



From Overweight to Badass Vegan on a Mission | John Lewis

[00:00:00] Podcast Intro

Darin: You are listening to the Darin Olien Show. I'm Darin. I spent the last 20 years devoted to improving health, protecting the environment, and finding ways to live a more sustainable life. In this podcast, I have honest conversations with people that inspire me. I hope that through their knowledge and unique perspectives they'll inspire you too. We talk about all kinds of topics, from amping up your diets to improving your well-being to the mind-blowing stories behind the human experience and the people that are striving to save us and our incredible planet. We even investigate some of life's fatal conveniences, those things that we are told might be good for us but totally aren't. So here's to making better choices in the small tweaks in your life that amount to big changes for you and the people around you and the planet. Let's do this. This is my show, the Darin Olien Show.

[00:01:11] Guest Intro

Darin: What's up, everybody? How's it going? Welcome to the show. This is Darin Olien. This is The Darin Olien Show. I'm stoked that you're here. I'm so excited about my next guest, John Lewis, aka the badass vegan. I have seen this guy around for a long time. We finally met. I love this dude. We had a dynamic, powerful conversation. He has done a lot. He has spoken about veganism and animal rights, a serial entrepreneur, certainly a big wellness expert, activist for the well-being of all living beings. We talked about this incredible documentary about a lot of powerful food deserts in the cities and inequality with healthy living standards and food. This film that he produced and directed, called They're Trying To Kill Us. So we talked about that. He's the author of Badass Vegan, so you want to check these things out. He has an incredible story at 13. He was 315 pounds, 13 years old. He was way overweight. He excelled at sports, football and basketball, and all these things. He found his way, bachelor's degree in marketing, MBA, from Nova Southeastern University. He has been educating people in being a leader. He is that one thing that we don't honor one person standing for themselves to be better, emanates and radiates to your friends, to your family, to your city, to your region, to your social networks. It goes infinite because it is a frequency, it is a vibe, it is magnetic, and John Lewis is all of those are more. My brother from another mother, I am so grateful to have connected with him. I look forward to maybe doing some stuff in the future with this badass vegan, Instagram @badassvegan, and please check out the website for the documentary, www.theyretryingtokillus.com. So a big round of applause for my next great guest, John Lewis, badass vegan.

[00:04:17] First Part of Interview

Darin: Dude, what a blessing that I lost the audio for the first one.

John: Best and worst thing to happen, then we're all good. That's how I am. I always try to see the best part of everything is not always easy, but sometimes the trials are gonna be the best day.



Darin: Eventually I think if you're on that pursuit, there are definitely opportunities behind every challenging thing. I look at losing this whole property and it changed my life in a good way and I would never take it back. We talked a bit but you came from such a behind-the-eight ball kind of thing

John: I was behind it and couldn't even see it. It was the cue ball, the eight ball. It was a whole bunch of them.

Darin: I mean, you're a big dude, but as a kid 300 plus pounds at how old?

John: Thirteen. It was on my freshman year.

Darin: At 13.

John: Kids are fucked up.

Darin: It's already hard enough. Kids are ruthless. If adults acted like kids, they'd be in jail.

John: Exactly. They definitely would be. It is so interesting to me. I look back, I didn't really get bullied too much, really, I didn't. Being an athlete I think that helped out. They just kind of like left me alone but you would see those side comments, I hear them every now and then, but I knew for me, and this is why I'm big on making sure I don't fat shame anybody. I just tell them for me, that was the most uncomfortable I've ever been in my own body. Then what I always tell people is a lot of times, you don't realize you're in pain until you actually feel good. Once I felt good, I was like, damn, I didn't realize how bad my knees were and how bad my ankles were and just digestively and all this stuff. I didn't even realize and I wasn't even vegan yet at that point, it was just getting rid of that weight. Like they say when you get the weight off of you, everything feels different. If it's emotional weight, physical weight, whatever it is, it just felt so different. That's when things just changed up for me a lot.

Darin: Obviously at 13, it's so intense. What was the trigger to be like, I got to do something?

John: The funny thing was, it wasn't a trigger. I actually just got more active because literally basketball, anybody's who's ever played in little league, I still am friends with my little league coach to this day. But they roll a couple of balls out there, say start practicing. They go outside and smoke a cigarette and then they come back in like, here's one play for you little kids, and let's run it. That was the gist of it. Then you get home, my mom did the best she could, but everything was processed, everything was fried, everything was overindulged.

Darin: This was where again?

John: In Ferguson, Missouri, right inside St. Louis. Dealing with the stress of just-- my sophomore year in high school, we lost kids pretty much the whole way through. But my sophomore year, we lost like six or seven kids, whether it was a car accident, shot in the head, everything, everything. You got those stressors, so many things. Then what happened for me losing the weight was just literally being way more active. We were doing two days in football. We started every day in basketball with a mile run. That's how we started. Before I look up my sophomore year, I'm like, oh, damn, and I used to always cry to my mom, not even exaggerating. I used to like, "Mom, I'm never gonna lose the weight." She's like, "It's



gonna happen. All the kids in our family have a growth spurt." But I was already a little bit taller than everybody else so I was like, no, I'm not having a spurt, I'm done.

[00:07:45] What lead to the extra weight

John: I remember walking past my sophomore coach, and he walked right past me. I'm like, "Coach Jacob." He's like, "Holy shit, John." He didn't even recognize me because I went from 315 wide to 61, 62-ish by my sophomore year. I remember him saying like, "Oh, this is gonna be a good year."

Darin: So, inches.

John: I probably was like 5'9, 5'10 in the freshman year and went to 6'1, 6'2 by my sophomore year and lost all that weight because of the activity. I think I maxed out at 6'6 round. It's funny. I didn't max out till college. I grew a little bit more once I was in college year. I had a very late spurt at the end, too but then that's when the whole weightlifting stuff came in.

Darin: How about that? That was magic to me because when I was 5'9, 135 as a sophomore, and then boom, 50-60 pounds later playing football. But it was the magic of oh, this iron in my hand, I'm not a victim, I can do something about it.

John: The funny thing for me was though in high school, I refused to lift weights. I didn't lift till college. Funny story. I lift in one day with the older kids, which was a mistake in itself, but I saw my arms are just shut. They're done. I went to go shoot a jumper and I mean, airball is an understatement. It didn't even make it to the mid-distance between my hand and the goal that it make it midway, and I was like, no, I'm never lifting weights again not knowing that if I would have stayed with it, my whole high school career, where would I have been? But when I got to college, shout out to Archie McClendon on this one, a teammate named Archie McClendon. He was like 6'1, 40-inch vertical. We played in NAIA, we didn't play NCAA, NAIA. He was 7th in the nation in rebounding, 60th in the nation in field goal percentage at 6'1. He could jump over anybody but he was built like an African god, just jacked. One day I'll never forget. We're doing a visual here so they can see it. I will never forget we went for rebound together. He was starting, I was a freshman and I was working my way to a spot. The ball draw for rebounding and when we landed, he had the ball. He had these hands, but his elbow when he landed was right here. He didn't hit me. He just let me know like, it's my shit. I remember we were in the middle of practice and coach was like, "Welcome to college, son." I'm like, "Thanks." I never forget he asked me one day, "Hey, man, I'm going to leave, you want to go?" I was like, "Hell, yeah." That's when--

Darin: It's like that, dude, I'm looking up to.

John: Yeah, that guy right there. We ended up being real good friends throughout college because I was reinsured in my freshman year, actually. My second year, I tore my knee up and I ended up having a surgery but I still played 10 games even on a messed-up knee because we were such a small school. At one point, it was literally five of us. My coach called me, he was like, "I know you're in pain. I know, you need to get the surgery but if you don't play, we got to forfeit the game." That kind of decision I have to go through in my head.



Darin: Now you got all your teammates, you had all that.

John: The funny thing with the teammates really didn't even give me pressure, it was just my coach asking me because my coach and I, we had a history. He was the only person that gave me a shot when I left high school because I was a knucklehead and I got kicked off my basketball team in high school, all kinds of just degenerate stuff. He was like, "I like your fire. I like your attitude." So if he asked me something, and I know he wouldn't ask me if he knew it would really injure me even further but I lost that year the eligibility too because I guess it was eight games at the time. As long as you play under eight games, you can't appeal to have that year back, but that was my eighth game. But I went ahead and did it. So I went and played two and a half years in college, but working out with Archie, it just changed everything. Then our whole team just kind of started lifting and we just started getting better and better and better. We had an amazing squad, man. It was a historically black school. It was so small. We didn't even have a home gym. We played at the local high school. Now you go to the campus, they got Performing Arts Center, they got gymnasium, they got dorm. I'm like, "You don't even know how lucky you all are." I don't want to be that guy that's like, "Back in my day, hey, you got this because of us. We bled, sweat, and cried for this." We just didn't have a budget. We just didn't have a budget for it but it's good to see how the school has growing. Shout out to Harris-StoweState University now. It was a college when I was there, but it's grown to a university status now.

Darin: It sounds like from the heavy-weighted, awkward kid really got--

John: Still awkward.

Darin: It just looks different. But hey, we need a good level of awkward in the world I think. It allows us to tweak our head and look at things differently.

John: At school we do face sometimes.

Darin: I don't know about that. You get active and that was your big thing. You're the badass vegan, which is such a great whole thing. I couldn't not like you. When I first heard about you and what you're saying because you're also a guy who was speaking-- it's a weird world, but as a man who's convicted, not judgmental, but strong, and I resonate with that because we have to stand a certain ground and hold that space, not in judgment but listen, here we are, raise the attention of these bad policies or systematic failures of our health, animals welfare, environment.

John: Everything. I like what you said because I'm always a big promoter of, and I know it's gonna go over somebody's head, but I always say, you can't just love the people you like. For a lot of people, they don't get that insight. A lot of times, the greatest example is how people talk about how you can't just be a gentleman to the women that you want to date. You got to be a gentleman to everybody, I mean, men, women, everybody. Don't just be nice to the people that you want to have sex with or you want to date and then you see a lot of that. The world will never get better if just because somebody is different than you now you're like-- no, don't get me wrong, if somebody did you wrong, literally did you wrong, fuck them. You got total strangers just because they wore a pink shirt that day. You got people talking trash about them.



[00:14:40] You can't just love the people you like

Darin: It's that whole story of like, "Hey, watch who you're dating how they treat the waiter or waitress?" It's like that kind of thing.

John: Not even just dating friends. I remember I was in a place. I will say a place because the person will know who I'm talking about. I mean, I confronted them when it happened, but we were in a place in a whole nother country, whole another continent. This person that I was working with, white female, it was black servers, but the way she was talking to them. I'm like, "No."

Darin: You called it out.

John: I called it out right there.

Darin: It was so obvious.

John: It was so obvious. I'm like, why are you so mad at her? You can't talk to her like that. It was just belittling her like, are you stupid or something? I'm like, oh, no. I know they paid me to come over there for an event. I don't care if you pay me or not, you can't do that in front of me. You shouldn't do it at all but she damn sure not gonna do it in front of me. I called her up. She was like, "Man, I didn't realize." I guess it's such a norm. It was such a norm for that place that I saw it across the board the whole time I was in that country.

Darin: That had to be weird.

John: It had to be weird. Being a black man around these black people and you got these white people treating them, I was like, no, that's not gonna happen with me.

Darin: Well, good. Again, that's why I like you. That's why I liked you right away is because you have to figure out what's the best way to communicate this shit of what's going on.

John: I could have went off on her but she was doing it and then it would have erupted into something else but I'm like, sometimes that person honestly does not know that their actions are fucked up. I used the word "cunt" one time in a post. I grew up in a black neighborhood, never heard the word "cunt." I went to Australia and "cunt" was used for everything like, "You silly cunt." Then I'm like, man, that word is hilarious. This was about five years ago, I had a friend of mine. She posted some memes about Facebook, 'If you could stop suggesting all the cunts that I avoided in high school's friend requests, I'd appreciate it'. I thought it was hilarious. I reposted not knowing what it meant. I had a lot of people like, lighten up. The people that were complaining, they were telling them to lighten up, but I had a publisher of a major magazine on her magazine page like, how dare you use this word? I dare you to use that word in front of me next time, you'll see what happens. I'm like, whoa, calm down, first of all. Second of all, I've never used that word. I've never even seen that word use. I didn't know that it was derogatory towards women. I'm using it in the context of the story now but I haven't used it since. She goes just completely off to the point. I was like, I've never used it. She's like, it's hard to believe that a man in his 40s never heard that word. I was raised on the corner of Ferguson and Henley. Have you ever been there? No. I'm sure some words we say that you've never fucking heard of. Why is it so hard to believe? I have nothing to gain by



telling you I've never heard of this word like that. So that's the difference between the way she came at me. The bad part is this person had my phone number. They could have just reached out behind closed doors and like, hey, John, it's not a good idea. I don't want to do that.

Darin: Here's why.

John: Exactly, here's why. I would have been like, oh, damn.

Darin: Then you could have actually corrected it.

John: I made an apology statement for it. I don't even have to do that. I'm not that status a person to make an apology statement, but I did it. I was like, look, it's never my goal. If y'all know me, my goal is never to degrade, belittle, it's not my thing. I'll call shit out. When I call it out, I still don't go after the person. I go out to the actions and that's a big difference.

Darin: Well, it's kind of a Pandora's box what you're saying too because we're now in the social media experiment where people want to blast each other. They want to take that latter route all the time and not seek to understand only to be right in their righteousness. It's a tricky time. It is a really tricky time. Then at the same time, ignorance continues. So it's like everyone's aware of everything, everyone's offended by everything, and yet ignorance lives. So what are we doing?

John: It's so interesting. This is what I've noticed on social media, and just everyday life, too, but some people literally wake up in the morning with a goal to be pissed, like, what can I find that's gonna piss me off next? And your page might just be that page. You actually being in a lane in front of somebody already and doing the speed limit but it pissed somebody off that's late. You don't know what it's gonna be and you almost got to be a warrior to the point of, I have to be in a mind-frame of like, I know that there's going to be a test today and I can't let them get to me. That's the thing, a lot of people don't realize that. I always say happiness is a practiced art like anything else. Happiness is not a right, it's a skill.

[00:20:05] Navigating happiness

John: People think happiness is a right. Happiness is not a right. You didn't earn the right to be happy. That's a skill. You got to practice that every day. You got to wake up, what am I thankful for? Okay, cool. Yeah, I was fucked up yesterday. All right, but I'm not gonna dwell on it. I'm gonna prove it. I'm gonna do this, whatever. It's a skill. I think people think they were born happy. It's like, no, you're born crying. You're born fucking cry. Literally, you come out crying.

Darin: And if you're not crying, they slap you.

John: To make you cry. It's like, oh, you came out happy? Not today.

Darin: Not to mention maybe if you're a male, we're gonna circumcise you and it's like, holy shit.



John: So you came into a fucked up situation and you got to work every day to be happy. That's the thing, happiness is achievable. I think that's what people mess up. They think that the happiness is wrapped up in the money and it is wrapped up in the light.

Darin: External.

John: I was sleeping at my car. That was the happiest person I've ever met. A lot of people didn't even know I was sleeping out of my car. I still kept my gym membership. I was taking my showers every day. I was going to class. I was going to work. Nobody knew. I had a couple of friends that were like, oh, the couch? Yeah, cool. You know what, I'll stay here on the couch, it's cool. I don't even feel like driving back home. Never told him what was going on, but I had friends that didn't care either. But you have to be happy, well, it could have been worse. I always think it could have been worse.

Darin: It's funny because I've been working on this book and I have this podcast doing fatal conveniences. So this fatal convenience, they're all over the place. They're toxins in your deodorant and your dental floss and your shampoo and one of them is to your point. It's a convenience to be angry. I think you're spot on in terms of you have to work to have a different perspective because it's so easy. Life is going to keep pushing you, people are going to keep showing up, the pissed off people just want more pissed off in the world, and they just proliferate that everywhere, so they stink up the joint and what are you gonna do?

John: Then they're mad at you for not being mad with them.

Darin: Totally. You have to be an asshole because if you're not gonna line and agree with me, then you're clearly an asshole.

John: It's interesting.

Darin: It is a skill. So then what was the click when you went like I can't be eating dead flesh anymore?

John: I went vegetarian first and not really knowing that I was still fucking ingesting the same DNA due to milk and cheese.

Darin: Just some pus.

John: Yeah, just some pus, but it was flavored plus so it's different.

Darin: At least they say pasteurize it.

John: Yeah, these are pasteurized, throw a little salt in there, you'd be okay. I went vegetarian when I first went to grad school. I moved to Fort Lauderdale in '04. It's crazy. I'm one of those people like, if I get a calling, if I get a feeling, if I'm in tune with something, whatever it is, or meditating, when I moved to Fort Lauderdale, I never visited the school, I never visited Florida. I hadn't even been to Florida yet. I just was like, alright, this is it.

[00:23:10] Making the transition to a vegan diet



John: This is it. What I'm doing today, if I wouldn't have done that, would I be here? Maybe, but I doubt it. So I packed up whatever fits in my Impala at the time. My best friend drove down with me and he flew back. I got down there and I had a culture shock through food as well because all I ate was McDonald's and Burger King. I would go to the grocery store and grab some stuff, but it'd be like, back in the day all these not all these of today. I was getting the Z-grade chicken and the shit that was just completely horrible.

Darin: We're gonna unpack a bit of that too because that leads us into your film and that leads us to food inequality and inequality zones, and all that.

John: I thought I was eating healthy, eating green beans without putting butter all in it, you know what I'm saying? I wasn't just eating the green beans, but I was eating the same thing all the time. So when I got to South Florida, I started eating Jamaican food, Haitian food, Cuban food, Dominican food, you name it. My stomach was like, timeout. You need to slow down. So I remember I was going to the university and we could go to the doctor for free there. So I went and get checked up because I was pretty much having IBS, but I didn't realize what was going on. The doctor, he was like, hey, do you eat a lot of meat? And being the liar that that most men are, I was like, no, not really but I had meat with everything. I would have meat on the meat with a little meat on the side.

Darin: A culture of overconsumption.

John: So he's like, I want you to try not to eat me for 30 days. I'm like, yeah. It was in the university.

Darin: It's amazing.

John: He was an Indian descent. I will say that, but I think there might have had like a little something like a more natural way of looking at it, more Eastern. When he said it, I thought he was crazy. I was like, "Dude, do you see how big I am? What's wrong with you?" I had a fraternity brother back home back in St. Louis who passed away from sickle cell, but he made it way longer than a lot of people expected because sickle cell takes people. It's very painful. He passed away on Halloween day and that was '04. That's when I was like, "You know what, as I owe it to him, and just something new for me, I'm going to give up this meat." I was kind of mad because the doctor said 30 days. Within two weeks, I felt 10 times better, and I was still eating the dairy. When you see all those comparisons, they're like, this processed meat is healthier than that processed meat. Yeah, because the other processed meats still shit, this is still shit. It didn't say it is the best thing, it's saying it's better than that one over there.

Darin: Which is a very low bar.

John: It is a very low bar. It's like I'm saying this person is better than Hitler. It's like, yeah, but you're comparing him to Hitler. You see that a lot. So fast forward, my mother who got diagnosed with colon cancer within like I would say a year of me being vegetarian. I never forget asking the doctors, "How did this happened to her?" The doctor was just right up front, and he's like, too much animal protein, fry fatty foods. I'm like, wait a minute, this is not hereditary. He was like, this is more of a lifestyle choice. I'm like, damn.



Darin: This was yet another doctor.

John: Another doctor back in St. Louis. I did more research. I didn't just go like gung ho into it. I did my research and that's when I started seeing more about it wasn't just the cancer. I start seeing the heart disease, the diabetes, the hypertension, all these things where there's one root cause right there. Now mind you, it can be some other attributing factors, but it's right there as a star player on every team.

Darin: It's open up the door.

John: I'm like, alright, so let's cut that out. Once I did that, man, my whole, body mental. I have a good friend. I mentioned her in the book. I didn't say her name. I told her. She was like, well, you didn't say my name so whatever. So star moon, I'm mentioning your name right now. She was vegan already when I first moved to Fort Lauderdale, and she was a sister of one of my frat brothers who I'm really close with. She had been vegan for years before I moved there in '04. She was like when you do it, you'll just know the difference. I never forget, I was playing ball one day, just pick up, we were at a court, and I went to dunk a ball. I'm not exaggerating. I felt literally like this surge from my big toe to when I dunk the ball, and it traveled up my body. I'm on a court full of men. I can't say shit to anybody because they'd be like, what the fuck is wrong with you? What are you talking about?

Darin: Had a lightning bolt.

John: Yeah, like did anybody see that, did anybody feel it? As soon as I get in the car, and we got no plan, I text her. I'm like, you will not believe this shit. She's like I told you. Then I just started noticing little stuff like that. Again, like I said, you don't know how bad you felt or how much in pain you are until you actually feel better and we all deserve-- we all have-- now that's one thing we do have the right to is to be healthy. But again, it takes skill to get there.

[00:28:20] Feeling like a vegan superhero

Darin: You got to participate.

John: You got to participate. It is like you can't look at somebody else over there that's healthy as hell and be like, that's bullshit, they probably cheated. No, what are you doing not to be in the same thing?

Darin: And we still do that.

John: Still do.

Darin: But they've never been fat. You just project all of this stuff on the people when you don't realize how much is gone.

John: That's why I love to share like me being obese. I think it goes over better when people are like, oh, it's not this guy that's been in shape his whole life trying to tell me how easy it is to lose weight because I do understand. The 315 kid is still in here. I get triggered easily when I'm around food and this and that. I just do certain things to make sure that I don't go



back down that path. You know the whole saying, once you're an addict of something, you're always that addict. If you're an addict of food, you're always an addict. If you're alcoholic, you're always gonna be an alcoholic. You just learned how to manage it. Coke, crack, whatever you want to call it, you learn to manage it. That's why I like to share. I share with people I was a butcher at one point. I'm not judging you. I'm just telling you there's a better way. I'm not saying you're evil because I did the same thing. So I think that's another thing, you got a lot of hypocrisy out there. Don't do what I do behind closed doors.

Darin: That's the thing. It is a weird thing and you hear it. I've had a few products. People, when they reach out and they're like, the landscape of influencers are driving certain people crazy because they're inauthentic with certain things that they're doing and it's never equated to me. I'm like, what do you mean?

John: Yeah, there's a lot of people out there or the person that are like saying, you know what, this glass is the best glass ever made and you should get these glasses. And next week there's a whole new company and they're like, you know what, this glass is the best glass ever made. You're like, dude, you were just telling somebody last week. At least let it die for it like six months. Don't change it up, use my ambassador code, and no knock on people getting their money, but you got to really look at what your integrity is gonna look like 10 years from now. Because if you are trying to get in this game, and you want to stay for a long time, your integrity is more than anything. If people don't trust you, what are you gonna sell?

[00:30:41] Bite Toothpaste Ad

Darin: Hey, everybody, I have a secret to minimize your waste in your own bathroom. That's right. Now, it may not seem like a lot of waste, throwing out your toothpaste tubes or your toothbrushes but keep in mind, none of it is recycled. Then add it up over the population, these are a big number. This isn't necessarily our fault though because we need toothpaste. We definitely need to brush our teeth. But thankfully, one company that has really thought of everything when it comes to taking a big problem and finding solutions is Bite Toothpaste. Their best seller and the product that really caught people talking is their dry toothpaste tablets that come in reusable glass jars. When you run out, you just order a refill, and it comes to your house in compostable pouches. So there's the impact, they're making an environmental waste problem go away, but they didn't stop there. They care about you. They want to make sure that what they're selling is the best of the best. All of their products are vegan, cruelty-free, and they're made from clean ingredients. I'm excited to get you in touch with Bite Toothpaste because it's good for you and they actually work. They do exactly what they say they will. If you're ready to ditch the toothpaste tubes and try literally this Bite Toothpaste, it's awesome. I love it. Bite down and boom you basically have the toothpaste all right there. So all my listeners, you get 20% off your subscription if you head to trybite.com/darin and use the promo code D-A-R-I-N. That's trybite.com/darin and get rid of the waste and get healthier with this amazing product.

[00:32:53] Second Part of Interview

John: I'm trying not to chew on this dirt.



Darin: That's alright. That's advertising. You know that crunch you're hearing? That is a happy consumer.

John: That ain't no sound effect, that's real.

Darin: He can't even stop himself. I can't sell. I just consume those things as if I just consumed it the first time.

John: That's crazy, man.

Darin: It's been like five years.

John: So they're what kind of nuts?

Darin: They're baru nuts. It's one of the common names, but we call it barukas because we set up a standard bringing it to the United States. It's a wild food. There's no farming of it. It's 100% collected, fair-traded planting trees. That deliciousness you're getting, it blows away all of the other nuts by factors of two, three, fiber, complete protein, antioxidants. For an almond, it's 400% more antioxidants than an almond. And you're and you're supporting an endangered area in the savanna of Brazil. For me, it just checked all the boxes and then the American palate loves that shit.

John: No salt added to this, right?

Darin: No.

John: I might fall in love with that.

Darin: It's a bit like a good crack.

John: Always got to have a good crack. It's funny because you mentioned it one day and I just saw it here. The word superfood, how it's been so buzzed and because people always ask me, they're always asking about the sea moss and this and that. I'm like, look, these foods are magical. They have all these powers, but I don't want you to think that a superfood is gonna save your life.

Darin: Totally.

John: A superfood is only as good as the other foods you're putting in your body. It's like you were drinking the sea moss in the morning or you're eating an amazing nut seed, whatever, but then you having Hennessy and steak and shrimp right after it, you just canceled it all out. An example always use is like, if somebody was to send a warrior out to war, and they gave him pencil, and they knew that they had AKAs and bazookas on the other side but you got this pencil, and alright, superfood, go do your job. It's like, no, you gotta equip them with everything. You can't eat the things that were giving them disease or giving them ailments, and still expect this to help.

Darin: Totally. I mean, we're addicted to reducing things down to that thing and this thing. When I look at it, it's like drink your good water, get your minerals, sleep well, move your



body, get outside, get some sun, put your feet on the ground, have good relationships, eat a bunch of great plants. Then on top of it, when you become an Olympic athlete as your life, every then little nuance you've integrated all of that and then you can keep kind of expanding, you can add in medicinal plants and add in all these things and that's a continued journey, but it isn't the answer.

John: It's not, and everything you just said, somebody just heard you say that and was like he's overreacting. There's no way I can do all that. No, that's what your body is actually designed to do. Your designed to move. You didn't come to this earth with joints, so you can just sit still. They would have made you a snake. Even the snake doesn't sit still, or made you a twig or whatever. You're here to move. You got to understand our human body is the first machine ever put on this earth. If you understand that concept, any machine that you got, if you don't use it, turn it on, give it the right fuel, how long is she gonna last? It's not gonna last long. Even your TV, if you don't turn your TV on for a year, try to go turn it on again, and it's gonna have to warm up and it's gonna like look fuzzy, and the colors are gonna be all messed up. The same thing with your car, if you don't change the oil, if you don't put the right gas and you put in diesel and unleaded fuel tank, what do you expect? It's just crazy.

Darin: That's the thing, the celebration of food. I was just talking to a friend. I had a friend over and we were eating some incredible smoothie bowls and stuff. I still freak out when I eat, like freak out in a good way because food and vibrant food is just like, my body just goes crazy still. It's just like, wow.

John: But again, unless you've ever felt bad, people don't get that. They think that you're talking some fantasy, choose your own adventure-type shit. Like Darin's over there tripping again, here he goes.

Darin: Weirdo.

John: He found his little friend here, this badass guy who's on the same page. So yeah, those two are weird. It's like you have to be there but also tell people too. If you've been doing something for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years, don't expect this change to be today with the first great smoothie. You got to keep it up.

Darin: The body is amazing. Like you said in two weeks, you felt incredible.

John: I was almost mad because shit, I love meat. I'm not gonna lie. I loved it. I was like, damn, no more Philly cheesesteaks, which is different today. If you want, you can find similar tastes and texture. I won't say it's exactly the same, but you can find the taste and texture. It's out there. Twenty years ago, it was salads and berries and that was it. Probably sold to people that were like vegan back in the '80s and '90s.

Darin: It was pretty close to sprouts and seeds. There wasn't a lot of variety. You've created a lot of businesses, you wrote an amazing book, Badass Vegan. You're charging. Your a charger, so you're getting messages out. What are you excited about now? What are you creating? What are you building? Because I know for me, dude, this world right now, I'm



digging in, I'm going. Let's go. Let's create futures that are bright and healthy and happy. What are you getting into right now? What excites you?

John: Just empowerment man and not for me. My biggest thing is just to help people to feel empowered themselves, not to feel like they don't have a choice to be healthy, they don't have the right to be healthy. So with the book, that's what this is about, with the movie, that's what this is about. I was gonna work on this fitness app, and all this other stuff, too because we talked about it. A lot of people reaching out now and they want to work with me, but I'm kind of like, I also don't want to overextend myself. I want to do more but I want to go so gung ho on the movie and the book right now to once that pops, then we do something else. I'm still on the works and stuff in the backend but it's nothing that's like going to take the place of those two. The app was important. People always ask me, I mean, I'm not the most rip guy in the world, I'm just in good shape. Like right now, I'm working on being in the best shape of my life, which I knew it was possible. I want the magazine to see me and be like, this guy's vegan, let's go talk to him, but it's more like an inspiration thing. I know it and I know it sounds so cliché in this whole twisted world today, but I really want other people to feel good. I think everybody needs to see that and need to understand that they can do it but they have to see an example of it first.

Darin: Sometimes several.

John: Sometimes several. Then being a black man in America, seeing a black man doing fitness-related, having compassion about it, understanding how fucked up the government has treated us and how fucked up things have been for us but we can get out of that.

Darin: And still providing a path.

John: That's my biggest thing, man. So probably some products coming down the line, but like you said, man, I got the pedal all the way down, man. I'm like, you know what, why am I holding back? One of the best moments that always stuck out in my head is when Derrick Rose, when he was with the Chicago Bulls, and he won the MVP of the league. When they asked him, he just had this very simple quote, and he said, "Why not me?" He said I had to tell myself like, why not me? Why can't I be the MVP? Why can't I be the best player in the league? Why can't I be the best player in the world? That hit me one day like, why can't I do that? Nobody told me I couldn't. I probably just let other people's doubts come into my head to influence my decision. I've had two knee surgeries, surgery on both feet. I got to play my wrist. I crushed my gum line at one point. I had to have reconstructive surgery on my skull. It's crazy. I got like a lesion over an optic nerve in my head from basketball being elbowed. We don't even know where it came from. I probably failed during basketball, I got elbow. It's been like 20 years. All that means nothing. I'm still gonna get my ass up and I'm gonna go work. I'm gonna go work. I gotta do it. Can't nobody do it for me.

Darin: Totally. You just got to put the big boy pants on, man.

John: Sometimes you got to put the little boy pants on. It's all good. You'll get to the big boy pants. Put on the underoos and then you'll work your way.



Darin: Those are great, by the way for the time. Who didn't want their underoos? Run around like a superhero.

John: I wonder if they're still out, the company at least. My sons got some wow ones like Paw Patrol or all these other different things but I don't think underoos is actually still out there.

Darin: So the movie, They're Trying To Kill Us, which is that's the title.

John: That's the title. I didn't want to sugarcoat it at all.

Darin: Learning about this is kind of astonishing. It's in our cities in America going on, and no one seems to know about it, and there's a lot of people that don't care because number one, they don't know or they don't want to know.

John: Right.

Darin: It's like that thing that we do like, don't look, don't look over here, just kidding, and then we're so uncomfortable and then culturally, we're uncomfortable. So then what happens? Nothing happens. So talk to me about this, and it's centered around that food inequality, and it is so good to bring up the honesty of the situation because if it's not brought up, and the way that can be received by the people that are being affected, then how the hell are we going to do it? Because it's certainly not going to come from the government, certainly it's not gonna come from politicians.

John: We don't know. I tell it to people all the time just to follow up what you're saying. I think people get it wrong sometimes and I'm like, when I say why are we worried about the government? Why are we worried about them? No, I'm not saying like, okay, don't try to change it but we waited 400 years to even get to this point. It's gonna take another 400 years for them to even acknowledge that they did something wrong to change it to do it. Why the fuck are we waiting on them? We got to take that ownership now. I'm always full of quotes and sometimes I come up with it myself and sometimes they get jumbled up, but when I think I made up and I said, we can't expect the one that abused us to actually heal us in any kind of relationship, I don't care what it is.

[00:44:25] They're Trying to Kill Us

John: A lot of times when you get abused by a certain situation or person, you're waiting on that same entity to come in and do something about it. They moved on with it life. They probably think you're overreacting in the first place. They don't care. So the premise of the movie is social justice and food justice through the lens of hip hop but I wanted to show people what was going on and not just inner city marginalize people. I wanted to show people outside of that bubble to show them we're not overreacting. This has been put in place. This system has been going on for centuries. It's not going to go away by us just saying, you know what, don't talk about it, and you see that all the time, especially on my page, on my profile. You get people like, you shouldn't talk about it. The best thing to do is ignore it. I'm like, yeah, okay, go ignore your bills real fast and see what happens. The doctor just told you got lupus, yeah, just ignore it, dude, don't do anything about it. Oh, you got cancer and heart disease, ignore it, just go. You can ignore certain things, but there are



some things on a major scale that you just can't ignore and so that's what this is about. We touched base on a lot of things, man, everything from what happened to the Native Americans, which honestly, was an eye opening experience for me because to be able to take cameras on the Navajo Nation land, that's unheard of. Anybody that knows you can just go Navajo Nation land, and just whip out a camera. They invited us with open arms and told us their story and what happened to them in prison camps and what's going on. Just even today, the amount of diabetes that they got going on in their system, the amount of heart disease. People think that all these Native Americans are rich. They're sitting on seminal land.

Darin: And it's going on right here. I've been wounded knee, Pine Ridge, all that stuff and you're like, there's so much wrong so much about this and the fact that it still exists. It's 2021. That's what I mean, listen, I'm not here to bash except I am. Whatever system is in place, failed. So it comes by way of people like you, and the people that helped you build it to raise attention so that we can mobilize solutions.

John: You gotta do it. That's the thing, I always say this too. A lot of people like, every white person is not evil. I'm like, I never said that. You got this whole subconscious thing going on. What I'm saying is that, I got ancestors that probably did some horrible shit. You got to be okay with like, alright, whatever they did, I'm not gonna carry on that tradition. Some traditions where you carried on without even knowing we're doing it. The people that sit in office today, they may not have started what is spiraled into what's going on right now, but if you're not looking to change it, they're part of the problem, too. That's what I'm trying to say, we can't wait on that government. Sure, they're working on plans and policies and this and that. We might even be alive by the time that happens. I plan to be 120, I get it. It's probably still not going to be where it needs to be, so we need to bring that back in and we need to change it even if it doesn't touch your bubble, you need to change some of your actions too, and that's kind of hard for a lot of people. It's like, well, I'm not the one poisoning the people. I'm not the one over there. Yeah, but do you realize all these stores and all these systems, they keep track of everything we do. Money is your biggest vote. You'll never have to go to a poll ever. Your money will vote everything.

Darin: And now we know that there's so much in bed with each other and so many conflicts of interests.

John: The film does that to the point, just let it be known, we're self releasing the film because I was literally on a zoom call with the president of a major network, not gonna say the network, but a major network. They're literally telling me how this film was the best film they've ever seen. They have an initiative to help heal the black community. They have an unlimited marketing budget, which is funny that they say that because they offered us pennies on what we should have got for the film but the President doesn't give offers, so they don't know what we've been offered by the channel yet. So she goes into this whole thing about how it's like the best film, this is gonna help them with their initiative to heal the black community. Then five seconds later, she goes, but we got to cut out like 30 minutes of the film. Me and my co-director were on a zoom call like, why would you cut, it's only an hour and 40 minutes. It's not like it's too long. Then literally tells us face to face on the Zoom because your film goes right after the people that advertise with us. I call out McDonald's, I call out Pfizer, I call out these other companies, and so they're like, yeah, I want to heal the



community but my money. I'm like, no, man. So another network reached out to us. They were like, look, we don't need all those changes but here you go. We do need a little bit of something. Then I saw on the flip side of that, that they wanted to even though they want to offer the same amount of money, which is like the same pennies on what it was, they basically said in the contract that they could sub-license the film. I'm like, wait a minute. So you buy from us, just giving out numbers, you buy it from us for \$2 but you go sell it for 20 million, and we just got \$2, and they were mad at us for not being grateful of that.

Darin: Then they say things like, this is just how it's done. Believe me, I know. It's crazy. So you went to the Native Americans, you got that story, and so what are some of the other contexts that people can expect to be educated on and to learn about because for me, when I'm starting to hear because I heard from a couple of other sources about this cities that exist and people, like you grew up in it. You didn't have access to whole healthy food. There wasn't any access to it, and you're in a major city.

John: And you're growing up in it and you don't even realize it. It's just a norm for you.

Darin: So what you found underneath that.

John: One of the major stats that we found out was, a lot people don't know this, there's actually more gun shops in the United States of America. There are more gun shops and their grocery stores. The gun shops are shockingly, predominantly located in cities of color, as opposed to the grocery stores. The grocery stores are disproportionately not in the cities of color. Then if you think about this, this is a way I can really get people to like see it. If you were to go to Beverly Hills right now, you wouldn't see a McDonald's, a check cashing place, a gun shop, or anything along that line. If you go right outside of it, you'll see right there in the hood, and it's put there on purpose. The thing is people are trying to say Wholefoods doesn't do this because they wouldn't make money there and this is no knock on the whole foods in general, I'm just using an example. But you're not going to find a store like that in a marginalized community because they don't think the money's there. The average McDonald's, and I might be off a little bit by the numbers, but I remember looking this up like a year ago, the average McDonald's brings in almost 4 to 5 million a year. The owner might not see all that profit, but that's what's exchanging in there. You mean to tell me you can't put a grocery store in there and make that same amount of money, or more. So they choose to do that. It's about just bringing up that awareness and also showing the other side like, look, you think somebody's over there complaining? No, they're actually pointing out the problem. I was just listening to somebody's podcast the other day, and they said a line in there, and as peaceful as I try to be, and they said, savagery is the best way to get your point across. I was like, man, that is not a lie. You can try to be peaceful, peaceful, peaceful, peaceful and sometimes you just gotta throw off the gloves and be like, hey, look, this is fucked up over here. We've been trying to show you it's fucked up over here and since you didn't listen, now, look what's about to happen. So that's really what it is. I'm just showing the world that all these diseases, all these chronic diseases, I'm not talking about stuff people are born with. I'm talking about stuff that is developing over time in these people are related to this food.

Darin: That's crazy because at the same time, there's so much food that's being wasted. There's a great nonprofit called FarmLink. It's a kid who basically had to quit school because of COVID or whatever, and you realized there's a bunch of schools now that don't have kids



there. Then he saw, literally, farmers are destroying food, destroying. In one year, they got 40 million pounds of food to people that need it. Imagine all of those food scarcity places that you're talking about that you've investigated.

John: If you could put it in there.

Darin: It's only a system.

John: And the bad part is, and people that's listening to this, it is is not even a knock on the farmers because legally, the farmers are supposed to get rid of their food. There are grocery stores.

Darin: Subsidize.

John: Even if the food is not necessarily expired, per se, by the date, grocery stores just can't give out the food that they have to dispose of, they have to throw it away, legally, and that's what's crazy. It can be a person that's dying of starvation sitting right next to the door, and they can't give them their food, they gotta throw it in the bin. Now that person goes into the bin and gets it himself, that's on them, but they can't just hand it to him.

Darin: There's a thing that if you have the right procedures in place to keep the food healthy, then you can take it. So that's what you have to kind of get around and literally, you can have someone right there who needs the food and they're destroying it right in front of you. It is happening in New York. I saw it on social media.

John: I saw that. It's crazy. Do you know what that was though? The situation was it was a vendor who didn't have a license, I guess, or whatever it was. But instead of them just giving it to the people right there, the cops pulled up a trash can and dumped all the food.

Darin: Yeah, there was literally a dump truck. They're throwing vibrant food away.

John: That hurt. That hurt to watch.

Darin: And you're like, what the hell?

John: Then the cops are sitting there. In the back of my head I'm like, I know one of those four or five cops is sitting there like, this is fucked up. You got to. You can try to act tough all you want. There's a human side to everybody. Now, everybody's trigger is not the same but everybody got one, and I guarantee out of those five cops, at least one or two, maybe all five were sitting there like, this is fucked up but we can't do anything. The synopsis of the film is trying to heal people to show them that all this propaganda that's put up that are like, these certain foods are saving our life and making us healthy. No, if you really take a step back, what is indigenous for humans to eat has nothing to do with that. Vegans aren't filling up hospitals. I don't really even use the word vegan in the movie, but I'm just being real, nobody goes to the ER because their heart exploded because they had too many oranges that day. Oh, man, what happened to Bill? Man, he had eight oranges a day and his heart couldn't take it.

Darin: And he was having eight for a month.



John: Yeah, and it just built up in his arteries. No, that's not the case, but we've been told that, oh, you won't get enough this way. With the industrialization of the world has kind of made it worse because we look at a lot of these lands, if you grew up next to a mango tree back in the day, what did you eat all day? You ate mangoes, and you probably lived to be 100. Nobody said anything, but now with this convenience, and all this stuff. I was conducting an interview with somebody and they didn't know that king's disease was gout. They didn't understand why it was called king's disease. It was called king's disease because back in the day, only the kings could afford to have meat and fat and all this other stuff so that's why they were getting it, and now you got gout on every block. I don't know the numbers on gout, I apologize for that, but heart disease and all that stuff, I kind of keep up with that. But the rate of people having gout now is not just kings, and not just royalty, and not just the rich, it's everywhere.

Darin: It's that whole, unfortunately, we've subsidized this poor quality factory farmed animals, which is a whole nother rabbit hole.

John: We subsidize everything. It's just crazy. People don't even understand. We talked about this in the film. People don't understand how much companies like Coca Cola, Pepsi and Nabisco are contributing to the SNAP program, which used to be like food stamps. If you remember, food stamps in its beginning, in its entirety and actually still to this day, they never changed the wording in what's going on. You cannot buy prepared foods which are food stamps. So what the fuck is Coke, Pepsi, Oreos as prepared foods. Exactly, but they're the main contributors giving me money. So they're subsidizing it. They're subsidizing the program and these lawmakers are like, yeah, you know what, you gave me a couple of 100 grand, here you go, go ahead. You can buy a Coke. You can go to some McDonald's and some other places with your card and get it. That's what I'm saying. If the government was really, really concerned about the health of the people, they would take it back and like, alright, you're gonna buy fruits and vegetables with this. I know a lot of people are like, that's infringing on their rights. No, infringing on their rights and saying, hey, you know what, go buy that bullshit and we got these pharmaceuticals over for you, we got the surgeries over here for you. You know what, when the surgery doesn't completely work, we got another pill for you. If that pill kicks in, you're probably gonna have a couple of side effects but that's cool because we got another pill for those side effects.

Darin: Guess what we own?

John: Exactly. Then we found also like there's money tied in between and they don't like to talk about this as noticed why they want this film on networks.

Darin: No, it's not about the time. We need to do a special.

John: Yeah, and I told them. I told the president of the network, I said, it sounds more like you don't want to film called They're Trying To Kill Us, you want something more like They Don't Really Like Us. If we tell somebody the film's called, They're Trying To Kill Us, and then they don't see anything showing them trying to be cute, they'll be like, why the hell did I just watch this movie for? We did this on purpose so you can see. One thing I've noticed throughout time is that no matter what relationship you're in, whether it's your school, your work, your spouse, a friend, a family member, once you find out that they're fucking want to



kill you, you pretty much get out of that relationship. So if I can show you that this food is killing you, you probably be like, you know what, I really don't need to be in this relationship anymore, but I have to show you that. We're living in a time where you got to go reach people where they are. Nobody's really reading books as much as they were. Everybody's at home watching this documentaries and watching docuseries so I'm gonna go where you are. I'm gonna give it to you right there, and that's where it kind of came from.

Darin: When is that gonna launch? When can people see it?

John: So we're gonna do the independent release, November 11, is the date we're looking at right now. You can stream it directly from the website. We're working on the technology now to where you pay your \$20, you can see it and then we're going to give instructions because most TVs at this point, you can stream it to your TV, bluetooth, whatever the case is. But just looking at these networks, why would we do this for these pennies? It compromised the integrity of the film, first of all, where they wouldn't even get it. Then by doing this plan, what I'm doing now is you got these people that donate their time for this. Most people do documentaries, they never get paid a dime for it. So this way, not everybody's looking to get something from it. I got my executive producers Chris Paul and Billie Eilish. They make more money just by blinking than being in this film, but now I can give them something for using their voice using their talent and then that goes down the line. We got Cedric the Entertainer, Mya, Styles P, Dr. Greger. It goes down the line. We got economists, doctors, lawyers, politicians, hip hop stars, athletes, we talked to everybody. I would say, out of the 90 interviews that we got in the film, I want to say there's three Mac's that weren't plant-based or vegan. I even give credit to the people that aren't that still wanted to use their voice to be like, you know what, you're right. You can't argue it. Even if I'm not vegan, I can't argue with you that this is what's going on.

Darin: I tell you what, it's very exciting and I applaud you for not compromising because you can't at certain point. If you let that line get pushed by all these major who has, then it's lost yet again.

John: I keep telling everybody, hey, if you can just wait two months before you bootleg, just support it first because I know it's gonna get bootlegged. That's just how it is. For the first two months, support the shit and then after that, we said look, if it raises enough money because the thing is, we're giving a huge chunk of it to charitable foundations. I'm not out here like I'm about to be rich off of this. No, the artists are getting paid, these charitable foundations are getting paid. I mean, I spent five years to make it so I'll make a little something myself, don't get me wrong but let's make sure that we show this industry that these films are important and they're gonna see how much they lost out on. We need to show them that. It's not about my film at this point, now it's about the next film and the film after that for other people because this might be my last one.

Darin: Yeah, let's push it back on them and it's like, hey, it's on you guys to start changing this thing too. There are companies, there are good people in some of those companies, there are. It's just a matter of like, we as the people literally create an opportunity for these companies through your dollars.



John: Your dollars are your votes, man. The dollars are the votes and you vote. You can be silent. Nobody even has to know your name. You don't have to do it like this.

Darin: Put your credit card in.

John: Put your credit card in, boom, get away. And not just this film, with the foods that you buy, the clothes that you buy, the cars that you buy, everything. They keep track of everybody. You might think that you're silent but they keep track of all of that so the more stuff that you buy that is eco friendly, that is plant-based, that is supporting the social movements, these rights, then you're speaking volumes.

Darin: Well, I'm stoked for that movie to come out. I'm stoked that we got to spend more time together, and all the stuff you're doing. So how can people find you and follow you and sign up for the newsletter for the movie to come out, all that jazz?

John: The film's website is theyretryingtokillus.com, which I can't believe that was actually still available, but it's there like the compound, theyretryingtokillus.com. I'm under Badass Vegan on Instagram. Well, Instagram Twitter, my account is suspended on Twitter right now. It'll be a year in February so I'll probably be back in February, who knows? Snapchat, all that under Badass Vegan. I think I'm even on Pinterest but I only do it because I don't want anybody to just take my name and then start putting like porn on it or something. I actually am friends with porn stars. You'd be shocked at how many vegans are porn stars. I'm not even lying. I'm dead serious, but they want to take care of your body like longevity.

Darin: Nice. Thanks, brother.

John: Thanks, man. It's good to be here, man.

[01:04:37] Generic Outro

Darin: What a fantastic episode. So tell me, what is one thing you got out of today's conversation? If this episode struck a chord with you and you want to dive a little deeper into my other conversations with incredible guests, you can head over to my website, darinolien.com for more episodes and in-depth articles. Keep diving my friends. Keep diving.