know it, so they could tell me more stuff that I didn't need to know. And so that's the method by which I put this stuff together, there's some twists and turns along the way it's took should have taken me a year or two to write that book, it took six, that's why it's good and thick. Because I was struggling for a while there was nothing left to do but write and research and report. So I accumulated quite a bit of paperwork along the way. And it became more than just a true crime story about a group of guys who broke the law and inevitably became a social history of a place how these guys in this cornbread mafia business were a manifestation of the, of the rural Catholic culture from which they came. And the similarities between what happened with cornbread guys in the 80s, and what happened with their grandparents during prohibition in the 20s that that comparison became crystal clear to me as I did the work. And I work to make that that comparison, clear in the book as well. And so even though it took me longer than it should have, I feel like in the end, it was it was good for the book and good for the story, even though it wasn't so great for me. But that's that's the short version. The book came out in hardcover in 2012. Came out in paperback in 2013. And then Johnny Boone are books protagonist was apprehended in a shopping mall in Montreal, the week before Christmas of 2016 and that led a series of events that finally gave us a closing to the story and so I wrote a final chapter that's in the new edition that's available downstairs that final chapter is titled is love fugitive America because he was caught in French speaking Montreal the French language press is fascinating and Trent and translating some of these bits of of Montreal journalism about Johnny is was a real pleasure for me to do because it rang true of all the things that people had said about him down here as well that he was polite and quiet, respectful and non cooperative and no one is as far as they the couple of journalist poked around no one could find anything bad about to say about this
guy people were saying he was a really good guy we like he was one of the phrases that I found was Papa ghetto with which translates literally I think is cake father. And so I asked my journalist friend in Montreal does this mean sugar daddy? And he said No, papa get tau is a is a Quebec qua expression in France. It just means a grandfather who dotes on his kids who brings them treats who brings them presents. And so someone refers to Johnny Boone is on pa pagato. Like he's just the friendly grandfather guy, you know, so that really sort of hit close to home made me remember the Johnny boom that I had known before. He went on the run in 2008. And so I was able to wrap that up, put a bow on the final chapter of the book. And sort of at the same time, I was reporting on national national politics in the cannabis beat for Politico magazine and happened to be in Western Kentucky when the hemp harvest came in, well Last year, and I saw what the hemp harvest looked like coming in off of one field, and realize that now all this stuff we talked about, about the hemp in the Farm Bill since 2014, was starting to mature and that this market was a real thing. And it was the perfect time for me to take all this writing and reporting in connection building that I've been doing for several years and translate that into the business space and jumped into the CBD, hemp marketplace at the end of last year, and we launched product April 1. So that's been though the whirlwind tour for me. I just spoke last week at the Kentuckians in New York, a. A club that's existed since 1904. I was there. Speaker for their annual spring dinner. That was last Thursday. And then I was here on Tuesday. I was in Frankfurt last night. And then I'm here tonight with you guys. Well, thank you for thank you for being here. So that's that's that's a lot of talking for me. Let's let's let's see. Let's see your hands in the air we got we got questions. I know we do. Yes, sir. In the back. That's you Yes, sir. Okay, so the question is how was I received when I first released it, when, when the book first came out? So I think my first event was at the Marion County Library and Lebanon, and I recall it being like, you know, there was a there was a heck of a line, we sold a lot of books, I think there was some resistance in the community. When I was working on the book. A lot of people did not want to talk to me, most people did not want to talk to me. But once the book came out, I think there was a lot of interest at home. In the book once it was done, and a lot of people read I had I had lots of women come up to me and say, My husband hasn't read a book since high school. And he read yours in like two days. And I'd say was he looking for his name? And she said yes. So it like, you know, certainly never my intention when I set out to do this, but I did. I feel like quite a bit for literacy in Marion County. I think. I think folks read a book. For the first time in a while I'll get to you. Yes, sir. How did I avoid running into a Hitman is the question. The answer is, they usually threaten you first. Man I got, I got my life threatened a couple of three times doing this work. It's not worth doing IT folks aren't unhappy that you're doing it. And at first, the first death threat you get is kind of unnerving. But once you get one, it's kind of just like, oh, this again. So I'm this tall and this big. And that helped other one that my first death threat came on the telephone. So they didn't know how big or tall I was. They just said if you're gonna come to that house that you call today, you're gonna get killed. It was in Maine, and I didn't know anybody in Maine, but this guy knew that I was coming. And he told me and then he thought, see, the funny thing is, is he thought I was there to kill him. Because he was he was this ex con that the DEA had convinced to come into Marion County wearing a wire to bust the vicar brothers in 1989. So when I just started my reporting, folks who here weren't talking to me, so maybe someone else would talk to me, maybe I'll go to Maine and find these guys, and they'll talk to me. And even though it was hard to find these guys, I can find people I found them. And I called them and told them I was on my way. But what they thought was, I was coming to kill them. Because they had come to Marion County and ratted these guys out and got them in trouble. So they had guilty consciences and thought that they was I was the hitman. Right? So after he threatened to kill me, then I got a call from the Maine State Police asking me what I was doing what I was up to. And I was trying to explain to him and he cut me off and he said, Look, if you just tell me you're not going there tomorrow, we don't have a problem. And there
was my first death threat, so it wasn't thinking real clearly. So I told him, I wouldn't go there tomorrow. If I woulda thought more clearly out and said I'm going there tomorrow and you're coming with me. Let's go together. That had been a great scene in the book, right? But unfortunately, I chickened out on that one. Yes, over here. That was one his question was the same question. Yes, ma'am. So the movie question so thank you. Turns out getting books made into movies is hard. And I've been trying like the devil and I'm feel like I'm really close. Although every time I feel close. It's LA, and someone's like, oh, well, you know, everyone's gone until Labor Day. So it's a difficult process. I've sold the option twice now it's it's in its second option period with a with a second production company. I really hope that it's less of a movie. The goal is Netflix series or paid cable series, get more play out of that way more more narrative out of the story. If we can do a whole first season that's just set in 1970. There'll be a lot better than just then one two hour movie that that goes through the whole thing. So working on it, there's a team in place, there's a producer, there's a pilot script, there's all kinds of stuff. There's just not a greenlight yet. So it's it's been a very stress inducing process that I wish I could tell you that it was done. But if I say anything, I will just jinx it. Yes, sir. Are there any public companies today selling hip? This is a good question that there are several are spinning off and going public. There's several IPOs I know planned for this year for this stuff. Several cannabis companies like Western State full scale marijuana companies have hemp spin offs, that then that's hemp spin off is going public because the hemp companies can now go public but the full scale marijuana companies cannot is canopy involved in southern so canopy is the big marijuana company in Canada. And they have a degree in principle with an American marijuana company called acreage acreage holding when it becomes legally federally canopy and acreage you're gonna do a deal. I think canopy also has some interest in him companies in America, but off the top of my head. I don't know which ones they are. Yes, sir.

Question 22:00
heard you say that in 1989, and federal government use the term cornbread mafia for the first time? What's the origin of that term? I think there's a discrepancy about where it came from.

James Higdon 22:11
Sure. Sure. So the question is, what the origin of the term corporate mafia? So the answer is, it's hard to know that the origin seems unclear. There's, you know, the, there's seems to be several fathers of the phrase, the only thing we know for sure is it's first issued publicly in this press conference. By the by the law. I know some people in Marion County say they came up with it. I know Johnny Boone told me that the first time he heard it, as a phrase was when he was in a jail cell on the TV. So it certainly wasn't on his end that it came from. I know a retired FBI agent who says that he came up with it, but I don't think that's right. But it's it's it's a mystery that never quite got to the bottom of Sure thing.

Question 23:00
For a long time, you get a chance to visit with

James Higdon 23:05
Canada. So the question is about Johnny boons housing after he left. So he wasn't extradited, I thought extradited to he was just deported to the border. So there wasn't like an extradition hearing. He was just deported to the border of Vermont and US Marshals took custody of him there. So then he was in the Oldham County jail before his sentencing hearing. So I guess he was there for almost a year, all which counted for time served on his eventual sentence. So when I started talking to Johnny, back in 2007, one of the stipulations he put on our conversations was that I was not to talk about them to anyone. And when I would go out in public, people would say, Oh, you're writing a book like Johnny Boone's. Here, you should talk to Johnny. And go and introduce me to Johnny, even though I had just seen Johnny earlier that day, I had to pretend like I was just meeting Johnny for the first time. So in the spirit of that agreement, I don't think it'd be right for me to talk about whether or not I've been in communication with Johnny. But I think my understanding is he's in a minimum security facility now in Ohio. And his release date is February of 21. Should be in a halfway house by election day of 2020. And we're all looking forward to him being home. Yes, sir. So the question is about Riverside and Bradfords Ville and some killings that went on in Riverside but which What are you talking about? You talk about Gerlinde Russell killings? Are you talking about some other killing? I don't know either. Way Oh that's the garland Russell stuff in the book so what about that

**Question 25:05**

well did they find it

**James Higdon 25:08**

oh so garland Russell disappears for good forever and did they find who killed garland Russell or whether going Russell's killed like I think that's still a mystery I think garland Russell's still owns property and Ray wick I don't think he's ever been declared legally dead Johnny's age is you know 75 ish His birthday is in September but off the top of my head I don't know I don't know his exact age. Yes sir.

**Question 25:38**

plane that landed at Bodensee in the middle of the night, and apparently they said it was loaded with marijuana up there do you know if there was any connections between the parties?

**James Higdon 25:58**

So this is one of my favorite little stories this plane gets abandoned on Bowman field runway the My understanding is it was a DC three which is a world war two cargo plane. So when this gets abandoned in 1979 It's already considered a dinosaur no one knows where it came from. It just shows up and it's described in the in the police reports as being filled with marijuana residue and empty champagne crates. So whoever left that was having a good time. I know so. So a couple things about this point, the gray plane that's sitting at Bowman field now I thought forever was the plane but that's not the plane. So when you go see that gray plane at Bowman feel you they can was that the plane? No, that's not the plane. The plane that was abandoned I
investigation that is in cornbread, is courtesy of outcrosses reporting and this forethought that was the folder the had kept on the Charlie Stiles investigation. So much of the Charlie Stiles were talking in this house and came back with a inch thick and gave it to me, and We went over a bunch of this reporting at the time. And then he disappeared one day when we different ways. But outcross was very generous with me, gave me lots of time and interviews. We went over a bunch of his reporting at the time. And then he disappeared one day when we were talking in his house and came back with a folder that an inch thick and gave it to me, and that was the folder he had kept on the Charlie Stiles investigation. So much of the Charlie Stiles investigation work that is in cornbread, is courtesy of outcrosses reporting and his forethought
to keep hope to hang on to that file that someday it was going to be useful in the way he used it as he let me have it. Yes, sir. So what drew me to the hemp industry, so I was sort of in the bleacher seats for the hemp industry from the start. Agriculture Commissioner Jamie comer, when he was at Commissioner invited me to be part of the original hemp commission that he seeded in 2013, because it was the year after my book had come out. So I already kind of had made a name for myself in the space. And so from that hemp commission was able to meet and see and talk to all the the the first Rounders, the early adopters, the people who are in Him first, sort of saw them get started in 2013 2014. Watched Jamie comer get the hemp legalization stuff passed through the legislature. So I was just always in the bleacher seats on it. And like I said, I wrote two stories last year for national publications on hip and various parts of the Farm Bill. And it was then that I realized that it was matured, and it was ready to go. And the book writing has been really good, but this was an opportunity to get in. And if I didn't take the opportunity when I took it I was going to be in the bleacher seats forever. Yes sir. Well, the well the opportunity it's not every day that a billion dollar industry goes online overnight. Yes, sir. So what was the economic impact of cornbread business and what was the first part of the question? How sophisticated were they? So at first not very sophisticated and money laundering laws weren't real sophisticated either, right? It was pretty easy to move money around. So, you know, sophisticated in kind of low key ways like Lebanon, for a town of its size, had way too many used car lots. Like, in retrospect, like why are all these used car lots here because a used car lots a great way to move a bunch of $10,000 transactions in cash every day on the books. And you get one of those late model Lincoln's or Ltd, or a Cadillac from like 7980 Those trunks that are real real big, and I'm told that about 120 550 pounds of marijuana, one of those trunks which is a lot but if you take eight of those cars, you put them on a car carrier and fill all their trunks you got about you know, you got 1000 pounds, you got to you know, you can you can push a ton. And the you can take that car carrier and you can take it anywhere. Right so you can drive that to California if you need to. It's just a carload it's just it's just a tractor pull and a bunch of old Mercury LTDs or, or I guess their Ford LTDs mercury. Our keys they Grand Marquis, you know, the big cars with a big trunk so sophisticated in that way, would they learned you couldn't bury your money because when you dug it up, it was brittle. And the bankers could tell he'd been underground. So so. So the way you fix that is you get your backhoe and you dig a trench, and then you put some deep freeze coolers down there. You put your cash in the deep freeze, and the duct tape the seal and covered up and then your cash is good and you know, airtight. So they're sophisticated that way, right. But my father, during all this time owns a grocery store. So, you know, he's he talks freely about these cornbread guys coming in, and spending cash in his business, buying stakes buying appliances, buying, buying, you know, buying the good stuff and paying cash. For small business owners like my father. These guys were, you know, contributing to the local economy. Now, how much money are we talking about? It's hard to say like how, like, are any of these guys going to tell me how much money they made? Like, like No, other than saying that they you know, lost more than I'd ever see. Which you know, like, probably make sense. And it's probably true. But one metric I was able to put my finger on one thing I was able to determine about the money was that the Federal Reserve had to alter its armored car delivery schedule, to Lebanon, because of the cash. Right, like the regular route wasn't cutting it. So that gives you an idea what we're talking about. Yes, sir. air conditioned, do the nuns ever get their hospital air conditioned. So in this book, there's this story called The hot air conditioner incident. And I grew up my whole life hearing this story. And I knew when I was a child that this story was just not true. It was the kind of story that one person would start telling and then double over in laughter and someone else would have to pick up the baton and tell the next part of it because they just couldn't one person just couldn't finish it. And the short version of the story is that in the late 60s, the nuns who ran What's now springview Hospital in Lebanon, wanted to air condition the hospital. And someone told them it was going to take $100,000 for window units in the hospital. And so the
nuns and other people in the community held bake sales, they held team dances. Every tobacco farmer donated a Hogshead of tobacco to the air conditioned fund. There was this community wide effort to get air conditioners in the hospital what more of a you no community need, could there be then an air conditioned hospital and after a year, they had raised something like $7,000 and change. And so someone approached the nun who was the administrator of the hospital and said, How would you like 50 air conditioners for $10,000 cash? And that nun said, Yes. She wrote a check for 10 grand to the bank. I've seen the check number because it was in the police file. Again, I could not believe when I was going through this as a reporter that any of this was true, was confident none of this was and the As he were unloading the air conditioners, were unloading them into an ambulance garage, and someone saw who was unloading them and thought, well, that's not right. And so that person called the police. So let me take a step back. So we're in a period of time talking about the high point of GE appliance Park and beautiful when beautiful, was really home. And it was essentially the Detroit for home appliances, every washing machine and refrigerator and stove in America was made in beautiful practically. And it was such a large operation that that GE plant was the one of the first private owners of one of those ENIAC supercomputers that was a computer like the size of this room that ran on punch cards. And first they used it for payroll. And then they developed it as a means of a new form of UPC code, like a preliminary form of the of UPC code, every appliance that they that they manufactured, had a unique punch card. And they put an envelope on the outside of the box and put three or four punch cards in that envelope. And when when that shipment left the loading dock, someone would pull one card when it got to where it was going, they would send in another card, they will run all these through the computer, then the computer would know what items left when where they ended up when they sold and they could keep track of it like an inventory system. Except the engineers as smart as they were never anticipated. Guys from Ray wick showing up. And what these guys from Ray wick figured out as if you pulled these envelopes off these boxes, and then ever ran through the computer once the computer never knew they existed in the first place. And so you could just go and steal truckloads of appliances from GE and they never know. They just went missing. So all these side by side refrigerators and like avocado, green and harvest gold. And what's that brown color? Copper copper tone. So you so you're with me, so lots of those for cheap and Lebanon back in the day. Like if you needed a side by side refrigerator, someone knew someone who could get the unit cheap, like you're not paying full retail for that refrigerator, right. So when the state police show up at the hospital in the ambulance garage to look at these air conditioners. The first thing they do is they bring in some engineers from General Electric, some executives from GE to eyeball them. And what the GE guys tell the police officers is we make this air conditioner that we have no record that we've made these air conditioners so the ones ended up getting two free air conditioners, the two that they've installed in like the maternity ward, they get to keep the rest go back. And I think the nuns get their 10 grand back. If memory serves. I think everything just kind of goes back the way it was because they couldn't prove they were stolen because they couldn't prove that they ever existed. I think if that's taxing my memory, but I think that's right. When I was reporting the book, I went to go see Sister Mary Dominic Stein, she was at the infirmary at St. Catherine in Springfield, she was in her 90s. And she was the administrator during this time it was her sister, Mary Dominic Stein, who signed this check that I had a copy of. And so I was went to talk to her about all this stuff, and asking her all these questions because I was really interested. And she stopped me like halfway through and she said, you know, you're asking me things that I've spent my whole life trying to forget. And I was like you're doing great, though you're doing great. This is really good stuff. So eventually that place got air conditioned, but it wasn't that summer. In the back with the growing legalization of marijuana, do you think Johnny kind of goes unjustly convicted? does. So does Johnny fill unjustly convicted? And do I see a future for him in the legal industry? So it was February of 2008. I was minding my own business in
Lebanon. And Johnny came to see me for once it was like the first time Johnny came to me and I was like, oh, but he was just making his rounds. He was come by to say hello. But I remember when it was because it was in the middle of primary election season in 2008. When Barack Obama was Senator Barack Obama running for president, and it was the night he had won the DC, Maryland, Virginia primary. And he was giving a speech, I believe in Madison, Wisconsin for the next thing. And I had it on TV and Johnny Boone came over. And we were watching this Obama speech together. And Johnny asked me, Do you think this guy, whatever make it legal so that I can make $1? Like, Johnny? I don't know. And it turns out, the answer was no. Brock Obama did not make it legal, even though he could have on his way out, I believe. So whatever reason he didn't. So I do think from that conversation that Johnny probably feels unjustly convicted, although again, I don't want to speak for him. Do I see a future for him in the industry, the industry as it becomes legal has done everything it can to keep people like Johnny Boone out. Because people in charge for whatever reason want to feel like even though they're changing the law that they they don't want to feel like they were ever wrong, right. So even these people who are losing the fight, people who want to keep marijuana illegal in her losing that fight, even as they lose, they still get a pound of flesh out of it. As the farm bill passes and hemp gets legal. There was a proposed felon ban in the farm bill that no one with any drug conviction ever could participate in the hemp program, which is completely counterintuitive. In my mind, you want people with the experience in the industry, that's where they belong. But because people in Washington DC, for whatever reason want to feel like they're still right, even though they've been proven wrong. People like Johnny Boone are getting squeezed out. Now, I did some reporting on that proposed felon band and then went from a lifetime felon ban to a 10 year felon ban. So some people are able to slide in if they're felonies are far enough in their pasts. But for people fresh out of prison on drug charges that are looking for work, they have a barrier to entry to get into the hemp business. Even the legal hemp business, which is not even regulated anymore by the Department of Justice is regulated by the Department of Agriculture. But because the way it was legalized, there's a barrier for them getting in. Now they can't hold licenses. But what some former convicted people formerly incarcerated people in other states have done is they've become consultants. So they can't touch the product. But they can show the license holder, Do this, do that, and point and consult and get paid good money as consultants, he could also probably work on the marketing side of it without touching product again. So there's probably definitely something for him to do when he gets out in the space. But it's going to be a creative cut out that hasn't been envisioned by the people who are trying to keep people like him out of it. Yes, sir. So the question is about John Boehner, former Speaker of the House. It's interesting because John Boehner has recently been hired by a company called acreage holdings that we were discussing earlier, acreage Holdings is a marijuana investment group in New York that owns grow houses in Gosh, six states or so now. John Boehner, as Speaker of the House, went out of his way to prevent Washington DC from going full legal, and then as he after he retired from Congress started taking checks from acreage holdings. Now, my read on this is that John Boehner, his role at acreage holdings, is to convince potential investors that their risk is low. That legalization is inevitable, because I John Boehner, and now employed by these guys, and I'm telling you the water's fine. Right, but he's done nothing to address his past political opposition to this issue and what his opposition the damage that his opposition has wrought. He's just cashing a check and telling investors that the risk is low. Yes, sir. Sure, so clip 68 was a bit before my time. But I'm happy to tell you what I know about who played there and what the scene was and why it was special and weird and why Louisville press like the courier journal went out of its way to be upset about it. What made club CCA special was that it was a it was a club built on the white side of town with black music. So it's a safe place for white kids to go hear black music, and that's what made it click right and also highly in George who who built club 68 and a number of the smart things that he did was that club CCA did not sell hard liquor. There was a set We're at liquor store on the property
called 68 Liquor where you could go and get your half pint of wild turkey or whatever you were going to fight with later. And club 68 Proper only served can beer, and that minute can have a dance hall license, which meant 16 year olds could go there. So by not serving liquor at the counter, you were able to get teenagers in the door. Which is why kids from the carloads and Louisville would go down there because if you could get in the door and reach the counter you could drink because Haile was also mayor and so therefore ran the police department and that's another it was Lebanon. But yes, sir. Okay Yes, sir. Loves to love cherry cherry. All the loyal man got their start. So, the monarch exile what made Lebanon special even before these bands from Louisville would come down? What made Lebanon click is that it was on the Chitlin Circuit. And what that means is the Chitlin Circuit was where black performers could play during segregation, where they weren't allowed into the major dance halls, the major theatres in cities because those were white only. Right? So these performers that were top, you know, like historically, like the best that there was, couldn't play in the nice places. So they had to play in rundown places. So they ended up playing in places like Lebanon. So Lebanon had the rail line that went to winter, Chicago on one end, and Atlanta on the other. We were a wet County, so we had liquor, and we had just enough black people in Lebanon to make it interesting. And consequently, club cherry on the railroad track was originally a black club. That's really the first one. And in 1951, Little Richard comes up by train from Georgia, and he plays for a year at Club Jerry. Now in little Richard's autobiography, he says Lucille was begun as a song about a drag queen in Decatur, Georgia named Miss Sonia. But he doesn't ever really cover when Lucille becomes Lucille. But the bar manager the manager of club cherry was Lucille Eastland. And we know Little Richard was playing in Lebanon in 1951. He doesn't record Lucile until 1953. So among the legacies of of early rock and roll that Lebanon brings a world is pretty sure we named Lucille but then after him I can Tina Turner played at least a dozen times they built a relationship with highly George he would treat him really well. Lots of people have memories of I continue to playing. Jimi Hendrix comes in because he was training in the 82nd airborne and Fort Campbell broke his ankle ends up in Nashville, playing around in Nashville and then plays in Lebanon before he goes to New York. So the number of people who came through Lebanon was was was really impressive musically speaking. Yes, sir. Are there are there is there marijuana in the Daniel Boone forest? The answer is yes. Or so I've heard now let me tell you why. The reason that is is not like marijuana growers are like you know what I want to grow marijuana and Daniel Boone. The reason why marijuana growers would decide to grow in a on federal land is to dodge property seizure and asset forfeiture laws. Because the way it is now if you grow marijuana on your land, they come and take your land. And they're pretty heavy handed about it. So if we don't want people growing marijuana in our national parks in our national forests, which we don't we should end property seizure laws. Yep. Yeah, everybody, is there buried money in Lebanon, like everybody out with metal detectors on weekends? I haven't seen much of that, but I wouldn't. I wouldn't be surprised if someone was hunt for money. I mean, there is one story I talked about in the book. Some kids find 20 grand in cash in a barn and turn it into the cops like we found all this money. And then the property owner sues the kids and takes the money I forget exactly what happens but no one's happy. So But those days seem like are long in the past the state police helicopters pretty much putting in to the the big cash days. Hard to hide an acre marijuana these days like like it was back then. When the first helicopter went up over Marin County in 1980, the first helicopter in the state of Kentucky that the state police ran marijuana spotting operations on the first time they had a helicopter, they flew over Marion County. And in one weekend, they found 45 acres of marijuana. Now if you know what an acre is, and you know what marijuana is, it's a lot and and those days are gone. Right? Because the helicopters you can't do that anymore. So if there's buried money, it's long ago buried it's like, you know, like, like pirate treasure at this point. We got time for a couple more. Yes, ma'am. Okay, I'm having trouble hearing you. Was the quarter horse industry commingled in? I haven't heard. I mean, I can understand how the horse
industry would get tied up in it. I don't have any sources on that. If you'd ask me about like, auto racing or like motorcycle racing and things like that, that seem to be connected to it in one way or another, but I've never heard Quarter Horses being being a horses in general. It's been. My parents still live in Lebanon and big house in Spalding Avenue. Yes, sir. Now, what's the difference? Between that and now? The amount of so the question is about how much illegal marijuana has been grown in Kentucky now versus then? I think most of the marijuana has been. My parents still live in Lebanon and big house in Spalding Avenue. Yes, sir. Now, what's the difference? Between that and now? The amount of so the question is about how much illegal marijuana has been grown in Kentucky now versus then? I think most of the marijuana has been.

*Helicopters by DEA state police and National Guard have done a decent job of suppressing domestic marijuana production outdoor marijuana production in Kentucky. It's nowhere near what it used to be. It's my understanding that now the biggest source for marijuana in Kentucky is probably ups. Right? It comes in on planes from Colorado and California. Yes, sir. Number of people started in advance. Yes, sir.*

**Question 57:40**

A lot of them are exposed to marijuana.

**James Higdon 57:46**

So yeah, so the question is what impacted the Vietnam War have on the marijuana growing in Marion County? And I think the answer is it was it was it was a catalyst for it right. Before the Vietnam War, these guys had you know, the the hot air conditioner incident is right before Vietnam. So the outlaw generation at the time was pretty much focused on stolen appliances. The moon shining days and prohibition were sort of in the in the rearview mirror and like a generation passed. The kids go off to Vietnam, and in Vietnam, they realized the value of marijuana and other parts of the country. And because it had been grown in Marion County during World War Two, it was still being it's still grew wild behind grand granddad's barn, and they realized that it was valuable at like $1,000 a pound or what have you, all you had to do is grow it and not get caught, and not getting caught was no problem for them. And growing things by the acre wasn't either. So Vietnam was definitely sort of a catalyst that ramped this stuff up in a big way. Because not only do they realize the value of marijuana at the time, but being in the Army in the military, and then coming back gave them an instant sort of nationwide network of like minded veterans in different parts of the country where they can move product. Yes, ma'am. Oh, gosh, you're gonna really get me in trouble. So so the question is about crystal Rogers in Bardstown, Crystal Rogers, one of five or six victims, how many how many murders we talked in in Bardstown. A separate interview for that oxygen network, documentary and I was sweating bullets through that too. Like, like, that's what this is what's gonna get me killed talking about this. Right. So Well, I mean, you know, I'll talk about it. I mean, it's bad. It's not good. I mean, they had a guy on the hook for perjury with two witnesses contradicting him. And then the two witnesses recanted. They had let the guy go and they locked up the two witnesses for perjury. I mean, I don't know what's like. I don't know why they if there's something going on in Bardstown, you figure somebody would have wrapped it up by now. Not just a crystal Rogers but the Jason Ellis and Chris Rogers his father, he got the mother and daughter who were killed in their home care rigged in Marion County seems to maybe be connected to that as well. It's no good that's a that's a downer. We can't even on that one. Hold on just seconds over here. Yeah, one more...
Question 1:00:35

question. Damn network at this thing. Drug dealers? Nobody brandy Jeff Brown is almost what do you tribute that?

James Higdon 1:00:43

So question about the code of silence. The 70 guys are arrested. None of them talked. And it's incredibly rare. In fact, when I was talking to a retired New York City police detective about this, he was like, really none of them. I mean, the reason why we know about Goodfellas is because Henry Hill was a rat, right? We wouldn't know anything about the Italian Mob if it wasn't for rats. And for 70 guys to stick it out. It's it's about this Catholic culture that was instilled for generations. Since prohibition, when federal agents would come in and arrest the father, the kids learned that the only way to the only thing they could do was to keep quiet. And that that silence to protect others was sort of hardwired and instilled in the whole community for generations. And when it came down when it when it was when it was time to demonstrate what was important to them as members of the community. They all stuck together. It was like the most impressive thing about this story. It was definitely not fear of retribution. It was all instilled in the culture. Thanks a lot. Thanks, everybody.