



## A Process to Raise Successful Citizens

Nathaniel Turner  
Author, TED Speaker

EPISODE 38

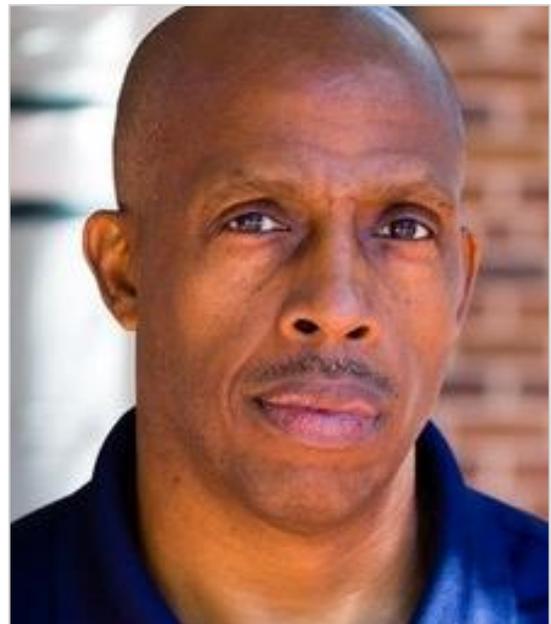
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### [Quote]

“Embedded in this application from Harvard were these three things that I used to as the template to design his life”

### [Description]

Parents, guardians, educators bear upon them this responsibility to raise children who are productive citizens. Nate Turner created a backward design life process to help his unborn child become a great global citizen without means of wealth, privilege, legacy status, or wrong-doing.



In this episode, we talk to Nate, an author and TED Speaker, about the techniques and strategies that helped him raise a successful Gen Zer, and the blueprint that he shared with parents, through his history making book “Raising Supaman”.

### [Intro]

**Jaison Dolvane:** Society’s chief responsibility is to raise children who will become the best possible citizens of the world and who will maximize their ability, so they fulfill their potential. Parents, guardians, educators bare upon them this responsibility to raise children who are productive citizens.

As a zealous advocate that every person has an opportunity to maximize their human potential, Nate Turner created a backward design life process to help his unborn child become a great global citizen without means of wealth, privilege, legacy status, or wrong doing.

Nate's son not only met Harvard's admission benchmarks, but scored in the top 1%, learned four languages, played soccer in Brazil, started a foundation to address teen homelessness, and went on to do his engineering Ph.D.

In this episode, we talk to Nate about the techniques and strategies that helped him raise a successful Gen Zer, and the blueprint that he shared with parents, through his history making book "Raising Supaman".

Nathaniel Turner, is an author, a TED speaker and describes himself as a "Humanity Propulsion Engineer." He is the author of several books, including the children's book series, "The Amazing World of STEM and has been featured in The Washington Post, Black Enterprise, iHeartRadio, The Good Men Project, Sirius XM, and U.S. News & World Report.

### [Episode]

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Welcome Nate.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Thanks for having me.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Good, now I Know your name is Nathaniel, but I read somewhere that you go by the name Nate, that's a lot easier to pronounce.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Yeah. And it means that I'm not in trouble with you. Cause the only time someone uses Nathaniel is when I'm in trouble.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** So Nate, tell me a little bit about your background and you know, how you kind of got started.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So I'm a guy from Gary Indiana originally. My parents, Tommy, and Gladys lower middle-class folks, neither one of them had a college education. My grandparents, I believe only one of them finished the ninth grade, the other three, I think the best was sixth grade. So I

don't come from a highly educated family, the first person in my family to go to college and then subsequently earned a master's in a terminal degree. So, and for the last 25 years or so, I've mostly run a financial planning practice, although a decent amount of time over the last six to eight years, I've been in this space with parents and education.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Got it. And I think you've got like a few degrees now, right?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** I do have a bachelor's in accounting, a master's in history and theology and a law degree.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Wow. So take us back to you know, your book Raising Superman and obviously the, the thought of that seemed like it was a life's journey of you actually thinking about this before your son was born and then sort of almost designing his life. So tell us a little bit about that.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Yeah, so my father passed on March, on Mother's Day of 2018, but I had a very precarious relationship with my father. As time has passed, I used to say it was tumultuous. We had bad times, but as time has passed, I've had an opportunity to see my father from a different lens. Something happens when people are no longer here with you, that you're now forced to look only at them as opposed to having an interaction with them. So I see my father a little bit differently. I guess the point of it is at the time when I learned I was going to be a father, I wanted to be so much better than my father. I wanted to be completely opposite to my father without realizing that my father had given me some good things. I just couldn't see it at the time. But one of the things I wanted to do better than my father was to make sure that my son and I had memories that were positive. Because I couldn't think of anything that was good about my time with my father.

So I started writing letters, notes, I started initially started just writing notes about what my aspirations were for my son and then just, he was two, he walks in the mailbox for me one afternoon and asked me, when was he going to get mail? And I said, hey man, these are bills that, you know, and he said, no, but I want mail daddy. And so it dawned on me that maybe this is a time to write him. And as I started to write him, things just started flowing out that I never intended. So what went from writing postcards and greeting cards turned to me writing him letters and it just stuck. And he

enjoyed reading his father's letters. And in time I realized it was a really a unique way to communicate with a child. It held me accountable in ways that I wouldn't have been accountable by just saying words out loud. And so we just kept writing and one day he decided that I guess we'll talk about that later, but it was his decision to publish the letters.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Oh, very interesting. So how long did you write these letters for?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** I still write them. So I started writing them in a formal format at age two, and I wrote him a series of letters from 2 to 16. And when he was ready to leave to go to Brazil, I put some of the letters in a binder and gave them to him. I said, you're going to be 7,000 miles away. We're not going to have the chance to interact as we do all the time, but maybe you'll find some value in some of the things that I wrote to you in the past. So I put the letters in a binder and then I left and went to Rio for a few days. He was in a city called Puerto Felice in Brazil. My wife called me and said, you're going to have to go back to the academy where he is. I don't think he's going to make it. He's having a really hard time adjusting. I've talked to him a few times. He's not adjusting very well.

So I go back to the academy and I'm expecting him to have his bags packed, ready to go. And he's got a big smile on his face. And I was like, hey, what's going on? He said did you put the letters in any particular order? And I said, no. I said, I re-read the first three. I remember my purpose. I'm going to be fine. And here's what we're going to do though. Whenever I do come home, we're going to take these letters and we're going to publish them. We're going to share with other families. Cause daddy, when you tell me I can do something, not only do I believe I can do it, I know it's supposed to happen.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** That's amazing. So let's go back to some of those first three letters. I mean, what was kind of the core essence of those?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So what I wanted to do is write him, I wanted to write him in a way that even as a two year old, they had value, but they also would have value at 32.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** And by the way, just before that, Nate, how old is your son today?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** He's 26. Just turned 26 on June 27th.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Okay. All right. So let's go back to the three letters then.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So I just wanted to write him, I want to say something that mattered. Because here's the deal. Again, here's my father and I, we didn't speak for over 20 years and now I've got this son. And, so the very when my son was born, I took him to see my father. I called my father and said, dad, you've got a grandson, come see him. He didn't come. So my wife and I get in the car and we drive to his house and I say, here's your grandson. And I extend my arms to hand him to him. And he extends his arms to push him away and said, take that baby, you know, I don't like babies. Bring him back when he's 21. And so I'm like, okay, man, you've been rejecting me for years. And now you rejected my son. And I don't want in any way to ever have a situation like that for him.

So I'm like, well, at least I'll just write him. If I write him and tell him how much I love him and what I hope for him, if I mess it up like my father did, at least he'll have some recollection that his father actually did love. So that's when the letter is originated. Me just wanting to find a way to leave my son a legacy that his dad, at some point wasn't a complete jerk and he actually did love him.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Amazing. So let's go back to kind of what you call this backward sort of design process. Now I'm assuming that wasn't like the intent when you started writing your first, you know, two or three letters and you know, you now look in hindsight and say, hey, that's kind of what you created.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So what I wanted to do was, again, I wanted to be better than my father. And one of the things that my father would say to me, so I finished law school and my father said to me, you know, you should be a congressman or Senator by now. And I was like, man, how do you come from where we came from and become a congressman or Senator, unless somebody has a pathway to help you to do that. And so as much as it me off, it did, it led me, it gave me sort of inclination that, well, maybe in some ways, what he's suggesting to me in his crude way is that you need a pathway, if you're going to help your child do better than you.

And so I was thinking about education at the time. So I wrote to Harvard and it was the time when you couldn't just go online and there was no

internet. So I wrote Harvard for an application. Harvard sent the application and embedded in this application from Harvard were these three things and now became the template that we [07:47 inaudible] design his life. Harvard's application of course, asked for students who did well academically. Then it said that at the time they said, we want world citizens. We want people who are world citizens. I was like Okay. And then the third thing, it says that they wanted students who care for something greater than themselves. And I'm like, oh, okay, that's interesting. So we need to raise somebody who does well academically, this was very early on. We need to raise somebody who if for us, maybe you can speak another language and we need to raise somebody who's a good person. And so that became the template that we use for everything that we did in his life.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Got it. So obviously the academic piece was...

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Was to make sure he could meet the standards of Harvard.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Right. And I think most parents will kind of understand that. Because you know, we've got all this kind of like formalized educational institutions around us that kind of help us with that. Talk to me a little bit about the world's citizens peace.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So, okay. So obviously I'm an African-American and oftentimes in this country when we think [08:54 inaudible].

**JAISON DOLVANE:** You just cut out there a little bit, Nate. Can you hear me? Oh, there we go. Okay. Yeah. Sorry, just repeat that very last part.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So I'm African-American obviously. And I shouldn't say obviously, because I could be Caribbean or something, but most of the time in this country, when we talk about diversity, we talk about diversity oftentimes from the lens of people, quote, unquote of color. But when we think about diversity in terms of the planet, the planet doesn't talk about people in terms of whether or not I'm African-American and I live in America. And so I wanted to make sure that I raised a child who understood and could respect the values of people beyond just those who look like him or those who were quote unquote white. And so that's what we wanted to do.

So that initially was introducing him to other languages. But then it also was like, well, we introducing him to other people's cultures and ideas and so forth so that he could be a global citizen, as opposed to being just a kid who focused on his own color scheme and whether or not that meant he was diverse.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Yeah. Amazing. So what are some of the things that you actually did to help him with that?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So one of the things we do is we do this thing it's called like a domestic exchange. So like, until we could leave America, we would say whenever we would go somewhere, we would go to a different community. So if we went to Miami as an example, we go to little Havana. Because like, and when we were teaching him, when he was learning Spanish, wherever we went, we made sure he could go someplace where he could speak the language authentically with people who spoke only that language.

And so he's had a chance to leave the country a little bit now, but yes, as an example, I have a couple who I consider my Jewish parents. And so he's had, and so when it got time for us to when he was turning 13 and we were saying, well, what do we do now? What do we do now? Cause there is no, there's no ceremony per se, for him to recognize him in terms of this, now he's a man. I talked to them and said, hey, what do I do? What do you do for bar mitzvah? Can I borrow some of that? And will you help me create this thing called a black mitzvah? And so this Jewish family helped me to create this thing for my son when he turned 13.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Oh, that's great. That's great. So really, you know, sort of what I take away from that is that, you know, you're really exposing, you expose your son to different cultures. And I think the kind of like sort of underlying on some of this is that to do that, you can do that in your backyard. Because most cities will have sort of pockets of different cultures that we just have to kind of walk a few miles to [11:49 inaudible] not necessarily have to travel, you know, and cross oceans.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Correct. I mean, I'm in Indianapolis now. And it's funny, cause sometimes we'll get a chance to talk about diversity is people say, well, how did you raise this young man who speaks all these languages and stuff? And I said, well, one thing you have to do is you just

have to be comfortable leaving your own neighborhood. In America, I say, you know, what we care about is where we spend our money. So I said, how many times and I'll say this to black, how many times have you spent time with a Turkish family? Or how many times have you gone to a Jewish synagogue? Like diversity, can't just be about somebody coming and doing something in your environment. Diversity, true diversity, and holistic diversity is that we all get out and we will spend our money in places that we ordinarily don't spend our money. So see a different dentist. Let somebody else do your hair, go to a different restaurant. Like don't just go eat at the restaurant, talk to the owners of the restaurant, and get to know some people in different communities.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Yeah. That's wonderful. Well, great advice. The third thing that you actually mentioned was I think it was, you know, we want people who care about others more than they do for themselves. And so in that particular one you know, what did you do to help them sort of develop those kind of capabilities?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So, first of all, we didn't name him for eight days. So that was a big part of it. There's the ancient tradition that you wait seven days, watch the child's characteristics, and so forth unfold, and then you name the child, but we took it a further step. We had known you and you were part of the village, we would have given you a list of names that we thought we were interested in. And we would have asked you to come over and spend time with the baby and tell us what you thought the baby's name should be.

So we wanted the whole, we want everybody, we wanted a village to feel responsible for the child, almost like the lion king. Do you remember in the very early part, Mufasa they hold him. And so that's what we were thinking. And so his name, our son's name is Nyeem Kahari Turner-Bendel. Nyeem is Arabic for benevolent, Kahari is Swahili for kingly. Turner is a slave name, right? And Bendel is [14:16 inaudible] born away from home. So his full name is, he is a benevolent king despite being born from slavery and born away from home. And we would tell him as he was growing up, that he was a king and he's supposed to be a good king. And that the people who are around him are part of the kingdom and your responsibility is to be good to the people that are part of the kingdom. And we remind him, even now that the most important word in all the human languages, who, because when he dies, he said on your obituary talks about who you are and your eulogy, we'll talk about who you are and on your tombstone, we are going to

talk about who you are, not what you did, not how much money you made. And we just talk about who you were as a human being. So that's been in everything we do is always about, it's about the who, I didn't mean to rhyme, but it is the case.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Amazing. So I want to go back to your father because you mentioned something about the fact that, you know, the last two years, since he passed away, you come to think of him a bit differently. Tell us a little bit about sort of, you know, how have things changed for you?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So, the daily, I do this thing, it's called journaling forward. I write about my best life in advance. So you might find an entry out written, it'll be about something that will happen 10 years from now. And so, and oftentimes, as I'm writing now, I find myself hearing my father's voice. My father, for example, my father taught me as a ten-year-old, I wanted a 10 speed bike. And he told me the year before, when I was nine and he bought me a bike. He said, you don't want this dirt bike, you want a 10 speed bike. And I was like, no, no, no, I want this dirt bike. Well, the following year I wanted the 10 speed bike. And he said I told you last year, you should have gotten the 10 speed bike. So in essence, he's telling me about how to look forward, but all I could do was see the present.

And so those are kinds of things. And so they he further said, if you want the bike, Nate, you know, if a man wants to eat, a man has to work. And I'm like, dude, I'm 10 years old. What do you want me to do? So he walks me out in the garage. He gives me a lawnmower, [16:36 inaudible] lawnmower, a shovel, and a rake. And he said, go at it until you can afford your bike. And so now when I look back on it, like I've been in business for myself for 25 years, I'm thinking about life forward instead of in the present. Like, and so those are things I got from my father, but I was so angry for a long time, I couldn't see that he'd actually given me some good tools. Whether or not he was always a good teacher, we can debate that, but he did give me some good tools.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** And you know, I think most parents are probably guilty of the same thing. We tell our kids because we consider that we have some experience in life, right. Or at least more than our two year old or a 10 year old we tend to preach. And obviously our kids don't have the same perspective. And so they're just not going to understand, right. So you're kind of describing a little bit

of that kind of conflict, in yourself and your father. But having seen that now, I mean, how do you change that message to your child?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So one of the things I try to do with Nyeem is, this is where the letters became really helpful. Because when you're writing, and if you write intentionally, you can remove the emotionality from the writing. One of the things that happens when sometimes when you communicate with children, as they look at your face, and if you're smiling, they're smiling. If you're frowning, they're frowning. The whatever word you say, they may completely miss those and you can be angry and they'll miss your message because of the anger. You could also be excited and they'll miss like the process that made you excited. And when I wrote him, that helped me to remove all of that.

And so that's very different than my father, my father might talk to me when he's angry and he might have a really good lesson, but I got to somehow unpack the lesson from the anger. Like, I can't do that as a child. Or if I do something good and he hugs me, I'm like, well, what did I actually do? Cause I don't know how to repeat it. So, but when I write Nyeem, I would tell them exactly how to repeat it today. You had a great day, but do you know why? It wasn't because you finished first in the race. It was because last week and the week before that, and the week before that you did all of these things consistently, and that is the lesson in life. So those were the letters would do for.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Makes sense. You know, and I guess it kind of strikes me that obviously it helps you speak in an emotionally, but also it allows the child to kind of like, you know, read it when they're in a better listening mode.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Or go back now and he's 25 to 26 and he can pick up the letters and he'll say, okay, this is what my father told me at 13. But the message is still the same message. Still got to work. I still got to get up early.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Yeah. I'm sure it means something different every time he reads it.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** And one interesting thing is that he shared the book with other people. So he's had other students who've asked him what

they should do. And he was like, well here, let me give you what my father gave me. Like, it's incredible when he does that.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Awesome gift. Yeah. So you talk about, you described yourself as a humanity propulsion engineer. Tell me what that means.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Okay. So, I'll say this, first of all, my son is an engineer and he would tease me and he said, you can't be an engineer, [20:20 inaudible]. But there's a social engineering. And if you feel like humanity is at a threshold, at a tipping point, in a bad situation, then our objective for all of us, for you included Jaison is to find a way to propel us forward. And so every day I think that that today could be my last day. And if today is my last day, how, like, how will I be remembered? Who am I, and what I want to be remembered as somebody who cared deeply about humanity and did everything he possibly could do, to lead the planet better than it was when I arrived. And now I call that propelling humanity forward.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Got it. Got it. And you also talk about this concept of relational legacy. And you mentioned the fact that, you know, that's sort of what parents are, whether it's, you know, subconsciously or consciously sort of doing when they're raising their children, tell us what that is and describe what you mean by that.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** So, I don't, I think most of us, when we think about legacy, certainly in this country, people are, I hear people all the time, especially in this industry that I work in, I hear people talking about generational wealth. Oh, I want to leave, I want to create generational wealth. And I'm like, yeah, that's great. But if you don't have a relationship with your kids that they understand what wealth actually is, the next generation they'll be poor. And most of us are not going to be able to leave generational wealth. But what we can leave is a legacy of relational legacy with our children, that our children see their responsibility for being intellectually ambitious, being globally and culturally competent and being humanitarian driven, caring about something greater than themselves. I don't think Jaison I'll do anything. I may never do anything that the world remembers me for.

But if I do enough good stuff as a father, then my son could go on to do something. And when you look at his Wikipedia page and it says, who was his father, there you'll see my name appear. And that's my legacy because

I've done, I poured enough into him. You don't know my dad, but my dad still lives through my relationship now with you. And so like that is the legacy that I think, and it should be a positive legacy. So even though I have, I could say terrible things about my father, I won't. I will only say about the things that helped me to be better that made you interested in having a conversation.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Right. Kind of like the legacy starts at home.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Yeah. Yeah.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** That makes sense. So tell me, you know, through this kind of journey, obviously raising your son and doing all these great things, any challenges that you've kind of faced along the way?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Yeah. Absolutely. The challenges are, are everywhere. I mean, so the challenge of trying to do what you think is the best thing to do in the face of what other people would have you to do differently. So even like naming him, when you tell your family that you're going to wait seven days to name your child, there's the challenge of wanting to revert and do what other folks said. When he was 16 and we said, hey, we're going to, we got to let them leave and go live in Brazil. Like you're going to do what? So for me, one of the larger, greatest challenges is finding a way to be, to be okay with being different. For me, that's the greatest challenge. I actually was telling a friend the other day, I see the world in this way, that everything is relative and most things are illusory.

And so Jaison could say, Nate is a nice guy, somebody else could say, Nate's a jerk. And what is Nate? Which one is he? Because it's all relative. And so Nate has to figure out, well, it doesn't matter what everybody else is going to say about you. What do you think you should do in this time. So that's been the challenging thing to do as a father. Certainly around money is another example. I work in an industry, people care greatly about money and making large amounts of money. That's not very interesting to me, but it's hard to be in an environment where that's all you ever hear about and you're measured and judged by how much money you make or what kind of car you drive or what kind of clothes that you wear. And if you're saying, I want to just be a really great dad, and I'm not thinking about money, the same way you all are. That becomes kind of a tough thing too.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** I guess that concept of like being okay to be different is about, you know, all of us kind of getting comfortable with our insecurities, right?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** That makes sense. So I asked this question to folks on my show all the time, which is there a one feeling that you have as a parent that you would rather not feel?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Yes. That I'm getting old and my time is running out and that troubles me greatly. When I first started to gray, my son, I think was about 13, 12 or 13, He said, daddy, are you getting ready to die? Are you going to die? And he says now, that doesn't bother him, but Jaison, I know my time is drawing near and as his father, I don't want to leave him. I Love that guy to absolute death. He is my best friend. I just saw him and spent the weekend with him in Miami two weeks ago. That bothers me tremendously. That I'm running out of time.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** I think you're bit too young to be recognizing your mortality.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** I'm 56. My grandfather passed at 65. I mean, men in my family don't typically live that long. My grandmother lived to be 103, so I tease everybody that I'm going to outlive the [26:24 inaudible].

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Yeah, there you go.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** But it makes me nervous. Right. I'm getting older. I'm like, okay, I'm graying. I'm not, things are not always moving in the same way it used to move and work.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** I hear you. **We all** start thinking about that at some point, right? So what is what is your hope for your audience?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** My hope for parents is one that the parents will fully engage in their children's lives and understand that they too have a legacy that they're creating with their children. And that we return in some ways to the time when parents were actually committed to making sure that their children's lives were better than theirs. I meet so many kids today who don't have that experience. I always say, the children didn't ask to be here.

Like we invited them here. They're the guests. So let's like treat them as honored guests for as long as possible and give them an opportunity to be great.

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Yeah, I hear you. So Nate you know, I really appreciate the time that you've been here. It's been fantastic talking to you. Can you just tell the audience where they can reach you?

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Okay. So the easiest thing to do, I have a website it's [www.Nathanielaturner.com](http://www.Nathanielaturner.com). And then once you get there, you'll find everything else we're doing. We also have an organization we found my wife, my son, and I found it called the league of extraordinary parents. And that email address, web address, I'm sorry, is L, the letters [www.LXTRAP.com](http://www.LXTRAP.com).

**JAISON DOLVANE:** Got it. Okay. And we'll put those links in our show notes also when we actually publish this. Well, thank you so much, Nate, for being here.

**NATHANIEL TURNER:** Thanks for having me. It was my pleasure.

### [Outro]

Thank you for listening.

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### [Resources & Links]

Nate Turner website  
<https://www.nathanielaturner.com>

Raising Supaman – Book link

[https://www.amazon.com/Nathaniel-A-Turner-J-D/e/B00IKUJ6MU?ref=sr\\_ntt\\_srch\\_lnk\\_1&qid=1564432710&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Nathaniel-A-Turner-J-D/e/B00IKUJ6MU?ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1&qid=1564432710&sr=8-1)

League of Extraordinary Parents

*Charitable Organization focused on reducing income and wealth equality*

<https://www.lxtrap.com/>