

John McWhorter on 2017-01-06 at 13.05

LOURY: Hello there, John McWhorter.

MCWHORTER: Hey Glenn, how are you doing.

LOURY: John, I'm getting by just barely, but I am getting by.

Glenn Loury, Bloggingheads.tv, Brown University, talking to my frequent conversation partner here. This is really the Glenn and John show at some level. John McWhorter of Columbia University, a linguist extraordinaire, and commentator on all matters of public affairs, including race issues, John, because we're the black guys at Bloggingheads.tv.

MCWHORTER: Proud of it, that's right.

LOURY: That's part of our brand. Yeah, I say I'm doing OK, and I'm just getting by, and if you allow me a minute, let me explain to whatever viewership that might still be left out there (laughs).

MCWHORTER: After that last one, OK, yeah.

LOURY: Yeah, the last one with Harold Pollack where I (inaudible) give Trump a chance, that was my basic position, OK, and you could beat me up about that too, but after our, uh, prescribed agenda. And, Harold held forth as a decent liberal that said, no, Trump doesn't deserve no chance to be given. And we got into various by-conversations, and the reading in some considerable portion

of the audience was that I was brutish, overbearing, ranting, and you know, repeating myself. And I take umbrage. But on the other hand, I have to also live in the real world, and if that's what people are saying, there might be something to it. So, in any case, I'm burdened by all of that. John, what happened? You disappeared.

MCWHORTER: I'm right here Glenn. I'm just -- as you know, I'm in a hotel room at Austin Texas at a conference, and I'm trying to make it straighter. And so I just moved away to prop (inaudible). I'm listening to everything you're saying. So go ahead.

LOURY: No, I'll stop. I'm talking about myself. I'm just saying, life is tough in the commentator business because sometimes the audience bites back. And I'm saying, I'm kind of saying a little bit of mea culpa. I promise not to bully you, John, not that you would allow it. Not that you would allow it. You wouldn't allow it. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: That's OK. I understand passion. And there's a frustration. I mean, there really, there is a frustration that one has in that, you know, we talk about these things in a certain way in our little bubble, and it seems that there is a viewership, and I think we're both very happy for it. But then, when you open up our mainstream organs, there's just this one kind of view that is tolerated. And

I think the people in question would think of themselves as having a diversity of views, but from our perspective, I think you could say that the various, you know smart people with usually three names who write for the usual places, none of them have any serious disagreements. And there's just that one view, and most of us know how editorial boards restrict it. So it can get frustrating, and I think that's where you're coming from.

LOURY: I'm frustrated; I am. I admit to that. I think also the season, the political season, I think the Trump phenomenon is very wrenching. I mean, the Civil War, it was worse. (laughs) The country was at war and we were literally slaughtering each other. But this feels very, like in the same genre, you know, or close to it almost. I mean, I feel, you know, we're a hair's breadth away from violence, and in fact, that's one of the things that we want to talk about, that incident in Chicago. We're a hair's breadth away, there's going to be an inauguration and there's going to be a kind of anti-inauguration and what not, and the spirit of the time licenses a certain sense of extra-legality, OK, maybe I overstate that, but anyway, these are not normal times. One must resist, one must do what one needs to do, and I assume there's a counterpart to that on the other side, one must save

America, and you know, pitchforks and torches and all that kind of stuff. Anyway, it feels like we're in a very raw time, so I think that's part of it, because if I take -- I personally, Glenn Loury, you John McWhorter, a sharp position on some issue, let's just name one, Jeff Sessions as attorney general of the United States. OK, so people are divided about that, so what do you say about that? Now if you have anything good to say about Sessions, if you said anything like, let Trump have his attorney general. The guy's been a member of the Senate for forever, I mean for crying out loud, let's just let him be the attorney general, you know, what the heck. I don't have to like his policies, I agree with you, he's wrong on the Voting Rights Act, or whatever, whatever, but what the heck? I mean, you're going to label him a racist? I mean come on, like that, if you say that, people's jaws are going to get tight, OK, because it's a very heightened moment. Something like that, that would be part of what I would add to it.

MCWHORTER: It's a tough one, and for example, with Sessions, it comes down to, we are a people who at least in certain circles feel that discrimination against groups is a taboo. Talk about me being repetitious, it's the religion, and in many ways, it's a good religion. And so the idea is that

if somebody's had the positions that he's had, has said some of the things that he's had, then, you know, all bets are off and that he just needs to be rejected, and I think anybody can understand that in the strict logical sense there might be a case for waiting him out, for thinking that maybe he'll behave somewhat differently when he's in such a high office, for allowing maybe what he says over his sweet tea when he's with just his nearest and dearest doesn't really matter. But yeah, the jaws will set.

But Glenn, this is something that we've kind of batted around between us lately that I think relates to a lot of this, which is this: do you notice that it's gotten to the point that there was an era about 15, 20 years ago, which you could see as ironically the heyday of the true black conservative, which is very much over. When I started doing this in the year 2000, you had Shelby Steele writing regularly, usually for the *Wall Street Journal*, but sometimes for Harper's. You had Tom Sowell writing his column, and known within a certain circle. And there was Clarence Thomas who was talked about a certain amount. Armstrong Williams was never a household, but he was --
Walter Williams

LOURY: Walter Williams, another one, yeah.

MCWHORTER: -- for Rush Limbaugh. There were all of these people, and when I came into things, and it was thought that I was one of them, the idea was that I was on this list of black conservatives. You had Larry Elder, the libertarian who might as well be black --

LOURY: Alan Keyes, who ran for Senate against Obama in Illinois. Ward Connerly, who made a whole career out of being against affirmative action.

MCWHORTER: Ward Connerly, exactly.

LOURY: No, I hear you.

MCWHORTER: What happened to that era, that was a counterpoise to the usual story. If you think about it, that era has gone, all those people I just mentioned are either in eclipse, or getting on in years, for example Tom Sowell has now retired. At this point, our friend Jason Riley, formerly the *Wall Street Journal* and now at the Manhattan Institute is the one card-carrying black conservative who carries that kind of status. Editors even tell me sometimes, he's the one you go to if you want the black conservative, then you have to go to other people. What happened?

LOURY: I think it's an interesting question, John. I don't know if we've got all the facts on the table, and I'm not sure I know all the facts. I want to mention the name

Deroy Murdock. He comes to mind for some reason. I want to mention the name Innis, Niger Innis, who you see on Sean Hannity. I want to mention Sheriff David Clarke, who played a prominent role in this election. I want to mention Ben Carson who's going to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. I want to mention Robert Woodson, who's very close to Jack Kemp, as you know, and you can call him a conservative player in the policy scene. So, apparently the person who's going to be -- Jesus, what is he, some important staff position, this guy's just gotten hired, and he's left a really important -- on the Republican side, in the House of Representatives staff position. I just read a piece in the *Wall Street Journal* the other day, I can't remember this guy's name, nor can I remember his position, but some very important staffing involving black conservatives. So that's it, that's it. I think --

MCWHORTER: Sure. But, very quickly Glenn, notice that none of those people have quite the totemic status that those people I mentioned before did. Maybe they will, but you know, that's very --

LOURY: No, that's fair. No, that's fair, and I was going to go on to maybe addressing that, and saying that, I think there's supply, but there's also demand. In other words,

there are these people who are so inclined and who write, and then there are these organs that are looking for people to write a certain kind of thing and want to publish them.

So, there was a time, you know, the Reagan era going forward was a big boon for black conservatism. You know, Charles -- Clarence Thomas was a product of the Reagan Revolution of the early 1980s, in his ascendancy to the Supreme Court and many of these other voices that you mentioned, including Shelby Steele's, came into their --

MCWHORTER: And you.

LOURY: And the Glenn Loury of the 1980s and early 90s in me, came into their own during the Reagan ascendancy, so we are entering into another such period, and we can make the forecast that we might want to make about whether that entails there for --

MCWHORTER: A new, yeah.

LOURY: -- a new upcrop. I think too though, that, you know, there was an argument in the 80s, and basically, we lost it, we being the conservatives who were arguing that argument, although we were right. (laughs) And if you'll give me a minute, I can say this, OK, I can say this succinctly.

MCWHORTER: I've been worried about this.

LOURY: Well what I want to say is, here's the argument:

blacks are behind. Is it bias, or is it behavior? OK, gut bucket, straight up, unvarnished, no euphemism, OK? How do we understand the lagging status of African Americans in this society? Now think about it, Immigration Act in 1965 completely reforms the criteria of immigration. We get huge influence from the non-European part of the world, Latin America and Asia, in particular, some from Africa. The whole demography has changed and Spanish become the largest group, etc., etc. You're a half-century now down the road from the Civil Rights movement, etc., I won't belabor it, OK, I've said all this before, point being that lagging status, jails overflowing, low educational performance, poverty rates, school disruption behavior, disparities of this, and that, and the other, Ferguson, Missouri, etc.

So now how do you account for that? OK, so now, there are really just two narratives that are available. One of them says, the system is white supremacy, exclusionary, biased, and oppressive. It's a plundering. It's a plundering of black bodies, it's a plundering of black wealth. It's a plundering. It's slavery by another name. It's the new

Jim Crow, OK? All of these phrases are familiar. We could name names; we won't bother.

There's another narrative. That narrative is about performance. It's about behavior. It's about whether or not you man up and woman up. It's about how you raise your kids, it's about what your values are. It's about how hard you work and study and whether you turn off the television and whether you go and run with a gang. It's about what you do. It's about what you do. That's a separate narrative. You know, people are going to get mad for me to ranting. All I'm doing out there, audience, is describing the alternatives. That's all I'm doing.

Now, now here's what I'm trying to say: we lost. The "we" being the people who said behavior, not bias lost the cultural argument. Just like the right lost most of the cultural argument, lost the argument on abortion, lost the argument on the sexual argument, lost the argument. Lost the argument on religion, basically lost the argument. The editor of *The New Yorker* don't give a damn about that. He's interested in other stuff. He has other values; he has other commitments, and he's not alone. Everybody running something important, practically, having to do with

writing, filmmaking, lecturing, symbolically describing -- Peter Berger, the great sociologist, the new class, the idea that there was a class of scribes. So you could have a country as religious as the Hindus being run by an elite as secular as the Swedes. This was his metaphor, but I always thought it captured something powerful. We lost. We who said behavior was important lost, OK?

So now, the genre of apologia, that's what it is, that gives an account of the African American lagging position, overflowing prisons, horrific acts being carried out on a daily basis, mostly against one another, and that accounts of that, in terms of bias, is the ruling orthodoxy of the day. And therefore, there's very little demand.

MCWHORTER: Here's the question though, that is true, and I think also what's interesting is that only the most extreme on the right ever said that racism didn't matter at all. And today, you can get people on the extreme left who will say of course behavior matters, but they only want to talk about it parenthetically. But it turns out that yeah, in terms of what anybody really wants to talk about, behavior lost. And the question is, why? Why does that say about our intelligentsia that they are so committed to an idea that only the descendants of African slaves are people who

are subject only in any serious way to the [operation of the economy?], and people's subtle psychological biases to the point of letting all sorts of static go by, such as all of shooting deaths in Chicago this year. Who can really say that all those people are killing each other "because of racism" in any way that will make sense to most, even intelligent human beings, everybody knows that doesn't make sense. But you let it go by.

Why is this, and is it reversible, that we've gotten to the point that there's no longer an elite group of black thinkers with influence who can get into those organs and say those sorts of things, and be taken seriously? Shelby Steele wouldn't win a national book award today. It sounds like another time that his book got that kind of recognition.

LOURY: You're right about that. You're absolutely right about that. And I think, you know, again, we can go into it in more detail, but I think you're onto something, and I think your question is very important, why is it this way, and could it -- and must it be this way? And I'm not sure I know the answer. I have a thought -- blaming the victim. OK, so any such discourse is partly about what the cause-and-effect dynamics are, how come blacks remain

disadvantaged. What are the causal mechanisms for that, OK, and we can have an argument about that, and it's partly about narrative construction about giving a kind of music about providing a kind of, you know, background presumed kind of understanding about what's going on, how we're telling the story, where we stand, from whose point of view?

Now, now, the structural racism account, the "white supremacy got us down" account, the "no black person can be expected," blah blah, and this is not the soft bigotry of low expectations, this is the realism that we're not in a color-blind or post-racial society. You know, this will be the stance that they take. Places the blame on the system. Whereas the behavioral account, while however nuanced it might be, however humane it might be conveyed, inevitably leaves some responsibility and blame resting upon the so-called "victim." I mean, I don't think there's any way around having to take a stand about whether you're going to hold people responsible.

Now, when I say this, I don't mean to say that you don't have public and social responsibilities about what a just society should do in terms of provision for people who are

poor, and the education and healthcare, and housing and all the rest. We can have a whole long discussion about what those policies should be. But yeah, you know -- and I'll stop John, I know I'm going on for a bit. The police and the kids on the street with guns, OK, and they have these encounters, and the encounters turn violent. Sometime the kid ends up dead. Now, you're just basically, you know, again, you know, the audience is going to get mad at me, I'm sorry, but I think a person has to take a stand, has to kind of be willing to acknowledge that every kid in a violent conflict with a police officer can't possibly be a victim. They can't possibly be victims, not every one of them. Some of them will be victims. Most of them, by just plain common sense, are exchanging gunfire with a police officer. That's how they got shot!

OK, now the default position that they're victims, and my back is going to get up, and I'm going to go marching somewhere, every time that happens, stakes out a claim in this narrative construction contest that we're engaging in, and I think a person has to take a stand at the end of the day, and my stand, I think, should be clear.

MCWHORTER: And you know what this is?

LOURY: What is it John?

MCWHORTER: It's interesting. There's an analogy. You have to be a corpse not to like Mozart.

LOURY: (laughs) Or a hip-hop (inaudible). (laughs)

MCWHORTER: (laughs) I'll bet even they --

LOURY: Even they really like Mozart. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: Then you got to teach somebody to like Beethoven. You know, other than the easy, da-da-da-duh, it requires a class, that's one of the classes I teach at Columbia.

LOURY: Ah-ha.

MCWHORTER: Then you get into Schoenberg and a lot of the serialist classical music, and frankly, you need even more tutelage to understand it, and most people, even music lovers, are never really going to like it. Jazz is the same way, and so anybody would like listening to Louis Armstrong --

LOURY: I hear you. I know what you're talking about with jazz.

MCWHORTER: Then the bebop comes in.

LOURY: Yeah, I hear you.

MCWHORTER: Everybody says they like it. Then there's some jazz that's unlistenable to anybody but a real -- you know. It seems that what we're talking about with this vision of black America, is that morality has gotten, in a way, "too advanced." I mean, I think both of us can understand this

notion that all black people are fundamentally blameless because of what happened in the past, because the system is set up against them to a certain extent, the playing field isn't level, and that that means that if, for kids, practically try to beat a mentally challenged white kid to death, yelling Trump, Trump, Trump, they're not culpable in any real way. You know, maybe grandma will smack them on the wrist, but they're not culpable in any real way because of the context in which they did it. What that is is a very advanced form of morality that I'm not aware of any human being (inaudible) --

LOURY: (laughs)

MCWHORTER: -- until the past 50 years, and I think all of these people think of it as an advance. And it is. I mean, I can see where they're coming from, but I'm not sure that that way of thinking is ever going to reach a whole nation any more than Schoenberg, or Sun Ra's music. And that's a tough one, because all these people think of themselves as "ahead of the curve," and they are. They've gone too far ahead, you know what I mean?

LOURY: Well I know what you mean, I think, and I disagree. OK, let me see if I know what you mean. I think you're meaning, what they're saying, is there's a kind of esoteric reasoning, a kind of abstract second or third-dimensional

more reasoning that's going on, which has its analogue in visual art, and the musical arts and so forth, of this kind of high-refined thing that a person really needs to be schooled in the genre in order to appreciate, and similarly -- and it's counterintuitive. It has a counter-intuitive dimension to it.

MCWHORTER: Exactly.

LOURY: It really is beautiful and amazing, but you can't really hear it until you know, you know, all those chord changes and stuff like that.

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: And likewise here, and where I disagree is, I agree that it is counterintuitive, and contrary to the common person's common sense, but I don't presume that it's right. I think it's actually mistaken. I think it's mistaken. (laughs) I don't think that's morality. I mean, I think --

MCWHORTER: How can you say that with authority? I mean in my gut I feel like --

LOURY: Incredibility (sic), and the maintenance and the maintenance of my own reputation as a decent person, how can I say that? I mean, take these kids, who took --

MCWHORTER: Glenn, I think you misunderstood. Upon what logical authority --

LOURY: Oh, do I say that it's wrong?

MCWHORTER: Can you say that it's wrong, yeah? I feel you, but how can you defend that logically?

LOURY: OK, that's a challenging question to me. Let me see what I would say. OK, so -- I'm now going to have to pretend to be a more philosopher, right, so what does morality consist in? OK, so --

MCWHORTER: Like Tommy Shelby.

LOURY: Yeah, like a Tommy Shelby, whom I admire very much as the philosopher at Harvard, African American, *We Who are Dark* is one of his great books. He's a very profound thinker, I agree. I'm going to have to pretend -- or an Anthony Appiah would be another one who comes to mind -- to be one of these types, and say, OK, so what does morality consist in? So I want to be concrete as I try to answer the general question. Take the incident that just happened in Chicago, and that everybody knows about, has gone viral with these four kids, 18 years old, kidnapped and held for some number of hours, more than a day, a white mentally-disabled, developmentally disabled man, and abused him. Abused him viciously, and then live broadcast the thing on Facebook, unbelievably, and they got caught, they're in custody, and have been charged with a hate crime, because during the process, and you know, I'm just trying to describe the incident, they said things like, you know

white this, and racist this, and Trump, you know, all, they're anti-Trump, and they're anti-white. And just, it's a horrible scene, and anybody who hasn't seen it, if they have the stomach for it, they need to look. I don't want to describe it any further.

Anyway, take an incident like that. Now, the line that says, these kids are victims, I'm going to argue, is morally incorrect, notwithstanding that it might have been arrived at by some rarified and very impressively intellectual derivation, OK? I'm going to say it's morally incorrect. Now I'm going to try to defend that position in this example, and then more broadly my position that I think they're wrong.

So, basic human decency, OK, standards of behavior. I'm talking about violence, you know, putting guns to people's head and blowing your brains out, I'm talking about cruelty, OK, torturing somebody. I'm talking about ritual humiliation of people, incanting a seemingly racial slogan, and sentiment and motive, in the doing of it. And I just, I invite you, I mean, let it be some cult of some weird new-age people who have kidnapped some "virgin," OK, and take her off somewhere to perform something. Let it be

some Ku Klux Klan nuts of the Dylan Roof variety who have similarly perpetrated some act based upon racial animus. Let it be a Chinese mafia gang enacting a ritual execution of one of its rivals. There will be a million backstories to how it is that a group of people come to perpetrate a heinous, barbaric, contemptible, an act of incivility, that is an affront to our common consensus of what it means to live together and to be human. That can't be on the auction block to settle a reparations claim. The parsing of our commitment to how we much conduct ourselves with one another can't be traded in compensation for the fact that is our history is flawed and imperfect in its treatment of people. That's just a profound confusion, OK? There's different kinds of morality here. One of them is the morality of everyday behavior. I simply don't walk up to you and put a pistol to your head and blow your brains out for sport.

Another is the morality of historical causation that acts out over centuries. It operates on a different plane and it has different instruments of its remedy. It's a category confusion.

LOURY: I see what you mean. But other people -- well there are two layers. What many of the three-named people now

would say is, "But we do think it's contemptible," and use words like "regrettable." It's a shame, but you can tell that they don't have the visceral sense of revulsion and anger that say most Chinese people would have at watching those sorts of acts being perpetrated particularly on one another, but even against another white person if it was their own children. There is a sense that whatever those kids did, it's a damn shame, and that they should go to jail even, but that still, it must be understood, and there's a guy named Shaun King who's done an -- in its way very articulate statement of this black intelligentsia view in the *New York Daily News*, I believe. The idea is, he's not going to protest against those kids. He's not going to, you know, say nasty things about them on Facebook, because of what's gone on in the past, because Darren Wilson is not in prison, etc. And I think that has now become a mainstream view, and I think that the people who think that way to the extent that they could actually own that that's how they think, and on that, I'm genuinely not sure if they would own it in their own brains, and/or want to admit to it publicly.

But if they can own it, that is a brand new morality. And I'm afraid that that sense of morality, which can be

outlined in books by Yale University Press, etc., may have won. It may be that in 50 years, even ordinary people understand morality in that way, and that you and I are going to be the dinosaurs, that we're actually thinking that there's no such thing as being -- we don't think that there's such a thing as it being essentially OK for someone to kill someone. Or our sense of it is just too narrow. We're supposed to think that when a black boy kills another black boy in the streets of Chicago, it's a damn shame, he shouldn't have done it, hope they catch him, but still you've got to understand that he's doing it because his great-grandfather may have been lynched. And I'm not caricaturing. That is what we're really supposed to think. I wonder if that's going to be considered morality in 2050. I'm beginning to think it is.

LOURY: I hope you're wrong. I think you're wrong. And I think this election is telling us partly why you're wrong, but you might be right. And I find your way of putting it very provocative and instructive. Because it's certainly possible that the same way in which we look back at the anachronism of, I don't know, *Mad Men*, you know, and attitudes toward women, and we all, everybody shares the same, like slap the forehead, I can't believe he did that, I can't believe he said that, kind of here, there was a

time when there were people arguing, you know, and I won't try to repeat your arguments.

MCWHORTER: Just let it pass, right.

LOURY: Yeah, exactly. You know, guys will be guys and so forth, you know, the "Trump." Now, I hope you're wrong. Why do I hope you're wrong? OK, so, and why do I believe you're wrong? OK, so those are two different things. I believe you're wrong because I don't think people are buying it. I think the bubble -- I think that's what was demonstrated in the last election in a way. The majority of people -- and so, the rear-guard position, which is, we'll fight to the death for "our values," when our values include that, I think it's not a winning position. I think it's a losing position.

And I think when you find many centrist Democrats, as you're going to find, I predict, as we go ahead, Trump will have his troubles with Republicans, but the Democrats are going to have trouble holding their thing together, because there's all these Senators who are going to be up for reelection in 2018 who are in Trump states who are Democrats, and there are going to be many, many opportunities for them to signal, you know, that they're not Nancy Pelosi Democrats. You know, they're not Harry

Reid Democrats, and you know, we could name them, but there's a limited amount of time.

So there's a kind of political thing. But the other thing is, soft bigotry of low expectations. It really isn't in the interest of the people themselves, the people on behalf of whom this highly rarified sort of third-order moral reasoning is being adopted. It's not really in their interest. The festering, you know, pathology. I mean, come on, communities in collapse, OK, order, the idea that there's no agency, that it's a kind of historical inevitability.

OK, I'm sorry, I'm varying between principal and empirical arguments. My empirical argument was going to be, many groups over time have experienced not the same, but comparable kinds of exclusion and marginality, and their behaviors have not all been the same, including amongst African Americans, amongst African Americans one can draw these distinctions, everything from Elijah Anderson's observations about how different cultural orientations and response to marginality and social disadvantage and racism play themselves out in inner-city Philadelphia, whatever, to Thomas Sowell's observations about how you can

distinguish between the descendants of free persons of color and the descendants of enslaved persons, and the descendants of people who are black but immigrated to the US from the Caribbean or from Africa in terms of their various achievements and so forth in American society. You can distinguish between people who are in Bible-believing Christian churches, just to give one religious denominational example, or in fervently observant black Muslim sects, and how they are managing these very same vicissitudes as people who are more fractionalized, and kind of, you know, alienated from any kind of institutions of social support.

The past is not a prologue. I mean, this is laziness. And it's not real morality. It's just, it's justifying finger-pointing. It actually retreats from morality. It retreats from an engagement with the realities of our condition. To wit, for example, exchanging gunfire with a police officer is not a normal kind of behavior. Somebody who does that is not presumptively a victim. They are a profound threat to their neighbors. And they have to be dealt with. Now we can discuss how to deal with them. But there really isn't anything to discuss about the morality of their behavior. OK, that kind of thing.

The realities of -- and I could go on, and people get mad at me, and I don't really care about this -- affirmative action. Now I don't care what the Supreme Court does. What I want to observe is that 50 years after the Civil Rights movements, African Americans are still dependent upon affirmative action to have adequate representation at venues of elite competition, whereas Asian students are knocking the doors down and overwhelming these places. Now you're not supposed to say that, and there's not supposed to be any lesson in that, because that can all be explained by history and so forth and so on.

OK, here's one professional social scientist, the Merton B. Stoltz Professor of the Social Sciences at Brown University who doesn't believe that. I'm not unfamiliar with the data. I'm not buying the argument of the esteemed economist, Sandy Darity, whose piece in *The Atlantic* recently about reparations and so forth is worth reading. I'm not buying the argument of President Barack Obama to the extent that he endorses the idea that the general gaps that we see in the representation of African Americans in one or another venue in American life are all accounted for by historical deprivation of black people. We have

choices, and we've made those choices, how you raise your kids actually matters and so forth, and if I continue in this vein, people will complain that I'm ranting. I'm simply trying to lay out a position. Bias versus behavior, just, to summarize the position I'm laying out, if you don't hold black people responsible for our behavior, you're not taking us seriously as moral agents. That is not equality. There's no equality to be found in patronization.

MCWHORTER: You know, it's interesting. Talk about closing out last year, which we said we were kind of going to do, and --

LOURY: John you're the host of the show. You're directing the conversation, and I'm happy to go along for the ride, man. Go ahead, let's close it out. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: I guess I'm in that mode.

LOURY: That's all good, then. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: You know, last year, our conversations, the big moment for me, where you know, you could argue that I had egg on my face, but I was happy to learn, is when I said, Glenn, where's the list --

LOURY: I remember that.

MCWHORTER: -- of white men who've been killed in cold blood the way all these black men were. I sincerely thought

there wasn't one, and I had not done the research, because everybody's so sure, and you can't check up on everything; I have a life to live. So then it turns out with the help of our friend Peter Moskos, who I've had a drink with since then, turns out that there is a list. And it's a long list. And so I gradually ended up -- I learned something. This whole race debate is one where it seems that for a lot of people the only thing you're supposed to learn is ways in which there was more racism in the past than you thought, or more racism in the present. But I learned something. I learned that there is a white list like that, and from everything I've seen, the idea that black men are shot dead unarmed because of racist bias on the part of the cops really doesn't hold up to remotely the degree that it's been said. Maybe the bias plays some part in some encounters, but even down to the statistics that the mainstream media have put up.

So there's been a wonderful piece by Wesley -- I'm not going to say Morris, because that's the guy who writes so well for the *New York Times*, Wesley somebody, who has, and I need to get to this, has written a book about reporting about black people being killed by the police. He wrote a wonderful article, is it true that race plays a part?

Where really, it kind of came out a wash from his article. This is a black writer for the *Washington Post*, and yet Glenn, this is my problem. I think I learned something, and to be honest, I spent 15 plus years arguing that the one thing that really is still standing in the way of racial healing is the cops. I have always been on the side of those people, annoyed the Manhattan Institute and everybody else. And it's beginning to look that, even that isn't true.

And you know what Glenn, I don't know I consider it worth the effort to push the point. Because for example, this Wesley -- I'm so embarrassed I can't remember his name, the *Post* article, he wrote a whole book about it which has been celebrated for talking about the same problem. He has a scene in it where he reads about one more black man killed by the police, and he goes and vomits in the toilet, and then goes, does his reporting. It's not about the white people who this happens to.

I'm not sure there's any point in what it would stir up to say, "Folks, I've been with you on this for years and years and years, if only this, but frankly, this idea that racism is what is killing every black guy in the street, that

every black guy is Laquan McDonald, that's one particularly egregious case. But there are equivalent white cases. I don't think it can get a hearing. I'm not sure what the point would be of even airing this, and so I have felt for the past six months, a little bit like I've got something in my throat that won't go down, or won't come up, because I feel like to be an honest observer of all this, I should be pushing that harder. And because of what we're talking about, because of the sureness, the security that so many of these people have, I'm thinking people will yell, people will scream. Any good point that you make will be argued past, because you just -- you cannot say this any more than you could say that there was no god in the middle of Switzerland in 1550. It's just not worth it. Do you think it's worth it? Because I've been kind of sitting on it.

LOURY: OK, again, a provocative question. Thank you for the prompt.

MCWHORTER: I've written a piece or two.

LOURY: OK, so, -- I want to say, you asked me, do I think it's worth it? I mean, I want to take the measure of your point that the religious zeal with which people hold on, there's certain narratives about what's going on the social world around us, leaves them impenetrable. No argument is going to actually have an effect. Indeed, all the argument

would do is mark the arguer in some way or another vis-à-vis such a person, so what's the point? And, you know, it's hard to argue with that, especially based upon my own personal experience, in which no, even people who are very close to me whom I love, you know, who I feel an intimate connection to, you know, I mean they can be my girlfriend, they can be son, they can be a lot of people I can think of in my life, there comes a point where I almost want to say, you know, obviously, nobody's going to change their mind, so my mind is not getting changed either; I think I have to acknowledge that. OK, so that's one point, and therefore the futility of arguing with people.

Of course, they're not the only audience, OK? These arguments don't take place, the argument, discussion that you and I are having right now, for instance, don't take place in a vacuum, and they're not only heard by people who are deeply entrenched in their religion. They are also heard by other people. I wrote a whole essay about this whole political correctness thing and about the insider, and about how the taboos on what can be said are sometimes even stricter on insiders than outsiders, because the fact that an insider says it gives ammunition to the alt-right

or whatever is out there, "See, even black people agree with us about," whatever, whatever.

And a lot of the reaction that you were describing of vitriol and social ostracism and whatnot that comes from people hearing you say it, it's based upon precisely that calculation. They know that you know that Steve Bannon is hearing what you're saying.

MCWHORTER: Exactly.

LOURY: (laughs) So even if you're not literally talking to Steve Bannon, you're talking within his hearing, and you're giving him ammunition for his agenda, which we know to be the evil agenda.

MCWHORTER: Which is exactly what one is told, yeah.

LOURY: So, so there's that. Now I have two answers to that. One is about the country, and one is about the self. About the country, the best arguments need to be made, allowing people to persist in error can't be good. And whether they themselves become persuaded, or merely the kind of governing presuppositions, our disabuse of the idea that they're right, it's worth trying to get it right for the sake of the country.

For the self, what of one's integrity? OK, it's a small thing. It's not the same as being dragooned and put in a cell for my political views. It's not the same as living in a Russia where you can get killed for having the wrong views, or living in a Somalia or someplace like that where a strongman might take you, whatever.

MCWHORTER: Kill you, yeah.

LOURY: But, having matured to my late 60s here in this oasis in liberalism, which is the United States of America, I've gotten rather used to my personal integrity and my freedom, my freedom of conscience, OK? So now these are my people too, the black people who are being gunned down in the streets of Chicago are my people too. I care about them, and I care about what happens there. If I think that the cops are not the problem, but that Black Lives Matter is the problem, suppose I think that. Suppose hypothetically, I thought that the zeitgeist that has emerged since Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown is poisonous and destructive of black life, just hypothetically suppose I had come to that conclusion upon consideration, OK?

MCWHORTER: You mean just on the outer edges of possibility?

LOURY: Yeah, I know no one's going to believe it.

MCWHORTER: (laughs)

LOURY: What would it mean to stifle myself if I thought that? What would it mean to me as a human being, caring about the outcome with something of a megaphone, not to speak such truth as I was given to understand, though I might be in error? OK, so it's an act of personal self-defense to tell these people who insist that murderous thugs -- I know they don't like the word -- what are you going to call somebody who takes a kid, leads them into an alleyway, puts them on their knees at 12 years old, and executes them with a bullet to a back of their brain, as a way of paying back a gang rival? What's wrong with that?

MCWHORTER: You call them a victim of societal (inaudible).

LOURY: OK, so then we beat into that. No, you don't, you're stuck, because that's the word that Steve Bannon would use, and after all that's a dehumanization of black people. Well, you can play your linguistic games all you want. I'm talking about the brutal reality of what's actually transpiring when things fall apart, when the center does not hold, when the fabric unravels, OK?

So now, those are the stakes that are -- and I'm not sitting here. I think people have to take a stand. I mean, my attitude now, with respect to the three-name folks, I'll see you outside. We're done talking. Talk is

over. You got something else to say, I'll see you outside. In other words, I'm prepared to get involved in fighting for what I believe in, not trying to persuade people that I'm a good person. I am the person that I am, OK? I have the values that I have.

Donald Trump -- and I'll be done. I'm sorry, John, you should respond to this -- wants to fix the inner cities. I think this is a really important issue. Obviously, from a Kelly Conway political machinations calculation, he has to try to do something, OK? Ben Carson is Secretary of HUD. Bob Woodson hovers on the outside, and is very close to Jack Kemp. Jack Kemp is running the Congress. They're going to try to do something.

Now, are we going to try to find something in there worthwhile for our people, or are we going to adopt the pose of an Upper West Side liberal who's mad about the fact that Hillary Clinton didn't get elected the first female president, and is mad about the fact that Donald Trump is Donald Trump? Lead us around by the nose, I'm talking about black people, and use us like silly putty, molding us into this or that posture of outrage, when we could be looking for some actual common ground that would allow us

to rebuild some of the communities where the schools don't work and the streets are not safe?

OK, my question to the state representative who's an African American, or represents an African American district, to the mayor, not of New York City, I know what that mayor is going to say, and I know what the mayor of Chicago is going to say, but the mayor of a medium-sized town that has 50 or 75 or 100,000 African American residents and some of them are living in poverty, my question as somebody who's got a kid who's 18 years old and is not getting ready to go to Harvard, but needs to have someplace to go after they leave high school, my question to the people who are afraid to send their kids out the door in the morning, because it's not safe on the streets where they live, is, are you prepared to find a way to work with the government of the United States of America to fix the communities in which you live? OK?

Now asking that question, you can call me a bad person if you want. I'll be damned -- I'm sorry John -- if I let Upper West Side liberals tell me how to respond to that.

MCWHORTER: I hear you. And you know, I think one interesting thing that could come this year is suppose out

of the cesspool which is this administration, and I do believe it's a cesspool, and I maintain from our last conversation, that I believe that the president-elect is a moron. However, just maybe, something different will come. I think that there could be a difference between whatever his private views are, and what he has his administration try, and it won't be the kind of Marshall Plan, you know, reanimation of the Great Society that many people are waiting for, but maybe something will work out. It'll be interesting if in a couple of years when we're still doing this, and we will be, it'll turn out that this cesspool actually, you know, there are a lot of organic substances in a cesspool. Maybe something will come out of it. And it'll be our job to say, look, it (inaudible), and I hope that we can say it.

Glenn, I have to run down and chair a session, and so I have to go. But I think, it's going to be a weird year. Why don't we talk about his inauguration speech?

LOURY: Oh, that'll be a very good thing to do. We could do that. That's two weeks from now, roughly. Or almost exactly. It's exactly two weeks from now, actually. It's the 20th, so yeah, we can do that. I agree. Farewell then, I will not try to respond to the last thing you said about

the government that's coming into power, though I do have a list of all the cabinet appointees, and as I look down it, I see a lot of impressive names on this list. I see --

MCWHORTER: What?

LOURY: I see generals. I see people who have been outstanding achievers in business, and I see a lot of members in Congress. Yeah, I don't see what's wrong with the list.

MCWHORTER: Those people don't belong in power!

LOURY: What's, uh-oh, I got you -- just, what's wrong with the list, man? We could go down the --

MCWHORTER: We have two minutes to look at the list.

LOURY: OK, Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State. John Mattis, Secretary of Defense. Steve Mnuchin, Secretary of Treasury. Jeff Sessions, Attorney General. John Kelly, Homeland Security. Tom Price, Health and Human Services. Puzder, Tom Puzder, I think it's Tom, Labor. Betsy DeVos, Education. Ross, the billionaire, commerce department. Rick Perry, Department of Energy. Ben Carson -- Nikki Haley, the UN, former Senator Dan Coats, Director of National Intelligence. And so, what are you laughing man? These are all --

MCWHORTER: This isn't (inaudible), this sounds like Li'l Abner. It sounds like (inaudible) --

LOURY: (laughs)

MCWHORTER: -- what Al Capp would have written from Li'l Abner. That's not an administration! Those people will die unsung. That is a bunch of cartoon characters. You really like that list?

LOURY: I -- OK. I think the list is OK. I'm not saying I like every name on it for every such job, and I see that I could argue with every one of these names. I think it's an accomplished list of people. It is. I mean, you know, OK so -- we have something to argue about next time.

MCWHORTER: What is the nature of their accomplishments, is the point. Why are they going to be running the country?

LOURY: Tillerson ran Exxon-Mobil, a huge corporation.

MCWHORTER: We know what we did.

LOURY: OK. Mattis is this all-star general from the Marines who's loved by his troops and --

MCWHORTER: (trumpet sound) Yeah. (laughs) That's going to be somebody in power, in that position? Keep going, do two more.

LOURY: (laughs) I will not. I'm already a fat enough target. I will not, I will not! (laughter)

MCWHORTER: These aren't the proper people.

LOURY: They're not the proper people?

MCWHORTER: These are -- (laughs) these people aren't careful. They're entangled. It's an inconsistent bunch. Ben Carson? I don't care whether his views are conservative, etc.

LOURY: Nothing wrong with Ben Carson.

MCWHORTER: What is he doing at HUD? That doesn't make any sense at all!

LOURY: He's overseeing the fix these cities at HUD. That's what he's doing. He's the figurehead black guy who's going to be on the front lines trying to push whatever this policy's going to be that they're going to roll out about trying to fix the cities.

MCWHORTER: Now you have me upset, and I have to run down and (inaudible).

LOURY: What, I don't get it? Why would Ben Carson -- I mean, these are Republicans! Ben Carson ran for president, he got a lot of votes running for president as a Republican. He's black, why wouldn't he be in the government? What's wrong with him being at HUD?

MCWHORTER: He has much business at HUD as I would have carving a cedar chest. He doesn't know anything about it! I'm sorry, I have to go, I have to go.

LOURY: OK. No, I'm sure the audience is going to agree with you. But we'll have to fight it out another time. Stop laughing at me man! (laughter)

MCWHORTER: I'm laughing at the world, Glenn.

LOURY: All right, John. Take care of yourself, man.

MCWHORTER: See you very soon.

LOURY: All right, I'm going to stop this recording.

END OF AUDIO FILE