

Human Rights – Conversations Across Generations

Episode: Eric Stover

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Transcript of audio conversation

Hi, welcome to our podcast, Human Rights, Conversations Across Generations. I'm Meredith Lockwood, founder of Lockwood Creative, a purpose-driven creative agency. And I'm here with my dad.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:16

And I'm Professor Bert Lockwood, the director of the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights at the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:27

Together, we are your father-daughter co-hosts.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:29

For over 50 years, I've had a front-row seat to the evolution of international human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:35

And now, we're sharing that expertise with you by connecting to the powerful stories and insights of human rights voices from around the world.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:43

We bridge the past and the present, making complex human rights issues more approachable and understandable.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:50

So, pull up a chair and join our table as we speak with Nobel Peace Prize recipients, political leaders and the world's leading human rights scholars and activists.

We are joined today by my dad's esteemed colleague and a pioneer in human rights investigations, Eric Stover. As a research professor and co-faculty director of the Human Rights Center at the University of Berkeley School of Law, Eric has spent decades at the forefront of applying science to pursue justice. He is a recipient of the 2024 American Association for the Advancement of Science Award, his groundbreaking work, which includes launching the first forensic investigation of the disappeared in Central and South America. Eric's research on landmines helped launch the international campaign to ban landmines, which was a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. We are so lucky. Eric could join us.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:53

Dad, I'm gonna hand it over to you, to kick us off, if maybe Eric might recall the first time you guys might have worked together and where you

BERT LOCKWOOD 2:03

Yeah, Eric, probably when you were at, uh, Triple A, uh, S, but would it have been through Richard Claude or,

ERIC STOVER 2:12

yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 2:13

okay, uh, Richard Claude Meredith was a wonderful social scientist at, uh, the University of Maryland, and when I taught my first class at American University Law School, in that first, class, I had a number of foreign service officers, but then I had this, uh, social scientist who had written a book on human rights already as a student in the class, and it was Richard Claude, and, we became, good friends after that, and, and I must say he, played a, uh, significant role in, one, getting me the, uh, human rights quarterly that he started, uh, as universal human rights, and then, in its third year, it shifted to, uh, Johns Hopkins University Preston became human rights quarterly, and, uh, he had asked if I would be, uh, willing to take it on, that it had become too much for him, I had recently come to Cincinnati and, uh, uh, jumped at the chance, because I dare say that, uh, in, uh, 1979, there wasn't a whole lot of international law or international human rights going on in Cincinnati, Ohio, and, uh, and I, I knew this would, uh, give me an opportunity to, give the students something to do, for the, the program. So he, he was the, the, the key there. I don't know, uh, Eric, I think the last time we may have, been together may have been his funeral.

ERIC STOVER 3:41

Yes, it may. I think the first time we met was at the point in which, uh, Richard Claude was handing over the human rights quarterly to you. And we had lunch at Georgetown, Washington, DC. then later, um, was that his, yes, his funeral. the. And again, in Washington, DC.

BERT LOCKWOOD 4:02

Yeah. I think, I think actually the, the dinner you referred to, I think, was not the quarterly, but the pen series.

ERIC STOVER 4:10

yes, that's right.

BERT LOCKWOOD 4:11

Yeah. Yeah. Because I can remember you were concerned, uh, on the number of books, I think, we had published, but, I'm, I'm pleased to say we're now over 180 in, in the series, and, it's been a nice compliment to the, the quarterly, but you've always done such fascinating work,

creative work in the, uh, the field. I'd be curious on your Berkeley stuff and the kinds of things you've done there, because you're one of the centers that's not located at a law school.

ERIC STOVER 4:44

Well, to, to, uh, s the record straight, we actually are in the law school.

BERT LOCKWOOD 4:49

Are you?

ERIC STOVER 4:50

Yes,

BERT LOCKWOOD 4:50

Oh.

ERIC STOVER 4:50

we are. We are in the law school. However, we are based in a house. There's about four or five old houses on campus. And we were fortunate, many, not, eh, seven, eight years ago, I met with the chancellor and we were given this old house. And we had to remodel it, raise the money. But we are based in the law school. However, we are very much focused on investigations and research. And that it's not just law-based. It's also based in public health and medicine and So and it's one of the things I like to see at a law school. And that is bringing science and public health over to the law school. Because, you know, students who are getting their law degrees need to understand, if you go to what's DNA analysis? And, uh, h do you need to look at these, certain, uh, aspects? And that's why now at the center, our logo is that pursue, pursue justice. Through science, law, and technology. And also understanding the role that technology is now playing. And something we're throughout history, but particularly now, is how, law is catching up with technology. And so you need to understand all of these aspects, to really be, you know, a good lawyer.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 6:22

Absolutely.

ERIC STOVER 6:23

And actually, I should begin also by telling you, I am not a lawyer myself. I actually, when I teach classes, I tell my students that I have a bachelor's degree in English literature and a PhD in misspent youth.

Which means that I went back in the mid seventies, hitchhiking into the world. but I landed in, in science and human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 6:49

And what an incredible place to land. And when I was preparing for our recording today with Eric and I know all about your work, but I really got to deep dive into your work through

science, forensic investigations, um, traveling all over the world. I'm really excited for this conversation. I do think there's a, but I do think there's a, kind of assume you need to be a lawyer and go to law school to pursue it. many of our podcast guests are human rights lawyers. but there's such a richness that there's so many facets that go into war tribunals, investigative work, helping survivors and families that, you know, have victims through different landmines or wars. Uh, recently we had the honor of the, uh, uh, uh, co-founder of the Ohio Innocence Project. Um, his work would not be possible without DNA and researchers and scientists. so I'm really excited about today's conversation. and you are the recent recipient of the 2024 American Association for the Advancement of Science award. Congratulations. I know we will dive into that as well. For our listeners, the award was for, they awarded seven recipients that recognize scientists, engineers, innovators, and public servants for their contributions to science and society. and to take us to your early years, Eric, um, I would love to start in the 1980s. one of the first forensic investigations was your work in Central and South America. Starting around 1984 with Clyde Snow.

ERIC STOVER 8:35

Yes. Well, let me, let me go back a bit. Just if there's any students tuning.

Don't do what I did. Get an advanced degree. That's the world we

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 8:48

Okay.

ERIC STOVER 8:49

live in. My goal when I got my bachelor's degree was that I was going to become, I was going to become famous fiction writer. Well, it never happened,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 8:58

There's still time. There's still time, Eric.

ERIC STOVER 9:01

thank you. So, um, basically, just to give a little background as to why I got drawn into science and human rights is that I did, in fact, mother's side of my family is, uh, from Chile and England. And so I had decided to, to travel to Chile, uh, mainly hitchhiking. And I worked throughout Latin America, went to Chile, and I ended up in, in Argentina, uh, in March of 1976. And I was in a town called Jujuy on the border of Bolivia. And it was the day of the military coup. And I was detained. And I spent 48 hours in detention um, other young men, there was a cell next to us of young women. many of them had come in, had been beaten up, broken arms and so on, because I had a U. S. passport. They actually expelled me from the country, but I never knew what happened to the other young men I was detained with. And that always stayed with me. So just, uh, later, I, uh, eventually, work mainly trying to do freelance writing throughout Latin America, science writing. ended living in France and then in London working at Amnesty International. And I worked there, uh, for about three years. The return to the United States. Uh,

BERT LOCKWOOD 10:29

Would that have been with Nigel Rodley?

ERIC STOVER 10:33

yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 10:34

Wow.

BERT LOCKWOOD 10:34

Yep.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 10:34

Okay. Nigel's always a connector in the human rights world.

ERIC STOVER 10:38

Yeah. And, I was a researcher working on the Latin American, uh, research department at Amnesty International. So when I came to the United States, the job was opening at the American Association of the Advancement of Science – it's an umbrella organization for the American Physical, the American Medical Association, Nurses Association. And at the time it was actually doing a lot of groundbreaking work. For example, there was a committee that was working on bringing more women into science. There was a committee on scientific freedom responsibility, which were the one that I was under, there was, was supporting whistle, scientists were whistleblowers in the government who were exposing, you know, violations that were taking place and needed protection. So, so they had the committee on scientific freedom responsibility wanted to establish a science and human rights program. So I was hired to start that program. And I, I in that program for 10 years. And that was the fundamental change in my life because what we were doing at the time was started the program by looking at scientists and doctors and nurses who had been detained around the world. And how could we put pressure, uh, to get them released from prison? Because this was during the cold war. for example, uh, there were many physicists who would not attend American European physicists, Asian physicists who would not attend conferences, where there were, there were Soviet scientists there. However, they would leave their seats open saying, we know there's Soviet scientists that need to be released that are being held. So this was how program began. But what was most important to me to get to your question is that, what I call, uh, una pregunta. And that was, I a question. And I traveled back to Argentina to investigate the detention under the military government, uh, of scientists who'd been detained and, and others. And I got to know the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the Grandmothers de Plaza de Mayo. This was an organization of women, grandmothers, who, were searching for their daughters, who had been detained. And what had happened is their daughters were pregnant at the time. And they were taken either to two military bases where they would be brought and they gave birth and then later were executed. And the children were given out uh, childless military and police couples. And so I got to know them very well and I admired them. and they were,

spoke out. They demonstrated once a week with the Madres, the Plaza de Mayo as well, another organization. And they, I, I, I often had to take their records out of files because they were worried the military would take over their office someday. So, they came to see me after the fall of the military government in the mid eighties, 1980s. And they came to me with a question, and that was, Eric, we understand that you can reunite, you can determine paternity with DNA analysis. Can you do that for establishing grand paternity? And so I shrugged my shoulders and said, I don't know, but I can ask. And so I got in touch with geneticists and was an Argentine geneticist as well, and a team was put together, and they came up with the Indice de Abuelidad, the grandparent index, a way of using DNA analysis in order to show that that particular child that was illegally adopted by this couple could be related to the grandmother. And shortly after that, with the new government, in, you know, Raúl Alfonsín, the new president, set up a commission on the disappeared. So they asked me, would I bring in a forensic team to look into the possible exhumation of the disappeared because throughout the country, young men and women who were detained were buried at unmarked graves, thousands of them. And so, um, um, and so, um, again, I didn't know anything, but this is one of the things that's wonderful about that path is that you're learning something new. And so I contacted the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and they said, speak to this forensic anthropologist, Clyde Snow, in Oklahoma. And I called him and we had a conversation and he agreed to pull a team together of forensic scientists here in the United States to go down to, to see what could be done. Now, I had to travel ahead of the human rights organizations there because there was skepticism. This was under the Iraqi years, and they were, why you supported the military? Why would we have these American forensic scientists coming? And of course, um, forensic scientists grew, sciences grew very quickly. So, they all agreed, let this team come in. They traveled throughout the country, called to stop the exhumations that had already started taking place, which weren't doing, being done properly. And then agreed to train Argentine students, who later became the Argentine forensic anthropology team, a they set up their own office. And they are fantastic. Uh, if anyone's interested, there's a documentary called El Equipo, the team that documents what they'd done. And it was very difficult for them because there was always the feeling there was going to be a military coup. And the office where these students had been trained to do this work, which was forensic archaeology, anthropology, and otocology, and so on, was they used to get phone calls that they'd answer. And they'd say, I'm so sorry, we only take death threats after 4 p. m. And they were so brave. And they continued to work. And today, they still continue to work in Argentina. And they are also worked all around the world. And what was developed with the team was what we call the blueprint method, that you train the team of Argentine students. They went to Chile to train a team, to Bolivia, later to Guatemala, so El Salvador, so that you students to take on this work.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 17:49

He's absolutely incredible.

BERT LOCKWOOD 17:52

Eric, I think it, you had some contact with Renee Applebaum.

ERIC STOVER 17:57

Yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 17:57

Well, she was one of the mothers of the, Plaza de Mayo. Okay. And I wanted to relate the story. It was a rather, one of the most powerful moments I had in, uh, human rights is I had her out to speak at Cincinnati. And I had read a bio of her that had been done by a friend of mine at Wellesley, but it hadn't been published yet that she had met her in Argentina. And she had lost, her son was three weeks away from graduating from medical school when he was disappeared. And she sent her 16 year old daughter to Uruguay thinking she would be safe there. And six months later, she was disappeared. And when my friend visited her in her apartment in Argentina, the kids' rooms were exactly the same as they had been when they left.

And so I had her come and she spoke at Cincinnati. And as we were leaving her lecture to go have dinner with my human rights students, this Jewish man came up and he said, Oh, Mrs. Eppelbaum, I don't know what your dinner plans are, but my wife and I would be honored to cook you an orthodox meal tonight. And she said, Oh, thank you very, that's very kind of you. But I'm having dinner with Professor Lockwood's students. And he said, Oh, whatever you do, don't give up hope. And I just sort of cringed, and he left. And she turned to me and she said, Bert, I don't know if you noticed that when you were driving me in from the airport, that we came over a bridge into Cincinnati. And opposite, there was a railroad bridge, and the train was going in the opposite direction. And I said, No, I didn't notice. And she said, I know you're going to think this is crazy. But in Argentina, there's a superstition that when that happens, something very good is going to, uh, occur in your life and I couldn't help thinking that maybe my kids were going to show up in your class today. And, and I just sort of realized that you may think, I mean, the, the cruelty of disappearance is it, is you may think that you've accepted, but you never give up hope. I mean, there's always that doubt that, you know, something may, they may be alive and that's

ERIC STOVER 20:53

one of the things, uh, that play off of that too, is that what we set as a team, was three reasons doing this work. The first was to identify the remains, to return them to the family for proper burial. And the second was to, to do the, to the explanation, identification work in, in a court admissible manner. So it could be admissible in court. And thirdly was to set the historical record straight. And one of the most important lessons that the team learned, and we all learned, was how to work with the families that disappeared. to have them come and gather around the site and interacting with them. And, um, once, we moved in the early 1990s to Guatemala, it was a team of students from the University of Guatemala who, began doing the work. And Clyde Snow and I were working with them. And what happens when you're doing this work is you're going up and you're, you're working at mass grave next to a village in the Altiplano up in the hills. And you're going to meet with family members to say, did your daughter have a, a broken arm? Was she left-handed? Because 11% of any given population is left-handed. So when you examine the remains, you can find these, these factors. And also,

that, you know, series of questions that you need to ask the family members. And often you can say, well, did your daughter have a room here in the house? Oh, yes, this is her room. And you see a hairbrush and you say, oh, could I take a hair follicle because it contains DNA? It could be useful. So why I'm saying this is what was so important is that what you see related to what you were saying, Bert, is that families who lose tend to drift into a world of hope and denial. and they often, this, I have not been studying empirically, but just observing it, is that families are often, we don't trust anybody, we don't trust anyone anymore because our son or daughter, our wife disappeared. And now they're seeing their students coming and doing this work.

And what you started seeing, and this was particularly in Guatemala but other countries, is in the villages, villagers would bring down food for the students while they're working. They would help carry the tools down to do the job. And then what happened, the way it would work, is that you take 37 remains, bodies, and let's say 34 of them get identified, the three don't. Well, you put them in the Zócolo in the village square, up, and the community gathers and follows behind. And you put the names of those who've been identified, but those who haven't, so the three who haven't, it's Ningún Nombre, no name. But what you see is community members gathering behind it as the caskets are being taken. And what was a last thing, and I'll stop here, was really moving and seeing how these Guatemala students are interacting with the members is that when they were walking down to the cemetery, oftentimes you would see whomever they'd gone up to their house to interview come up and take their hands. And walk with them down. And walk with them down. So that it was, you're giving them something, which is finally the identification that's very rough, but it's important, and they're giving you something in return. And so that's why often in human rights work, you know, we can think of things in the law, abstract, and, you know, this is, but why working with communities is so important. And why at the time, these local organizations, particularly family-based organizations, really were the spark of the human rights movement that's often overlooked.

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:15
fascinating.

ERIC STOVER 25:15
Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:16
That's fascinating. Wow. Thank you for sharing that.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 25:21
And, Eric, from there, did you and Clyde Snow carry on and work together in former Yugoslavia around the mid to late 1990s

ERIC STOVER 25:34

Yes. What happened was when the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and then later Rwanda, was established, we were hired, we were not hired, but we became experts on mission, which means that, and particularly what happened until the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, which ended the war, the court couldn't send its investigators in, so I would actually go in and Clyde Snow sometimes would join me to try and potential graves, mass graves, particularly dealing with the Srebrenica massacre. we actually got access through the Department of State satellite imagery, which would help us find sites, because you could see the changes in soil anomalies in fields that can help you. And so we went in after November of 1995, when the Dayton Accords were signed, then we started working with prosecution, taking in teams. teams were made up of forensic scientists from all over the world. we would go in literally for months at a time working on exhumations and also going and meeting with family members like in other countries to gain that information and interacting with them. And was extremely important to the community.

BERT LOCKWOOD 27:04

Eric, I don't know if you know this story, but I, think you'll find it interesting. The, um, first president Bush's, uh, representative to the human rights commission was Ken Blackwell, who was a, uh, African-American, former mayor of Cincinnati conservative. And Rob Portman, who, um, eventually was the, the Senator head suggested to is Blackwell that he, um, because at that time, the Human Rights Commission met three times a year for three weeks at a time. And so there was big spaces in between. And so Blackwell became associated with my human rights program. We sort of recognized, even though our political views were not necessarily, uh, the same that there would be advantages. And so one of the advantages was that it was a Friday afternoon and he called me, he was at the State Department and he was putting together, uh, the U S delegation to the Human Rights Commission. And he said, Bert, I can get you one appointment. Whom would you recommend? And I said, well, you know, Ken, I've been dealing with this wonderful Dr. Clyde Snow, forensic anthropologist. And I've been very impressed with his, his work. And I think he'd be a wonderful member of the delegation. And so as Blackwell later tells me the story, he goes back into this meeting, the state department guys, no one's ever heard of Clyde Snow and they're resisting it. But, and again, this is Blackwell telling me that because of his commitment to me that he insisted and they eventually agreed that Clyde Snow would be a member of the delegation. And then that Sunday, the style section of the Washington Post, the feature article was on Dr. Clyde Snow. And so Blackwell comes out looking great, but he and he and Clyde Snow absolutely hit it off. They discovered that they shared two things in common. One, they both loved telling stories into the wee hours of the night and drinking Kentucky bourbon. And, and so that, that was sort of the common bond between them. And I don't know if this is, if this is apocryphal or not, but supposedly they're over in Geneva and Snow says to Blackwell, what, what are you doing for the weekend? And he said, Oh, I don't have any plans. And he said, well, I think it was ABC just contacted me and they want me to go to Kurdistan to identify some mass grave or something like that. Why'd you come along? And so they, they go off to Kurdistan together. As I say, I don't know if that's apocryphal or not, but as Blackwell tells it, that was one of the stories,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 30:23

And then Eric, I would like um, stay in the 1990s of your work in the pursuit of justice through science, and how you got involved in the research for social and medical consequences of landmines. and I know through your work, if I am correct, you helped launch the International Campaign Landmines, which was in 1997, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

ERIC STOVER 30:51

Yes, what happened I taken a sabbatical from the American Association of Advancement of Science. And I received a call from Aryeh Neier who was the head of the Human Rights Watch at the time. And he asked me, if I would be willing to put the team together to go to Cambodia to investigate the problem with landmines. and, um, and this, again, it was a topic I knew nothing about, so immediately had to start doing research. I agreed and, what I did is I got a, a British de-miner, to come with me and a orthopedic surgeon. and the, the three of us went to Cambodia. And what had happened in the reason we were there is um, the International Committee of the Red Cross had an office, in Cambodia. Um, and they, uh, and they, uh, were very upset because their doctors working throughout Cambodia were seeing so many landmine victims coming into the hospital and nobody was speaking out about And so they agreed, to have the three of go up to the hospitals and they gave us documentation that we could get through checkpoints and so on. and we went into the hospitals. The de-miner took with him booklet full of drawings of different minds, including anti-personnel minds. So what one needs to understand is when you have an anti-tank mine or vehicle mine, oftentimes you put anti-personnel minds around them so de-miners won't take them away. And so what happened was he wanted to find out what minds people were finding in their communities. The orthopedic surgeon was going into the surgeries and witnessing how the surgeries are taking place. And what we learned is at that point in time, and this is just as the war is starting to end. there were only about five six, uh, physicians, doctors in Cambodia, Cambodian doctors. So this healthcare system was so stressed by these injuries. So my role was to interview people in the hospitals to find out what happened to them and what was so important. And again, this goes back to understanding the community was that uh, something like 70% Cambodians live in the countryside and in villages. And they're, they live in the rice culture. So there's four phases of growing rice and getting it ready to send to market and so on. And in each village, work, the community works together in the rice field. And you have your chat, what's called your chat tong, that is your task. So one might be to help plant the rice, other might be to harvest it and so on. What would happen is also in villages, particularly women and children walk the animals out to pasture. And because there were so many landmines that had been laid out, there was a really affecting women and children. And so in the hospitals, it was listening to those stories to understand what, what this meant to them. So for example, what we learned later, because I returned several times and worked with the public health school in Cambodia, there that we did surveys of families to find out. was often were not able to work in your village because you a limb, a leg or something, and you weren't able to contribute. And that affected you in the village. So what we learned was what needs to be done, and there was other nonprofit organizations who did this, was that then those who are injured need to be trained on how to repair radios, how to do things so they'll have jobs. And so the learning curve, for me, and in this was trying to understand socially how communities, again, are affected. And then what happened is there was, from the Vietnam

Vets of America and Aryeh Neier and so on, an idea of Physicians for Human Rights to come together to form the international campaign to ban landmines. And that included organizations all around the world. All around the world who are working with landmine victims.

And eventually what happened, it was nominated to receive the Nobel Prize. Jody Williams, who was the head of the international campaign, was a recipient, as was the organization. And I think what was important, and this is something that learned over time, is if you're going to argue on policy, you need to bring in data. You need to show legislators, this is the problem. This has been done in an empirical manner. And that's what we did with my side of it, was working with epidemiologists throughout many countries who were studying the effects. And you could even do studies, for example, in Ethiopia, where you could see refugees who had left Ethiopia to Sudan or whatever were coming back. You'd see a spike in the hospitals of the number of landmines because refugees were coming back. And so what we did, for example, in Cambodia was the Thai government, which had accepted thousands and thousands of refugees, Cambodian refugees, were returning them. And we could document there was a spike fields had not been cleared yet. So we campaigned to UNHCR Commission for Refugees to stop sending back those refugees. So this was part of the process.

BERT LOCKWOOD 37:08

Eric, if I could just clarify, were the refugees getting hurt on their attempting to come back?

ERIC STOVER 37:15

The refugees who were returning from Thailand in the camps were returning back to their villages. And since the mines hadn't been cleared, They would try to go back to their homes. Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 37:27

Yep. Gotcha. Yep. Thank you.

ERIC STOVER 37:29

And so the, the important thing was also that in some countries, landmine victims, you know, were kept in the back room. Nobody really got to see them. And their, what was going to happen with their lives and what needed was set up programs, which happened in many, many countries, to bring them out, to have them to be able to not feel they weren't part of society. They weren't part of society, any. And again, the key factor here wasn't necessarily the organizations in Europe and the United States or major capital, it was the community organizations who needed the funding to be able to the landmine victims.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 38:13

And Eric, presently are you working on any international work for Ukraine with the current war with Russia? Because as of now, Ukraine is the most mined country on earth, surpassing Afghanistan and Syria. And the current count is, out of the 27 Ukrainian regions, 11 have active landmines.

ERIC STOVER 38:38

Well, at this point, we at the Human Rights Center are not working on that topic. there's other, many other organizations that are – and it's important that they do – and there was the Ottawa treaty that was signed in 1997, banning landmines. However, we're now seeing that some countries are pulling back from that because of the fears that they need to use these mines on their borders and so Um, and as you say, Ukraine is, is a major issue there more I'm working with an organization called DNA Bridge, uh, And what we are looking at in particular in Ukraine and other countries here, here at the U S Mexican border children who were taken from orphanages in Ukraine by Russian troops. And, uh, uh, how do you use DNA to reunite them with their families? And this was a project we began in El Salvador back in the early 1990s was many times during the civil war in El Salvador, children were given up, for adoption. It was illegal, uh, but were forced, to give up children and they were legally adopted in the United States or in Europe and so And the idea now is at the Human Rights Center for years. Now we put out that if you're interested, you think you're from El Salvador, um, you're now 40 years old working, uh, you know, in a safe way somewhere. And you'd like to send in a buccal swab, DNA sample here. We work with a lab in El Salvador, then who are looking for family members and reuniting. And there've been hundreds of reunifications, of family Um, and they're difficult, uh, it's a difficult process, b it has taken place. And so that's the hope is to be able in Ukraine is to do the similar work and in Syria as well. is going to be important. And of course, here in the United States, becau of children who are separated, at the border and are now, living in foster care. Um, and, you're gonna have to use DNA analysis to find their family members.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 41:00

Absolutely, I know, in recent weeks we saw that a father was detained, outside a gas station, and his two young children under the age of eight were left in his pickup truck, and ICE and DHS took him, and the children left no parents, no, no, nothing, just by themselves, and the gas worker and community members had to step in to figure out how to find their their family, and now the family doesn't even know where they're. Where the father was taken? Is he in Louisiana? Was he already deported? so, absolutely, I think a lot of people don't realize how science and forensic research is going to be imperative to reunite families.

ERIC STOVER 41:41

Yes, that's, and also the, the psychological effects that that has on children, because they, live in this, hope and denial, they don't know where they are, uh, and so that's why it's so important to do it as soon as you can,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 41:59

Eric, your work has been throughout the already such an incredible legacy, I'd like to take us over to your work in northern Uganda, worki with Alice Achan, who's one of the co-founders of Pader Girls Academy. how did you get involved with the Academy, and if you could tell our listeners a little bit about it, and for myself, um, I'm going to put in our show notes with your colleagues at the University of Berkeley. And, um, I think it was a wonderful, I think it was in

2023, a panel discussion, with colleagues in the space about issues of slavery and modern economy and issues facing the world today. It was a really wonderful discussion. I'm going to include that in our notes for our listeners if they'd like to listen, but for that, you kind of mentioned your work with the Pader Academy. And it was really fascinating about the young girls the Lord's Resistance Army, and how they needed help once they were rescued, um, after brutalization.

ERIC STOVER 43:00

Yes. Thank you, Meredith. So what happened was I went for Human Rights Watch to go to northern Uganda, in order to look at what had happened with the Lord's Resistance Army and the government. because the fighting was really intense in northern Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army, uh, Joseph Kony was the head of it. What they did is they would actually abduct, children in, in schools and particularly young women who would then be given as forced brides or forced marriage, uh, with the leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army. Um, and they were based just across the border and Sudan from Uganda. And so what happened is the war continued more and more of these children were actually either fleeing from the, uh, Lord's Resistance Army, um, and, or they were captured. and what happened was the, um, locally they had to set up what were called child reception centers. So you had all these refugee camps, but you had these separate six or so child reception centers where children who had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army would be brought and placed in these child reception centers. Well, what happened at the time I was traveling to refugee camps. I was sleeping, Médecins Sans Frontières. They had, you know, a clinic somewhere in the camp and I would stay there doing interviews. And I kept running into these child reception centers and I became fascinated and I would go in and, and speak with people um, see that these children were there and what they were working with the children. So the social workers in these reception centers were trying to find their family members and their villages. But of course, the children had to remember where they were from and, and eventually they were returned to their families. Uh, this usually took about six, seven, eight months. One of the child reception centers was in Pader, which to the South. And I made it to that child reception center and, um, that child reception center, this was still a very violent area. And the head of it was Alice Achan and Alice Achan was a social worker there and she had sat with the camp and I stayed there for a few days. And, I, what she did was taking in these young parents. Women who had been given this forced marriage to the LRA leaders and had children. And so, um, I got to talk to some of them and with Alice. And when I was about to leave, I said, Alice, what's- what's, what do you want to do? What do you- what's your dream? And she said, I want to set up a school so that these young girls with their children can get the education. They didn't receive because what was happening culturally, if a woman had a child, you actually sometimes wouldn't be admitted back into the community. So they were going to have to stay there at this, a this reception center. So later I did some more research and I went to the MacArthur Foundation and they put up very significant funding to establish the Pader Girls Academy. And so what Alice did was set up to have classes for these girls and they stayed there with their children. there was a bakery. um, some of them got trained to go to university and so on. uh, and later the Pader Girls Academy then turned into the- a large maternity ward

award- in the area and has grown since then. So that was- was seeing again, somebody like Alice Achan doing incredible work. And how then could you support her dream, essentially?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:06

And currently she is running three boarding schools

ERIC STOVER 47:10

Yes. Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:11

and a medical maternity clinic. And she was honored, by your center, the Human Rights Center at Berkeley, during your 20th anniversary award.

ERIC STOVER 47:20

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:21

Wow. So throughout that work, you've stayed close, um, and been able to see her journey in helping many, many young girls and young women, through socioeconomic opportunities.

ERIC STOVER 47:33

Yes. Yes. And it was her vision. It was her vision.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:36

Her vision.

ERIC STOVER 47:37

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 47:38

Yep. And she came to Berkeley for the award.

ERIC STOVER 47:41

She came to Berkeley for the 20th anniversary.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:44

Yeah. And Eric, one of my favorite genres in human rights, film media is documentaries, from all different walks of life. Um, And I was curious how you got involved as a co-producer, and a number of different documentaries, with PBS, for instance, um, for example, the Search for the Disappeared in Argentina, um, as well as Tulsa: The Fire and the Forgotten. how did you get involved as a co-producer in that role?

ERIC STOVER 48:14

Well, I think it was dipping back to my misspent youth.

Was that I, yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 48:22

Full circle.

ERIC STOVER 48:23

And that I, that I was particularly interested in, in journalism. And how do you convey a story? How do you tell a story? so my role would be, how do we describe what's happening? In terms of the science applied. So in Tulsa with the, you know, a hundred years after the Tulsa massacre that took place was, they were finally going into the cemeteries and looking for those unmarked graves. And so the forensic work was being done. And so I was there to comment on what's the process. so that was primarily my role. So again, uh, the other aspect of it was, I worked with, uh, Jonathan Silvers of Saybrook Productions and, very much again, focusing on the community. So what does this mean to the community? So what does this mean to the community, particularly the Black community? You know, a hundred years later. And it was so fascinating to see sort of entrepreneurs within the Black community who were setting up tech training, you know, you could get diplomas for, because a lot of young people were leaving Tulsa. And now there's reparations recently announced in Tulsa. And so a lot of the funding is going to go to help support the community-based organizations that are, are helping, the Black community there, which is important. And so I think it's, again, it's bringing science into the human rights field and how do you, because it can be complex. And how do you explain it in a way that, um, understood by viewers?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 50:03

In the Tulsa documentary, for our listeners is currently able to be watched for free on PBS. Um, a shout out to remind everybody now more than ever we need to donate and support our local PBS, our national

ERIC STOVER 50:17

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 50:17

PBS

ERIC STOVER 50:17

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 50:18

channels, as well as NPR. and to bring that segue into modern day challenges, um, a question for you and my dad with the current federal government, we're seeing a lot of slashes to science grants. We're seeing a lot of scientists, medical researchers, forensic researchers, losing key funding for their studies. it doesn't just affect us presently. This is going to be a multi-decade devastating effect that we're going to have to navigate. in both of your works and

also working with students, are you seeing any of these challenges and are already effect, trickle down effect?

ERIC STOVER 50:57

uh, Well, Bert, I'll let you begin on that?

BERT LOCKWOOD 50:59

I'm not sure I deal particularly with the, uh, the sciences part of it. So I'm not seeing that with my work, but then I wouldn't expect to see its impact there. I will say that the, the attack on truth, I mean, it's not just science, but it's, it's sort of the attack on truth and facts, uh, as well are of great concern. I do have a bit of optimism in that at least the students that I'm in contact with, I think their values in terms of, uh, others and tolerance and human concerns are as strong as I've witnessed, uh, uh, over the I don't see a dissipation in those kinds of concerns. And so I do have some belief that we will get out on the other side of, uh, this, this current nightmare that we're facing and we'll come out. Okay. Over to you, Eric.

ERIC STOVER 52:02

Well, I would say, and sorry, this is a little promotional here, but one thing we recently did with the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights is we published the Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations.

BERT LOCKWOOD 52:18

Oh,

ERIC STOVER 52:18

Which

BERT LOCKWOOD 52:18

wow.

ERIC STOVER 52:18

has now been translated into six languages. And I will send you a link. Um, and the reason I mentioned that is what we do at the center is we have an investigations lab, and these are student teams who are trained to do digital open source investigations, which of course is much above my, uh, brain level. because I'm more boots on the ground,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 52:47

Yes.

ERIC STOVER 52:48

but what they do is they will work with newspapers, they will work with courts and, nongovernmental organizations doing investigations. And, uh, the reason I mentioned this is because these students more than ever want to be seeing what is happening with the policies of the Trump administration and who's being affected, how. And this, even one of the studies,

uh, investigations that the students undertook was looking at veterans and how they were being affected. And so the motto we have for the, this open source, digital open source investigations lab is facts matter and verifying facts matters much more. And in the world where we all live in social media, being hitting us with information is stop a minute. And what are the facts and how can you verify them? So the students will actually look information that's sent out, and, for example, things that are filmed on a cell phone, and then you can geolocate it. Is that the place that claims it is? Is that what's really being, you know, being sent out? And and as we know at the New York Times, they now have a visual investigations team, and many of our students have now gone on to with those teams, the Washington Post to others. So it's training students again, the blueprint method, in new forms of investigation, to really, as Bert mentioned, you know, the importance of facts, and that we verify them and show the world this is right or wrong. And we do it in a way that, ultimately, you might be asked to stand up in court and testify.

BERT LOCKWOOD 54:42

I, I should mention, um, Eric, that I've been sending in the summer after their first year. to human rights organizations around the world for over 40 years. And this is the first summer that I've ever had a problem where one of the students was refused admission

ERIC STOVER 55:04

uhm,

BERT LOCKWOOD 55:04

to a foreign country. And, um, it was Canada. She was, she was going to go to Toronto to work with a, uh, a law firm that does a lot of human rights kinds of things, but the Canadians, uh, refused to admit her. I think it was the Trump effect, if you will.

ERIC STOVER 55:26

uh, our Bert, we're, we', you know, 10 years behind you. We're celebrating our 30th anniversary this year, but we as well have a summer fellowship program. And I've had over 400 students working, all organizations around the world. Uh, yes, what I'm, sometimes we're seeing is a bit of a chilling effect going on.

And, uhm, I think we all need to understand that it's time to stand up. uhm, and today, this morning, on NBC News, uh, it was announced that, there is a lawsuit that, uh, several professors here in the UC system who lost science grants, uh, have, uhm, now filed this lawsuit.

Uhm, and, the Human Rights Center, we helped, helped organize the lawsuit. We're not part of it

BERT LOCKWOOD 56:14

Oh,

ERIC STOVER 56:14

as plaintiffs, but, we worked with someone in the law school who organized it.

BERT LOCKWOOD 56:19

oh, terrific. Terrific.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 56:20

I have the article pulled up. I saw it this morning and it felt very serendipitous for our recording today. And I saw that one of your colleagues, law professor Claudia Polsky,

ERIC STOVER 56:31

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 56:31

who had been on sabbatical, but during that time, she decided to devote her semester to organizing a lawsuit to recover research funding.

ERIC STOVER 56:39

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 56:39

they have a great, great photo of a really incredible article. I mean, the reporter, your colleagues, the team, and even just the photojournalism alone in this article was just really inspiring. And I, I just, I think a lot of us are craving that, and, the crux of this podcast and the reason why my dad and I started it is multi-generational conversations, from the younger Gen Z's. I'm a millennial. just to remember that, I think all of us are craving more truth and fact in today's world.

ERIC STOVER 57:08

Uh-huh.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 57:08

Uhm, and the challenges that are ahead of us. I unfortunately believe that they're ahead of us for a while. but there's still so much good in this world and for all the listeners who are inspiring students, and I know it can be a daunting time for students. Uhm, but one of your classes, Eric, which I only wish I could go back to school and sit in your classroom, I would absolutely love to take your Human Rights and Health. Uhm, had that been available during my years as a student, for inspiring students who are looking for a university to attend, they're interested in human rights, and maybe they have a love of science and health, could you tell us a little bit about that course?

ERIC STOVER 57:48

Well, the courses, I mean, one of the objectives, again, is often at UC and universities, we all know that it gets siloed. So you have the public health school, the law school, medical school,

journalism. So what we're doing in the health and human rights, which I co-teach with Dr. Rohini Haar, she's an ER doc, and we co-teach it together. And what we do is we bring public health, medical students and law students together, all graduate students. And so what they're, we're really trying to focus on is to show them the way that law and public health molded together. And we dedicate a lot of the seminar to having guest speakers come in and talk about their work. Uh, so, for example, one is a former student I had, Dr. Michelle DiTomas in the journalism school, uh, got her medical degree. She now runs the hospice care for the California prison system. and this is in Vacaville and what it is, uh, which is north of San Francisco. And what it is, is those terminally ill patients inmates are brought there. Uh, and she is in the hospital where they, are still in cells, but they're made to look like rooms and they have family members who can come. And she talks about, she comes and talks to the class about what it means as her as a doctor to work inside the system to give this support to those inmates. And she also is now under, u, working to look at, um, compassionate release throughout the prison system. So here again, the idea of students, we want students to get inspired by their peers who've gone on and done remarkable work. Another is a law student who works at center here in the Bay Area, uh, that under the Flores Agreement represents migrant children in detention. And so she actually goes and visits children in detention. So, so we students to understand they get their degrees, go do your clerkship, go do your residency, but you come back into the human rights sphere contribute. And here are the ways that former students have done it.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:00:13

and you know, the hospice care in prison is so fascinating to think of. Do you, and I know this isn't your work, um, do you think that being a resident of California in a more progressive state, that that is one reason why they have set up this hospice care and able to set it up as more of a room, even though it is a cell with family? Because I just immediately thought of... prisons in the south, such as Angola in Louisiana, I can't imagine if they have those abilities or programs

ERIC STOVER 1:00:46

Well, again, it was based on research many years ago that saw that within the California prison system, that there wasn't proper health care being provided. And particularly for terminally ill patients. And that there's something that people, um, that there was, uh, th the movement was to set up this facility so problem would be taken care of. And again, that shows, and something we try to really emphasize in the class is the power of research. And again, data, and how doing proper research. And one of the things you learn, a couple of things that we put into the course, when you are an investigator, particularly on a forensic investigation, you go into an investigation with multiple working hypotheses. So, um, you know, if I'm going on to a space of land here, where there might be a potential mass grave, you have to keep your mind open, because you don't know what you're going to find. And so we're trying to train students to keep their minds open, watch your confirmation bias, and then also learn how to do research that can be objective and effective. And how to turn that into policy. so that's basically, uh, what we do with, and we like the fact that you have law students meeting public

health students and learning how they can actually take their own disciplines and work together on projects.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:13

Well, we usually love to end the podcast on reflection and advice, and I couldn't have said it better myself, um, particularly as more than ever to inspire students, I think is so important. and I know we have a diverse group of listeners, but a core is students. Um,

ERIC STOVER 1:02:31

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:31

current, aspiring, and soon to be graduating. What an honor to have you on this podcast. I could ask you a thousand more questions, but you've been so generous with your time. And it's wonderful to see you and my dad's friendship throughout these years.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:45

You, you do incredible

ERIC STOVER 1:02:46

Well,

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:46

work, Eric.

ERIC STOVER 1:02:46

thank you. But so do you.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:48

Thank, thank you.

ERIC STOVER 1:02:49

It's a team.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:51

Yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:52

It's been wonderful. Thank you very

ERIC STOVER 1:02:54

Thank

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:54

much.

ERIC STOVER 1:02:54

you.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:54

And hopefully we can come see you in Berkeley.

ERIC STOVER 1:02:56

Please do.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:57

Or come down to Cincinnati.

ERIC STOVER 1:02:58

Come and visit our, our house on campus.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:01

Oh, we would love that. Absolutely. Yes. And all, you know, support to your colleagues and University of Berkeley for the lawsuit. Anything you need from our end, um, we're here to support.

ERIC STOVER 1:03:12

And same to Harvard.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:13

Yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:03:13

Thank

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:14

Yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:03:14

you.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:15

Thank you, Eric.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:03:15

Okay.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:22

I'm so inspired by our conversation today. If this episode inspired you, and perhaps even sparked an idea or a question, we would love to hear from you. Our email is humanrightsconversations@gmail.com. And you can visit my website, meredithlockwood.com to learn more. I hope to see you next time.