

Episode 206: “The Pro-Human Answer to Intolerance & Racism” with Bion Bartning

Announcer ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists and thinkers, fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing, interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:25](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. Increasingly American institutions, colleges, universities, businesses, government, the media, and even our children's schools are enforcing a cynical and intolerant orthodoxy. This orthodoxy requires us to identify ourselves and each other based on immutable characteristics like skin color, gender, and sexual orientation. It pits us one against the other and diminishes what it means to be human.

([01:00](#)):

Last week I had Sahar Tartak on the show, a college freshman at Yale who'd penned an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal [inaudible 00:01:10] High School in Long Island had become, and what she had to go through to stand up for her views that she didn't think some of the curriculum should be taught.

([01:24](#)):

Anyways, a terrific show and I've got it as a companion to this show, and I hope you'll watch them both together. I was so interested, she's not only a freshman at Yale, but she's also a fellow with the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism, which also is known as FAIR.

([01:40](#)):

And FAIR was founded by Bion Bartning, who's also an entrepreneur and investor. He founded a personal care company called eos Products, which sells egg-shaped lip balm. I think I may be a customer for that, but he's got an incredibly interesting resume filled with achievement.

([02:04](#)):

So I wanted to bring him on to talk about FAIR, talk about the issues, and understand what's at stake, because certainly America is being divided by identity politics and identity culture, and we need to do something about it. So Bion, welcome. Glad you're here.

Bion Bartning ([02:21](#)):

Bill, thank you so much for having me on. The pronunciation of my name is Bion like Zion, but thank you so much for having me on your show.

Bill Walton ([02:30](#)):

Well, it's an exotic name, Bion Bartning. What's your background?

Bion Bartning ([02:35](#)):

So the short answer to my name is my mom was, I would say a child of the '60s and wanted me to have a different, a unique name. So Bion means life in ancient Greek. My particular ancestry is Mexican and Yaqui on my father's side, and Ashkenazi Jewish on my mother's side.

([03:03](#)):

And I've always felt that my background makes me a pretty normal American because I think that we're a country that is comprised of people with really diverse backgrounds who have a lot of things that are different and unique about themselves, but really are united in being part of this amazing country.

Bill Walton ([03:25](#)):

Well, that's why I wanted to have you on, I couldn't agree more. And I think one of the things that make America great is we're built on an idea that we are all equal and that there's an opportunity for everyone, and that's been distorted.

([03:40](#)):

And we're right in the middle of this affirmative action case now in front of the Supreme Court, which I'm sure you're following, and it'll be interesting to see how that plays out. When did you found FAIR and what was the specific impetus?

Bion Bartning ([03:59](#)):

So I launched FAIR last March, so about a year and a half ago. And the impetus for me was an experience that I had with my children's school. My kids were at a private school in New York City, which we loved. It was just a warm, wonderful community. And coming out of the summer of 2020, the killing of George Floyd, the riots, all of the turmoil in our society, the school rolled out a new approach to teaching young children.

([04:35](#)):

My kids at the time were in second grade and fourth grade, and the school rolled out a new anti-racist curriculum, which when I really dug into it was, in every sense of the word, racist and was teaching children to see themselves fundamentally as defined by the color of their skin, by their immutable characteristics instead of seeing each other as unique individuals who are united by our shared humanity.

([05:12](#)):

And so when I saw that, at first I thought the school had just picked something off the shelf, they thought that they needed to do something, and they had chosen an anti-racist curriculum that was just the wrong one.

([05:28](#)):

And when I dug into the issue further, I realized that Riverdale Country School was not the only school that was going down this path, that a lot of our institutions, including some of the civil liberties organizations like the ACLU or the Anti-Defamation League, really embraced this same reductionist, flattening, dehumanizing approach to really addressing real issues of racism and bias in our society.

Bill Walton ([05:58](#)):

Well, you've-

Bion Bartning ([05:58](#)):

Sorry, Bill, go ahead.

Bill Walton ([06:02](#)):

You've assembled already an incredible advisory board and gathered thousands of people in your network, and it seems like you've ramped this very quickly. I guess there are a lot of us that share your view. Who's been joining this and where do you see this going next?

Bion Bartning ([06:25](#)):

It's been a very diverse coalition of people. So we have on our board of advisors, people who are left of center, people who are right of center. We have one woman who says that she's a Marxist, but believes in the ideals that FAIR is advocating for. So our approach is really to pitch a very wide tent of where people from very diverse backgrounds, ancestries, ideologies can come together.

([07:03](#)):

And really the unifying theme is that it's a group of people who really believe in the principles and the mission that FAIR stands for, which is to advance civil rights and liberties for all Americans and to promote a common culture based on fairness, understanding, and humanity. And that sounds like something that everyone should be able to embrace.

([07:26](#)):

I think there are some people, I think, who don't embrace that approach and really see the world in terms of tribes, in terms of having people who are different from each other, maybe have different physical appearance, different physical characteristics, and putting those people into different buckets, into different categories and really pitting us against each other.

([07:54](#)):

And so I think what FAIR is all about is overcoming those divisions and advancing what we refer to as a pro-human approach to addressing issues of racism.

Bill Walton ([08:08](#)):

Well, there's a view, and I think I share this view, and James Lindsay, I've had on the show writes and talks a lot about cultural Marxism and critical race theory and the 1619 Project and the fact that whiteness is a ... In fact the Smithsonian had an exhibit on whiteness, which is an extremely interesting exhibit to take a look at.

([08:39](#)):

But it seems like a lot of this is not driven by an idealism, it's driven by the desire for power among these groups, and that if you define everything as racist in different groups, and there's an out group that's supposed to have more than the in group, which is typically just white people, it seems like they've created a zero sum game where we're not working together and you've got it, then they want it. But what is your take on that?

Bion Bartning ([09:11](#)):

I think that John Haidt, who wrote *The Coddling of the American Mind* really described this best, and I'll paraphrase what he said to me when we spoke, but essentially we're all born with a button on our forehead that if you push it, it invokes that tribal instinct that I think is latent in every human being.

([09:35](#)):

So I think that whatever the origin is of this, whatever name we want to call it, I think ultimately when we push that button and when we tell people that they are inherently different and divide them up in this way, I think that you're going to have conflict, you're going to have power struggles, you're going to have all of those issues.

[\(09:58\)](#):

I don't know that everyone who participates in these really bad ideas really understands how bad they are and is necessarily driven by a desire for power or for resources. But ultimately, I think that the way that you defeat these bad ideas is by promoting the positive approach, right?

[\(10:25\)](#):

Because I think when you get down into the trenches and you start to see things through that lens of division and you buy into the racialization of everyone, I think that that ultimately perpetuates these ideas, even the people who think that they're fighting against them.

[\(10:48\)](#):

So I think that what's really important is that we rise above the pettiness of this ideology that has permeated so many of our institutions, and that we really get back to the fundamentals of, I think the wisdom of our founding fathers in this country, and we really embrace the concept that all men were created equal, and that we really stand up for those ideals and we don't get dragged down into the petty divisions that I think are consuming so much of our society and so many of our institutions.

Bill Walton [\(11:27\)](#):

How did you find Sahar or did she find you?

Bion Bartning [\(11:32\)](#):

Sahar found us.

Bill Walton [\(11:33\)](#):

Tell us about that story. She's compelling and her story is compelling.

Bion Bartning [\(11:38\)](#):

Yeah, Sahar is amazing. And Sahar and her father connected with us. They wanted some support for what she was dealing with at her high school in Long Island, New York. And I think what's happening in Sahar's school is very similar to what happened at my kid's school at Riverdale Country School in New York City. It's what's happening, I think at many schools across this country, but frankly many workplaces as well, many cultural institutions. And so Sahar reached out. She is a gifted young woman who has-

Bill Walton [\(12:21\)](#):

True.

Bion Bartning [\(12:22\)](#):

But she has a really unique mix of curiosity, courage, and compassion. So she really understands these issues and I think she's an effective messenger for these ideals that we're advocating for. So we're really thrilled to have been able to support FAIR and thrilled to have her involved.

Bill Walton [\(12:45\)](#):

Well, her story, and for those of you who haven't had a chance to catch the other episode we did with Sahar, is that she was a student at Great Neck North High School in Long Island, and she was directed by the school officials to write a \$375 check to fund a racial equity group that was going to speak to the student body about systemic racism.

[\(13:12\)](#):

Well, she wasn't really sure she wanted to do that, and she didn't know enough about it. And she very courageously, I might add she was the student body treasurer and responsible for the checkbook and she just simply refused to sign the check.

[\(13:29\)](#):

And as I said, everything broke loose at that point and she had a series of meetings and confrontations with her teachers and school officials, and eventually she took it to the school board, and we've got her presentation to the school board on our website. And what an extraordinary, courageous young woman.

[\(13:49\)](#):

Now, you helped her through your litigation group. Don't you have a group of lawyers that helped her with the Freedom of Information Act requests and some of the other things that she did, she needed?

Bion Bartning [\(14:02\)](#):

Actually, Sahar didn't really need much in the way of legal support. Definitely there are people who need legal support and FAIR provides legal support to people who need that. I think what most people need, and this would include Sahar, is they need to feel that they're part of a community. They need to feel that there are people backing them up who are supporting them, who can help them with messaging, with how to talk about these ideas.

[\(14:35\)](#):

Because one of the things about these ideologies that have permeated our institutions is that they are using language, manipulating language in a way that makes it very difficult for normal people to oppose them, because if somebody comes in and says, "I'm bringing anti-racism to your institution," and anti-racism means opposing racism, who could be opposed?

Bill Walton [\(15:08\)](#):

Who could be against that?

Bion Bartning [\(15:11\)](#):

So one of the things that we've been focused on is really helping people to have a conversation in a way where they don't end up falling into the trap that's being set by some of the language that's being used. So-

Bill Walton [\(15:31\)](#):

Isn't that Ibram X. Kendi that coined that one? I mean, he has a great knack for putting really bad ideas into very attractive terms.

Bion Bartning [\(15:41\)](#):

Yes. No, Ibram Kendi I think has promoted the anti-racist, which actually I will point out, So Daryl Davis, who has been involved with FAIR from the beginning, he's one of the leaders. I'm a huge personal fan of Daryl. And Daryl, in case you're not familiar with him, Bill, or your listeners-

Bill Walton [\(16:01\)](#):

No, I don't know him.

Bion Bartning ([16:02](#)):

Daryl is a black blues musician who is best known for having convinced hundreds of members of the Ku Klux Klan to leave the organization. And he did that through the pro-human approach. He actually befriended these people and helped them to see past skin color. And so I think that that's really the approach that we need to be taking is embracing people as human beings and seeing them as human beings.

Bill Walton ([16:33](#)):

Where do you get pushback? Just like anti-racism is a term that it's hard to dispute, it seems like what you're doing is so unexceptional and so worthwhile. What kind of reception are you getting?

Bion Bartning ([16:52](#)):

I would say we are having a lot of positive reception from a lot of people. I think there are a lot of people who have felt these ideas who were struggling to articulate what they objected to about the approach to anti-racism, the approach to diversity, equity, inclusion that was being taken in their institutions.

([17:20](#)):

And I think that one of the things that we're doing that's unique and I think important is that our approach is to really reclaim the words, reclaim the language. So we're not rejecting the term anti-racism, we're not rejecting the term diversity, the term equity, the term inclusion, we're just insisting on what those words really mean to the vast majority of people.

([17:45](#)):

The word equity means the quality of being fair and impartial. That's why it's a word that's been used by people who are pushing discrimination and calling it equity. So our approach is to say, "Of course we believe in equity," but then we can argue or push back on the bad ideas and we don't get caught up in this battle over language where we're giving people ownership of these words that have so much power.

Bill Walton ([18:12](#)):

When you roll this out, are you going into the institutions? It seems like you could set up chapters in universities or businesses or even the military, which has been badly damaged by these bad ideas. I mean, if there's any unit of human beings needing to work together without seeing race, sex, or any other differences, it's a military unit, particularly a combat unit. And it seems like now we're creating such divisions that we're losing our combat effectiveness.

Bion Bartning ([18:47](#)):

I think that's a great point, and frankly, the military has a long history of really helping to move our society forward on a lot of these issues. So yes, we have a chapter network, we have a grassroots network of people. I think we're in just over 40 states at this point.

([19:10](#)):

We have thousands of people who have signed up and joined FAIR, a lot of people who are very actively engaged with their local schools, with their local cultural institutions. We have a FAIR in the Arts network, which is really focused on these issues with the arts community. We have a legal network which is focused on these issues within the legal profession.

([19:36](#)):

And then obviously on the education front, that's a big area of focus. Both within K through 12 and higher education, I think we're seeing a lot of these really bad ideas taking root. And I would say the source of a lot of this has been our higher education institutions.

[\(19:55\)](#):

So I think you can't really treat this without addressing what's happening in our universities because it's like a toxic waste spill. If you only clean up the toxic waste, but you don't deal with the source of the pollution, you're never going to solve the problem. So I think that part of really addressing these issues and bringing a healthy, constructive approach to these issues is going to require dealing with it in our universities.

Bill Walton [\(20:28\)](#):

Now, your background, you're an MBA from Columbia, I think. A pretty good school. I'm sure it has its own issues with curriculum, but we can talk about that later. And you've been a very successful marketing maven, and you've created a product that's been successful. I think you worked for American Express in one of their groups. I mean, what of these skills are you bringing to rolling this out, because you've moved very quickly in a very short time?

Bion Bartning [\(21:04\)](#):

I mean, for me, I think the understanding of branding, marketing, the power of words was very important. I think that really helped to guide our approach, our strategy, our tactics for how we're going to address these issues, because I think ultimately, my observation was that you can't give up these words. They have so much power.

[\(21:32\)](#):

And so that was a huge part of our approach is to say, "We're not going to give up on the word diversity." Diversity is a good thing and just because somebody's pushing conformity and calling it diversity doesn't mean that we give up on the word diversity. It means that we push back on the bad ideas, on the conformity that's being called diversity. So that was one key insight [inaudible 00:21:57]-

Bill Walton [\(21:56\)](#):

Well, it seems like one of your brochure ... Pardon, to interrupt you, but I just had a brilliant idea. It seems like one of your marketing pieces might take the words that are used to divide people and then explain what the words really mean. And it could be a glossary for how to deal with this language, which is really a very hidden agenda, very well disguised.

Bion Bartning [\(22:21\)](#):

A hundred percent. And I think that's something where some people have reacted to the words, and this is the what ... It's almost a jujitsu move, right?

Bill Walton [\(22:32\)](#):

Yeah.

Bion Bartning [\(22:33\)](#):

Reacted to the words, and then they start attacking the words. And the problem is when you attack the words, that's where you can sound like you're intolerant. You can sound like you're a bigot because

who's against diversity? Who's against equity? Who's against inclusion? These are obviously very positive words.

[\(22:51\)](#):

And so one of the tactics I think that that has been used to push some of these ideas is to use these words, manipulate these words, get people to react to the words, and then the vast majority of people who aren't really in the weeds just want to be left alone, don't want to get involved in anything, aren't activists. Those people just see people saying, "I'm against diversity." And right away, that person lost.

[\(23:21\)](#):

So I think that one of the really important things that we're focused on is helping people to be effective in how they're addressing these issues and not reacting to the words, but instead reacting to the ideas and engaging in a reasonable, compassionate, common sense way, not overreacting, not losing their heads.

[\(23:45\)](#):

And then in terms of how we've made the progress that we've made, how we've built the organization out, I think my background, I don't have a non-profit background, I don't have a background in this space, I've never been an activist. I still don't really consider myself an activist, I call myself an advocate.

[\(24:05\)](#):

I think that having that business background, having the impatience that comes from a background of startup businesses, I think has really helped. It's helped us to keep that sense of urgency and drive that I think really permeates this whole organization.

Bill Walton [\(24:24\)](#):

This is the Bill Walton Show. I'm talking with Bion Bartning, and we're talking-

Bion Bartning [\(24:28\)](#):

Bion.

Bill Walton [\(24:29\)](#):

Bion Bartning. I'm slow. You're going to have to help me with these words. Bion Bartning. I'll talk to your mother about that name. I'm sure I'm not the first person you've corrected.

Bion Bartning [\(24:47\)](#):

Oh, no, no, no. It's a lifetime. It's a lifetime.

Bill Walton [\(24:48\)](#):

I grew up in Indiana where he always hit the last syllable, not the first one, so it's a cultural problem I have. Anyway, Bion founded the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism, which is gaining a lot of traction. Right now, you're in the midst, you're just launching a fundraising campaign. What's that about and how can people get involved?

Bion Bartning [\(25:10\)](#):

Sure. I mean, FAIR is a mostly volunteer organization. We're volunteer led. I'm a volunteer. Letitia Kim, who runs the legal network, is a volunteer. We have hundreds of volunteers. All of our chapter leaders are volunteers. So we have about 500 people who are volunteers for the organization.

[\(25:29\)](#):

We have a small paid staff. We have about 12 people who are in paid positions with the organization. And some of the programming that we're doing costs money. We're doing curriculum development. We have some litigation lawsuits. What our focus on is to provide constructive options for institutions to choose that are based on this pro-human approach, this approach which is really fundamentally about seeing people as unique individuals united by our shared humanity.

[\(26:03\)](#):

And so California, for example, has an ethnic studies mandate from a curriculum standpoint and really the only options being offered to schools, which over the next several years are required to offer this curriculum, are based on what's called liberated ethnic studies, which is based on this really dehumanizing, flattening approach of dividing people up into race groups, and it's also really a negative distorted view of American history.

[\(26:33\)](#):

And so we have been developing a pro-human ethnic studies curriculum, which would meet the California standards and will give schools options so that they don't have to choose the liberated ethnic studies, they can choose the pro-human ethnic studies curriculum, for example. So what we're focused on is developing these programs, offering these programs, and then also supporting people with lawsuits, litigation, et cetera, as required.

[\(27:01\)](#):

And then having this small group of paid staff as well, because ultimately there are some of us who are able to put in a lot of time, we have the flexibility. We can be full time or close to full-time volunteers, but any volunteer led organization, you have a need for people who are full-time and committed to the organization. So of course, you need some number of people who are staff members as well.

Bill Walton [\(27:28\)](#):

Well, I hope you gather lots of resources because you're really up against a powerful thing that's happening in America. I mean, I'm in the DC area and it seems like the Smithsonian Museum is going to launch a new identity group museum every other week. And I think the next, we're going to have a women's museum, of course, and I think we're going to do a Latino or Hispanic museum. We've got an Indian museum.

[\(28:03\)](#):

And again, you get buildings and they're identified with subgroups and subgroups that get pitted against each other. It seems like the last thing we ought to be emphasizing, if we want a solid society, is tribalism.

Bion Bartning [\(28:19\)](#):

A hundred percent. Yeah, we're pushing those buttons and people are reacting to them. But you know what? I'm really optimistic, Bill, because I think that most people in this country see through this, and I think they have a hard time articulating, they have a hard time really recognizing that they are the majority in this country, but there's lots of data to support the fact that people really fundamentally are

good and decent and see each other as human. And so I think that this is a message that resonates with people, and I think ultimately this is the message that will win.

Bill Walton ([29:06](#)):

Oh, I quite agree. I quite agree. I'm optimistic long term, but right now we're up against it. Well, I'm going to do what I can to help you, and I hope everybody who's been taking this in. Mr. Bartning, Bion, I got it right finally, founder of the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism, a wonderful idea and an organization that's gaining a lot of momentum, where do we find you?

Bion Bartning ([29:37](#)):

The website is fairforall.org, so F-A-I-R-F-O-R-A-L-L.org.

Bill Walton ([29:44](#)):

And people can donate right on the site?

Bion Bartning ([29:47](#)):

Yeah. They can donate right on the site. They can learn more. They can join a local chapter, they can volunteer and get involved.

Bill Walton ([29:54](#)):

It seems like the creating of chapters and franchises, I think this could really catch fire. You're an entrepreneur. Have you developed a franchise concept, not for money, but a way, a kit for people to set up a unit in wherever they are?

Bion Bartning ([30:12](#)):

Yeah, we have toolkits available, and then there's a whole chapter network community that people join. So we have two people on our staff who are dedicated to supporting the chapter network.

Bill Walton ([30:28](#)):

Oh, that's great. Well, anyway, I'm very impressed with what you've done, and thanks for joining, and I'll be pairing your show with Sahar's show. You're suffering from the fact that you're not broadcasting from a Yale dorm room, which is where we did her show, which was very charming. And she's great and I'm glad you two are working together. So I'm looking forward to catching up as you make progress and helping you succeed. So thanks for joining.

Bion Bartning ([31:02](#)):

Wonderful. Thank you, Bill. I should just mention we have a few events coming up over the next several weeks.

Bill Walton ([31:08](#)):

Yes.

Bion Bartning ([31:09](#)):

If anyone wants to join us. So on the website you can find more information.

Bill Walton ([31:13](#)):

What are they? We've got a minute.

Bion Bartning ([31:16](#)):

We have an event at Arizona State University coming up on November 9th. So that's focused on the illiberalism in the arts. And so we have a number of people who are involved with FAIR, who are going to be speaking on a panel at Arizona State University. We have fundraising events in Los Angeles on November 10th, San Francisco on November 12th and New York City on November 15th. So I have a lot of travel in my immediate future for all of these events.

Bill Walton ([31:51](#)):

Well, they all sound great. I hope people hear about this and show up. And I think the more people learn about it, the more people are going to want to get involved. This could easily go viral. So here's to our success, and for everybody taking this in, thanks for joining the Bill Walton Show.

([32:10](#)):

And as you know, you can find our show on CPAC NOW on Monday nights and on Rumble and on YouTube and all the major audio podcast platforms. I'm also doing something with Frank Gaffney's show on Mondays as well. And so we'll be talking with you soon and back more with Bion Bartning and the success he's making with FAIR.

Bion Bartning ([32:37](#)):

Thank you so much, Bill. Really enjoyed the conversation.

Bill Walton ([32:40](#)):

Great. Thanks.

Bion Bartning ([32:41](#)):

Bye.

Bill Walton ([32:42](#)):

I hope you enjoyed the conversation. Want more? Click the subscribe button or head over to thebillwaltonshow.com to choose from over a 100 episodes. You can also learn more about our guests on our Interesting People page, and send us your comments. We read everyone and your thoughts help us guide the show. If it's easier for you to listen, check out our podcast page and subscribe there. In return, we'll keep you informed about what's true, what's right, and what's next. Thanks for joining.