

bhtv-2016-07-15-loury-mcwhorter

LOURY: Glenn Loury here, Brown University, as everybody knows, and the Glenn Show at Bloggingheads.tv talking to John McWhorter, much in demand, John McWhorter of Columbia University, Associate Professor of English. I believe that's what I saw, your title.

MCWHORTER: English and Comp Lit, that's right.

LOURY: And Comparative Literature, a profound linguist whose books are legion and whose audio course on linguistics has, in fact --

MCWHORTER: Oh, right, that's right.

LOURY: -- come to the attention of some of the people in our Bloggingheads community on the commenter section. John McWhorter, who, in the last week, has at least three -- count them, three -- pieces in major -- four, he says.

MCWHORTER: Four.

LOURY: OK, so I should turn it over to you, John, but you had a piece that I really admired in *Time Magazine* pointing out that the list -- and I'll turn it over to you -- about whites killed by police is actually quite long. You had a piece in the *New York Times* giving some advice to Hillary Clinton about how she might want to address the questions of race, and, please, let's not have another conversation.

You have a piece in the *Washington Post* pressing your point, which you've been pressing for some time, which is that the major obstacle to improve race relations -- what do you say? It's like a tower. Everything has been torn down except the tower.

MCWHORTER: It's a house.

LOURY: It's a house that's been knocked down.

MCWHORTER: The house burned down.

LOURY: Racism is a house that's been knocked down, everything except this chimney. This brick chimney is still standing. We've got to knock it down, that chimney being antipathy between the police and African American communities. And you say four -- what's the other one, John?

MCWHORTER: The other one, I think, was the one I did for CNN.com where I was trying to explain that you can't hate on Black Lives Matter in the way that Rudy Giuliani does it. It was a response to him basically saying that Black Lives Matter is responsible for what happened in Dallas. I think that it's a very smallminded way of looking at it, and I used as a comparison -- I said that you can't claim that Black Lives Matter's rhetoric has nothing to do with people like Micah Johnson, as you said in our last conversation. But then, on the other hand, I think we also have to allow that life is tragic, that any large social

movement is going to bring out psychopaths, and it seems to me that, if Rudy Giuliani is talking about broken windows, the criminological program that was designed to make New York City an easier place to live in after the hell of the '70s and '80s -- and I think broken windows actually did a good job and was significant based on the literature I've read -- well, there were rogue cops during broken windows. A lot of people's lives were interfered with or ruined during that effort, and yet, if anybody said that broken windows shouldn't have happened because of what happened to Abner Louima, the Haitian immigrant who had a broomstick shoved up his behind in the name of the kind of policies that Giuliani's administration (inaudible) --

LOURY: Oh, wait a minute, John. I've got to stop you.

MCWHORTER: -- nothing said to him directly, but that atmosphere. There were things that happened under Giuliani's watch where you couldn't say that it had nothing to do with the sort of things that those officers were directed to look at and the responses they were to have. That doesn't mean broken windows shouldn't have happened.

LOURY: Wait a minute. I'm objecting, John. Let me object.

MCWHORTER: All right.

LOURY: You're drawing an analogy between Giuliani and his police -- Bratton, I suppose, when he's mayor --

instituting a quality of life policing in New York City that rousts homeless people and squeegee men and marijuana sellers out in front of the public library and so forth, you're saying that created a climate in which a rogue police precinct practicing torture on a suspect, somebody who's taken into custody and sodomized with a broom handle, that *A* is to *B* as *X* is to *Y*, *A* and *B* being Giuliani and company having a police policy and *B* being the sodomizing of somebody with a broom handle. And then, you're saying that's similar to *X* to *Y*, where *X* is the Black Lives Matter narrative and themes of anti-cop sentiment on the one hand and a guy with an automatic weapon assassinating five police officers and wounding seven others and two civilians. The mayor and the police commissioner saying we're going to have a conservative, low-tolerance police policy causes every bit as much or as little rogue police - - so I'm not sure if it's as much or as little. I mean, I'm not -- I'll stop talking because this is your thing, but, you know, what exactly are you saying? I mean, I don't get it.

MCWHORTER: What you just said. All I'm saying is that there are going to be bad actors when you enact any kind of risky and complex policy of that kind.

LOURY: So if we --

MCWHORTER: And some people are going to listen to Black Lives Matter, and, especially if they're mentally insane, they might do some pretty awful things, and that is not the fault of DeRay Mckesson any more than various people who are hurt or killed or tortured in some way during the Giuliani cleanup, any more than you can say that those things are Giuliani's responsibility. This is life.

LOURY: OK, you're saying that in neither case is it the fault of the activist.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, right.

LOURY: OK. Now, let me shift the ground a little bit, still talking about whether a movement or an administration should be held responsible for the actions of rogue people who might somehow or another be more or less loosely connected.

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: Of course, the shooter, as far as we know, had no connection to Black Lives Matter in any formal sense but did --

MCWHORTER: He mentioned them on his website.

LOURY: -- he avowed that he was a supporter. So now, the deed happens, and the question is what do you do afterwards. So Giuliani is mayor of the city. His officers have committed a horrible deed. He's not directly responsible for it, but

there's some loose connection because of the climate or the mood. Let me just grant that for the sake of argument. Now, what does he do? Does he punish them? Does he take them into a court? Does he treat them like the criminals that they are? Does he disavow everything about them? Does he affirm -- quite to the contrary -- the important values that all citizens are to be treated? Does he make an example out of it and take it as a way of asserting unifying values that bring the city together? I actually don't remember how he handled it. Versus Black Lives Matter, DeRay Mckesson for that matter, what speech should he be giving in the aftermath of somebody -- no, not connected to him but loosely, quote, "inspired" close quote, influenced, quote-unquote. I'm not sure what the right word is here. I'm sure if Donald Trump gives a speech in which he's thumping on the podium talking about how divisive the Black Lives Matter people are and he's got all these rednecks in his rally, and they're jumping up and down, and they're screaming. They're shouting out. Have you noticed that, how they sometimes shout out in the Trump rallies? I mean, it's very unnerving, because he almost encourages it, actually. But in any case, do you see what I mean? And one of those jokers runs out and three days later walks into a nightclub somewhere and mows down a bunch of

black people, and he has a Make America Great hat on when he's doing it. OK? So now, what is Trump supposed to say the day after that happens, because obviously he's got skunk juice on him now. I mean, he can't avoid being implicated. No, he didn't give the order. No, it's not any part of his organization. It has as much distance from him perhaps as this guy has from Black Lives Matter. I'll finish. My point is that it had better be a damn good speech. Giuliani had better have made a case out of these guys; I don't know if he did or he didn't.

MCWHORTER: I don't remember.

LOURY: And Black Lives Matter, DeRay Mckesson or whoever -- if we're going to name names -- need to step up. OK? And when I say step up, I don't just mean cover their ass. I don't just mean give a speech in which they -- I mean, of course we disavow violence. I mean, affirm unifying values in the aftermath of someone having committed an atrocity in your name.

MCWHORTER: Now, remember, if any Black Lives Matter activists are watching what you just said, they're snapping their fingers and shaking their heads and clinking their glasses, because they think that you are just this obnoxious man who doesn't know that they have disavowed these criminals. I can just see them now, smugly doing the

high-five because you're just completely out of court.

You're not "woke," as the new expression is.

LOURY: I'm asleep. I'm still asleep.

MCWHORTER: (laughter) You're asleep, right. And so --

because they're going to say, "Well, we did say it," what do you expect them to do more? Because they're going to say, "Oh, we said it all the time," and they would give you clips in a row of all the people who have said things over the past months.

LOURY: Here's what I expect. OK, no, I do know actually that such disavowals have been given. They were being given over the immediate hours after the shooting by various spokespersons affiliated in one way or another with Black Lives Matter. Of course I don't think that that movement harbors violent extremists who want to do physical harm to police officers, although it may attract around its fringes some nutcases that are more or less inclined in that direction. What I expect is moral leadership at a time of crisis in the country that rises above racial narcissism that rises about the need to cover our butts because people are going to think this about us. I mean, you know, you must have seen the piece in the *New York Times*. The headline was something like "Black Lives Matter Was Just Gaining Momentum," because there have been two recent

shootings of black men. That gains Black Lives Matter momentum. That puts them back into the swing of things. That gives them more leverage. The Democratic convention is coming up. Everybody has got to genuflect, and you've got to genuflect more frequently and deeper. Your genuflection has to be more sincere the higher the body count of black people killed by the police, and then that got canceled out by a nut, and now we have to run out and do a press strategy to make sure that we don't lose the news cycle. No, no, no, no. What I want is somebody who steps up and says, in the Black Lives Matter register, "We're all Americans." They can have a fag on the stage behind themselves, OK? The news conference is about, "We understand what we're about, and we insist that we get what we are trying to get because our people deserve justice, but not at this expensive, not at this consequence. Not only do we disassociate -- we don't have to disassociate, because we were never associated. Not only do we decry," as -- what did Ta-Nehisi Coates call it -- "horrific," OK, that's adjective.

MCWHORTER: Well, that's (inaudible).

LOURY: It was not horrific; it was barbaric. It was not barbaric; it was contemptible. It was not contemptible; it was evil. It was not just evil; it was the worst possible

kind of thing that can happen in this country, OK? We are advocates, but we are Americans first. Not only do we mourn the fact that these people died needlessly, you're not going to hear a mumbling word from us about, "Oh, but if there hadn't been such violent (inaudible) people, this would have never happened." That's for another time. They could have stood with the grieving families. When they said, "Say my name," they got a hashtag, say the name. "You're going to say the Sandra Bland name. You're going to say the Walter Scott name. You've got to say the names. We've got to know the names. We've got to say the names." They could have added the white cops to the names. They could be doing hashtags for the white cops as well. They could have visitations with the families if they could possibly work it out -- they're going to need mediation to affect that obviously -- certainly with police officials rather than being antagonistic. Did you read the *Washington Post* report on the meeting that the president had the day before yesterday with all these people and whatnot?

MCWHORTER: Yeah.

LOURY: And my understanding -- I had a source. I got a little idea about what went on in the meeting besides just what was printed in the newspaper, and you had the cops on one side, and you had the Black Lives people on the other, and

they're talking right past each other. And I'm saying charity, OK? That's something that our friend Ta-Nehisi Coates doesn't know a whole lot about, Christian charity. That's certainly something that doesn't come up on his screen, the idea that your victimization does not give you any morally privileged position in the discourse. We're a country. The thing that we should most want to avert is any kind of protracted, expansive, race-mediated conflict, "race war" in the shorthand. We all have an interest in that. So let me put my advocacy aside. In other words, you know, throwing bricks down from a highway overpass bridge onto Minnesota police officers who are trying to keep you from blocking Interstate 94 running through the city -- there's a huge demonstration. The lefties want to write about the police tactics and whether or not they should allow the demonstrators to shut down the highway. Some of these loose thinkers somehow imagine that there's some racial entitlement to shut down highways, because, "Do you know that highways have been used to divide the city into the enclaves where black people suffered? So of course we're going to shut -- you just want to take the highway to the suburb, to your white enclave. We're going to get in your face." And then, you're going to -- when they try to clear you off of the public thoroughfare because you're

breaking the law, you're going to rain projectiles down onto those people? That is -- in the aftermath of somebody acting loosely in your name, having assassinated police officers, you're so superficial and so narcissistic in your morality that you can't see past the end of your own black nose?

MCWHORTER: Glenn, though, they think that the charge of narcissism doesn't apply here, that it's different. And I want to say something to you with sincere affection because you're worrying me a little bit. You know how Shelby Steele wrote that old book --

LOURY: Oh, don't do that, John, please don't.

MCWHORTER: -- no, no, no -- that Obama couldn't win?

LOURY: Yeah, I remember that book.

MCWHORTER: It was a shocking misanalysis, because Shelby thought that most of black America was so addicted to the angry black man persona like early Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson that he felt that somebody like Obama would never be embraced.

LOURY: Obama, a bargainer.

MCWHORTER: That was a stark misreading of what black people are like.

LOURY: OK.

MCWHORTER: You -- I have to be careful -- you're beginning to sound like you -- you're kind of like Ralph Ellison. It's like you missed the late '60s. The people who you're talking about don't see themselves as having to play by the rules. And so, for example, I had a student -- oddly enough, it was in just the room I'm in. If anybody sees this weird setup, I'm now on the set of some Ayn Rand novel. I happen to be in the first room that I taught a class in at Columbia University.

LOURY: That's funny, John.

MCWHORTER: So a few feet from me -- because the reception is better here -- a few feet from me, a very brilliant black woman used to kind of cringe affectionately or kind of raise her eyebrow whenever I would say "we" when I meant "America." And about two-thirds of the way through the class, I said, "Apparently, I'm not supposed to say 'we' as a black person in America," and this person openly agreed that that sounded funny to her. She was normal. Black Lives Matter didn't exist yet, and she was not an extreme person. This is these people. So you're idea, "Think about charity," don't you remember the way people were treating Dr. King right before he got killed? This is that same thing. What you're talking about sounds to them like you're placating the enemy. They feel that we've just got to blow

this shit up and start again, so, yes, they're going to block the highway. Glenn, what they like about themselves is being the angry victim. If you really want to address this kind of person, you have to point the way to something they could base pride on other than being the noble victim, because if you take this away, as I said last week, you're taking away the very essence of their being. And they don't know any better, because we've had two generations deep of smart black people telling them that this is the way to be. What would you tell them to substitute if they can't have this noble black victimhood, because you're breaking them?

LOURY: I'm worried that you're worried about me. I'd rather -
- I see your Ellison analogy. I actually like an Albert Murray analogy better, but, you know, I'm American. I'm sticking with it.

MCWHORTER: How is it more like Albert Murray?

LOURY: Well, I'm the Americans that -- I don't want to reach for race first as a lens through which -- and maybe that's not different from Ellison, but Murray certainly elaborates that. You being a cultural studies devotee amongst other things will understand that better than I. But in any case, I want to distinguish between is the psychoanalytic problem of understanding, quote, "them," close quote, the mentality of the demonstrator and the outraged black protester.

That's a challenge, what's going on with them. You've put forward a hypothesis about what's going on with them. You could be right. You've also given a diagnosis. You say, you know, a prescription about what the cure should be. You say I've got to give them something else to believe in besides the addiction to indignation that characterizes their --

MCWHORTER: Don't even call it an addiction. They've just built an entire sense of identity around it.

LOURY: OK, understanding themselves as being defined by their indignation and their injury. I've got to give them something else to hold -- OK, maybe that's the right analysis. But I want to distinguish between that problem, which interests me less -- because I'm concerned about the country -- between that problem and the critique of them. In fact, you're not telling me I'm wrong in what I say about them. You're telling me that I simply shouldn't be surprised that that's the way that they're behaving. Do you think I'm wrong? I said -- you're saying that I shouldn't -- that it's unrealistic for me to expect anybody to exhibit what I regard to be a kind of wisdom, I mean, a kind of --

MCWHORTER: You're correct -- unrealistic, unrealistic. You're talking about people who would have to be of a different time.

LOURY: So then, let me talk over them. I'm not speaking for them, and I'm not necessarily speaking to them. I'm speaking to my fellow Americans.

MCWHORTER: Interesting. So you're not speaking to them?

LOURY: Well, if they would listen, I wouldn't mind them listening.

MCWHORTER: But they're not going to listen. So yeah, you're speaking over them.

LOURY: But they're not my audience.

MCWHORTER: OK.

LOURY: OK? I understand that they're going to write me off at some level, just like these young people here at the university. We'll see what happens in the fall.

MCWHORTER: I can't wait to see what's going to happen to you this year --

LOURY: Yeah, yeah.

MCWHORTER: -- when you're home.

LOURY: I may need refuge, John. I may need to escape. But no, no, no, I mean, come on. It's time to grow up. We're 50 years past the Civil Rights -- putting your fist in the air, you know -- I mean, I get the gesture. I get the emotional thrill, whatever. I used to be an adolescent myself one day. I know it was a very, very, very long time ago.

MCWHORTER: So your idea is that you just want to get a different notion out there, but the problem with that is that -- what's the [solution?]?

LOURY: No, no, no, let me just say what my -- my idea is, when there are five dead cops in Dallas and where that is, in some sense, the bitter fruit of a struggle that's ongoing -- again, how I characterize this will make people angry, but I'm sorry. In the same way that Rudy Giuliani's police department had a rogue element -- just as the analogy that you were giving -- the contempt -- you say the cops are not legitimate. This is what Ta-Nehisi is saying at the *Atlantic*. "The cops are not legitimate, so they shouldn't be surprised when it blows up in their face." No, they're not legitimate, and, yes, they do bear some responsibility for that, but we too -- the people who are being policed, even African Americans -- bear some responsibilities of citizenship to cooperate with the cops in the effort of producing public safety. Those marchers were being shepherded and protected by the police officers who ran toward bullets, and some of whom gave their lives, in the service of those people. Now, that deserves to be honored, not just managed. You're not just managing the news cycle. That deserves an expression -- in other words, it deserves to move you to see beyond the end of your nose.

And if you don't do it, then somebody like me is going to come along -- I'm coming along right now; this is what I'm doing right now -- and suggest that you grow up, that you have responsibilities, that your victimization and your injury does not exempt you from the moral calculus of reciprocity and citizenship.

MCWHORTER: (inaudible), you expect so much, because I think what you're talking around is the fact that there are some people who -- they're not going to put it in so many words, but they think that those five cops deserve it. You always get us talking about this person, but, yes, the Coates piece that you sent me -- because I do not read him actively -- yeah, I mean, you can take especially the last few sentences as indicating that, on a certain level, the cops deserve it, just as that same person said that a little part of his mind thought that the guys fighting in 9/11 deserved it. You know, and you don't like that, but --

LOURY: I hate it. It's more than I don't like it; I hate it.

MCWHORTER: -- to the extent that that is definitely in a lot of these people's lives -- leaving out Ta-Nehisi Coates, but that general way of thinking, which is familiar -- they're thinking, "Well," and it's funny; I just came off of this *OJ: Made in America* that just dwells minutely on the notion of that verdict. They're thinking, "Well, this

is what the guy gets who shot Walter Scott in the back. Well, the next guy who fell down, that's the one who killed Tamir Rice." It's human. This is human nature. It's the seamier side of it, and I can't believe that, in a way, I'm the one who looks at this, and I say, "It's messy, but I see where they're coming from," especially if they come from a community where they've had to deal with the cops more than I ever have, and I think of those [sneering?] New Jersey guys who I can get away from. You just think, "Be charitable." You think, "Be mature. Be intellectual about it." I don't think that's the way most human beings in the thick of this thing called life are capable of being. I don't think you should be mad at them.

LOURY: Well, OK, forget them for now. Let me just withhold, bracket -- am I mad? Am I not mad? I am mad, but I'll think about it.

MCWHORTER: That sounds trivializing. Get angry at them.

LOURY: I'll think about it, about --

MCWHORTER: You're disgusted.

LOURY: -- dialing it back. I am a little disgusted and disappointed. But leadership -- and I don't mean to be self-promoting here; I mean, I am just me -- somebody has got to speak up. Leadership is not giving people what they want. It's not understanding them where they are. It's

pointing to higher ground, and that's what I'm trying to do right now. I'm trying to point to higher ground. So, you know, in the fullness of time --

MCWHORTER: (inaudible).

LOURY: -- maybe there will be some trickle-down effect, and, you know, maybe there will be some influence, or maybe I'm just spitting in the wind.

MCWHORTER: You're not spitting in the wind, but I think, once again, you are more honest and, in a way, braver than me. I try to be more pragmatic. I'm pulling of a transition here that I think you'll like. For example, one thing that I think people do need to look at, based on our last conversation, my bildungsroman of the week has been the list.

LOURY: Oh, yes.

MCWHORTER: (inaudible) list. And I said, "OK, if there isn't a racial element of this," a week ago -- I was wearing this shirt -- "Where is the list?" And I said that I haven't seen a list of white guys who die under these same seamy conditions where they really shouldn't have died at all. And I said, "Not just one or two cases -- I want the list," and we kind of left it at that. And you know, right away, I started getting people sending me, first, you know, two people, three people. Everybody kept saying, "This is the

beginning," and, frankly, I thought to myself, "No, this is the end. If that's all you can find, then there's no list." But then, more things started coming down the pike, including from you, and you put me onto Peter Moskos' blog. And I didn't tell you this at the time, but -- this is going to sound really corny -- I was reading *Huckleberry Finn* sitting outside up here on campus.

LOURY: That does sound corny. (laughter)

MCWHORTER: I was actually reading it. I got your message, and at first I thought, "This is going to be another goddamn, lame-ass list of two and a half people." And I wrote to you, "I'm going to curl up with this." I sat there on that bench, and I thought, "Shit, this is the list," and I am not ashamed that I didn't know about it because no one tells us. You had to dig for that list. I don't happen to read Peter Moskos' blog. What does a typical American know? What do these Black Lives Matter people know? What does the woman crying over her child on the street know? She doesn't know about the list because the mainstream media doesn't put it out there. So I decided, to the extent that I at least pretend to be mainstream media, I'm going to put out the list, and so that was my *Time* piece this week.

LOURY: Yeah, John, let me just tell people --

MCWHORTER: I (inaudible).

LOURY: -- let me just tell people -- I want you to go into some of the details in that piece -- that Peter Moskos is a professor of criminal justice at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, and his blog is called copinthehood -- one word -- .com, copinthehood.com. So, anyway, go ahead, John. Tell us about -- and this list that John is talking about is that he had said -- I had said, "There are twice as many white people as black people killed by police in this country every year." John wants to know, "OK, then where is your list, man? They shot like Walter Scott? They shot like Trayvon Martin? Give me the list!" So I found the list.

MCWHORTER: There is a list. Basically --

LOURY: Tell us about the list.

MCWHORTER: -- and I mean, let's -- for the comments section, let's clear something away right now. Yes, proportionately, more black people are killed unarmed and innocent by the cops each year than white. The numbers overall are rather modest, but, yes, that is true. Nevertheless, that list of white men who are killed this way goes on and on, and what's interesting about it is how similar the circumstances are to the sort of stories that are common now. There was a guy, Loren Simpson -- L-O-R-E-N -- and he's in a van, and he's probably stolen it, but, you know,

just like if you've taken some cigarillos -- whatever those are -- from a convenience store, that doesn't mean you need to be killed. This guy is probably a car thief, and there's a cop, and he's saying, "Boy, these little fuckers, they take cars, and they always get away with them." This person sounded just like George Zimmerman talking about Trayvon Martin. They encounter the car. The car tries to turn away. They shoot into the car, which, federally, is not supposed to be allowed. That guy gets killed. There is a man who is -- Daniel Shaver is 19. He's waving a pellet gun out a motel window at a drunken little party. The cops come in. They put his hands behind his back; tell him not to make any strange moves. He doesn't make any strange moves. He's crying and begging for his life. His hand jerks behind him for a second for some random reason, and they shoot him dead. These stories go on and on. These cops are hideously undertrained, and they really don't seem to give a damn. But there are all these stories that you tell where, even if you pick the names carefully so that they sound black, you could open the story -- and I decided not to pull this too obviously -- you could open the story by saying, "Look at these cases you haven't heard," and, really, this happens with white men too, and it doesn't make the *New York Times*. There's a narrative. Now, it'll make the local

paper, but it won't be a string. You won't hear about it. You hear about it when it happens to a black person that people think that either it only happens to black people, or it happens to black people much, much, much, much more. It's not true. So we need to think about this as we keep talking about the whole shooting issue.

LOURY: Can I offer a thought?

MCWHORTER: Please.

LOURY: The thought is that, certainly, your description is accurate. There are whites, more of them than blacks, who are killed under awful circumstances by police that are hard to see how they could be justified. Certainly, that's right, and certainly you're right that we don't hear about it. OK, so it's not a three-day story. There's not demonstrations. There's not money being raised on behalf of trying to do something about whatever. OK, and the thought that I have is that the reason why that happens is not that those lives are not valued. It's rather that, in the case of a black being killed; the presumption is that his race was somehow causally implicated in the act.

MCWHORTER: Yes.

LOURY: OK. And, I mean, basically, as a social scientist, I don't know of any way of saying this other than that people are entertaining the counterfactual that, had the victim

been white, he wouldn't have been killed. Now, that, by the way, is not inconsistent with many white people being killed, because not all white people are being killed. So there are some white people who are not being killed, and the idea is that that set amongst white people is bigger than the comparable set amongst black people. Some of the black people who are being killed wouldn't be killed if they had been white. That's kind of what the hypothesis is. So there are two things going on here. One of them is about police killing people, and the other thing is about race affecting the way that police use their violence. And because, you know, we are not -- I mean, there's 1,000 people a year being killed by police, 980-something in the last year, 1,000 people a year, 1,000, three a day. Three people every day, on average, are shot dead by a policeman in the country. That's not the object of public remonstrance, that fact. It's the racial addition to that. That plus race is what's getting us the complaint. Now, that's not obviously wrong to me. I mean, at the end of the day --

MCWHORTER: Not in itself.

LOURY: -- at the end of the day, I think it is wrong, but it's not obviously wrong.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, but not in itself, right. And of course, we have to take into consideration that since January 2015, I believe the figure is that 18 unarmed white men have been killed, 24 unarmed black men have been killed. Now, that could be taken as indicating that there is still a racial element in these things. It could be taken as an indication that there's a disproportion to which black men -- mostly men -- wind up in certain situations where something might happen, and you could say that that disproportion is because of racist circumstances such as poverty and the legacy of red-lining. But nevertheless, that part is true. So vastly many more white men are killed, but, in terms of the ones who don't have anything on them, and you read the story, and you shake your head grievously, it's more black people, despite the fact that black people are 13 percent and white people are 62 percent of the population. So we're not completely out of the Black-Lives-Matter-style woods, but, nevertheless, the fact that these things do happen to white people so often is important, because if you're sitting on the street grieving that a black man has been killed, I don't think that the individual person is thinking, "This is even worse because there are only 48 million of us and there are 180 million white people." That's not what's going on. There's the thought that if you

say, "This wouldn't have happened if this person was white," but the person who says that doesn't know that that probably did happen to somebody who was white in Utah or something three or four months ago. So the role that race plays in these killings is not as simple as we've often been told, and we can't really think about any of this without realizing how common it is for somebody named Brandon, as opposed to [Blaquan?], to get iced by the cops for no real reason. I'm glad now to have more of a sense of the facts than I did basically. I'm glad we had that conversation.

LOURY: Well, I think there are major implications in the facts, OK, and I think of two. One of them is political, and the other one is a policy implication. The political implication is that if you want change, you need a coalition. The African American or even non-white population still remain a minority of the country, and so you need white allies if you're going to build a movement over a period of time that has a lasting effect, that doesn't just come and go like Occupy Wall Street may have just done. You need to broaden it. You need to broaden it, and this is an opportunity politically, the observation that many whites are victimized, even if not in the same proportionate rate per population and even if there are

other aspects of racial disparity built in, like the fact that blacks are relatively more represented amongst the unarmed victims of police killings than they are amongst the armed. Those are real things, and they need to be taken into account, but, even so, there's a political opportunity in the fact that they are white victims because it allows you to cast your net more broadly in terms of generating people supporting what you're trying to get done.

The policy thing is that, actually, John, I don't know of too many solutions to racial implicit bias. There was a story in the newspaper not that long ago -- it might have been the *New York Times* where I saw it; maybe it was online -- it was that reporting on efforts to train people to reduce their implicit bias by giving them a set of experiences, putting them through, you know, some kind of play-acting stuff, exposing them to some kind of sympathetic portrayals of the other, and getting them to be aware of and perhaps less implicitly biased. I suppose you can do that kind of thing. You can certainly root out -- if you catch racist emails in the social media of the officers, you can fire them. You can have leadership in the department that emphasizes community relations. These are worthwhile things that they're doing. You can have greater

accountability for police officers. The big policies, I think, are things that change the structure. What does the police union have in the contract that limits the ability of the district attorney to interrogate a policeman after a shooting? There are real restrictions. I've heard DeRay Mckesson speaking out as Aspen when I was out there a few weeks ago who was harping on this point, because, apparently, a lot of the union contracts protect the police officers inordinately and give them rights that, you know, you and I as citizens wouldn't have, three-day cooling-off periods and blah, blah, blah. Harold [Pollack?] tells me that there's a civilian review board of police misconduct in Chicago, and that there are, like, 900 cases before it, and three of them were found in favor of the people accusing the police. Maybe it's 300, and it was only three, but it's some incredible imbalance like that. So that structure could be changed.

You could change the protocol that legitimates the police use of force. There's a Supreme Court case, and I cannot name it -- forgive my spontaneous ignorance; we could look it up -- in which this issue came up of whether or not an officer was legitimately using deadly force when he felt fear for his life. It's a kind of, like, super stand-your-

ground law for police officers. All the police officer needs to establish is that a rational person would have feared for his life in the circumstance, and then he's exempt from being charged with a crime for using deadly force. Now, that's, you know, a pretty loose protocol. You could say, maybe sometimes, there are circumstances where, you know, it's on the margin. Maybe you could fear for your life, but still you don't shoot. Michael Brown was shot dead by Darren Wilson on that street. OK, let me grant all of that the Wilson defense says. Let me grant that Brown was trying to take the gun. Let me grant that he was charging at Wilson at the end. Did he have to kill him?

MCWHORTER: Some people wouldn't have shot.

LOURY: You know, you could say that he could have just had to take the risk, which would have been -- I mean, maybe he was scared. Maybe he was scared to death. Maybe he was really, really, very scared. So what? You signed up for the job. That's why we give you combat pay. You don't get to take citizens' lives just because -- you could say that, OK? I'm going on too long. All I mean to say is that you could change the structure that governs the legal administration and adjudication of conflict between citizens and the police. To get that done, you need white people onboard.

MCWHORTER: Of course.

LOURY: You're not going to do that as a byproduct of civil rights claims, not racial civil rights claims. You're going to do that as a byproduct of renegotiating the contract that governs the relationship between the police and the citizens. That's all 300-odd million of us. So there is a kind of policy impotence to the racially defined claim. It doesn't have much of anywhere to go very much. There's a lot of angst. There's a lot of emotion. There's a lot of remonstrations, but there's not going to be a lot of change unless we get white people onboard and, in my view, deracialize the definition of this problem.

MCWHORTER: You know, it's interesting, the -- what I have to say in response to that is something that I [don't?] want to say wrong, given that we're dealing with very serious things. But in a way, the list makes me feel a little better about the whole situation (inaudible) I have always been appalled at how evident it seemed -- and I think justifiably, to me -- that you get a gun in a tense situation, and it's so easy for a white cop to shoot to kill where, presumably, he almost never would if the person on the other end were white. If that's not true -- and the list convinces me that that is much less true than we've been told -- rather, when a cop gets scared or is

undertrained or is an asshole, if the person on the other end is white, and he might shoot him dead too and not just once every five years, it means that this is less racialized, because, yes, as you say, what exactly could you do about that? How do you train people to, in a really tough moment where they might be afraid they're going to die, not to let their inner racist peek through. I think the answer is rather clear. We're not going to know how to do that until we can change the neuronal configuration of people's brains from afar. That's not going to happen in our lifetime, so maybe what we're talking about is certainly cops in general. The cops kill too many people, and I think if we could talk about some of the things -- not talk about -- do some of the things that you just mentioned, I think black people would be brought in as part of everyone else. We'd be solving a national problem, but it would take care of a lot of what Black Lives Matter meant. It's interesting that the guy who was haranguing Hillary Clinton many, many months ago, saying, "What's in your heart?" and Hillary said, "What's in my heart isn't important; it's policy. Give me an actual game plan," that's what's going on here. I don't think we can get at what's in people's hearts any more than we already have. We need a plan. And to tell you the truth, if the problem is

that the cops just tend to shoot mouthy or wayward young men too often -- regardless of what color they are -- we're going to have at least an easier time with this than we will if we say, "We've got to get the cops to stop shooting men of color." I'm not sure what we ever could have really done about that, now or on safer ground. I hate to put it that way, but the list is kind of our relief. I think you, Glenn, sometimes get me to read the comments, because ordinarily, frankly, I'm reading something else. But I read them for the last time, and somebody said that my not knowing that the list existed was one of my lowest moments in Bloggingheads. No, that wasn't, because there was no way for me to know, and I have really learned something that I am happy to know. I think this gives me a whole different perspective on the situation. I don't feel low at all. So that's how this has panned out over this truly wild couple of weeks, and this has been an incredibly couple of weeks.

LOURY: A couple of weeks of amazing stuff, yeah, and we have the terror attack in Nice, mowing people down on the promenade with a truck. I don't know what to say about that except that --

MCWHORTER: Glenn, can I (inaudible) a little something on that?

LOURY: Yeah, go ahead.

MCWHORTER: What went on in Nice is the sort of thing that always makes me think. The black person cop issue that has been so grievous -- including misperceptions, which we have basically thematically discussed -- it shows how much this drives people crazy that --

LOURY: How much what?

MCWHORTER: It shows how much this cop-black tension can drive a person crazy, how deeply people feel this, whether they should or not, how deeply they feel that a guy could get up and kill five people out of a Black Lives Matter kind of ideology, easily stated, and was going to do more. That guy would happily have killed dozens of people if he could have. You see somebody doing the kind of thing that you see someone doing with a truck in Nice, where we look right at that person in that truck, and we think, "That is a person in the grip of something, which, for better or for worse -- and mostly worse -- they feel very deeply." You're going to shoot up a stadium? They feel something. Well, Micah Johnson was not just crazy. This is somebody who felt something. This sort of thing really is tearing the nation apart, which is why I think it's so important. Do you know what I mean?

LOURY: Yeah, I do know what you mean, and we certainly don't want to end up where the French are with their Muslim,

North African immigrant population. We certainly don't want to go there. The stakes are very high. I want to ask you about the president. Did you see the town hall that he did last night?

MCWHORTER: I saw about 10 minutes of it, but I don't know if it's going to be the part that you're -- (inaudible) OJ documentary, frankly.

LOURY: Oh, you've been looking at OJ. OK, I'm going to have to get to OJ.

MCWHORTER: Very good, very good.

LOURY: I've seen some of the early ones. What I wanted to say was that there were two things that struck me about it, the president's town hall meeting. It was short. It was 30 or 45 minutes, something like that. He was open. You know, there was a group of people that had been produced. They had lined up. They had the mother of the police officer who shot Walter Scott in South Carolina.

MCWHORTER: Michael Slager's mother?

LOURY: Yeah, I didn't remember his name. They had his mother there, and they had relatives of -- oh, my God, I'm sorry that I'm not going to remember who the victims' mothers are -- certainly, the woman who took the cell phone video in the Philando Castile case was there.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, Diamond...I forget her last name. Yeah.

LOURY: They had the mother who is Mom of the Year because she is caught on video disciplining her son during the Baltimore riot. Do you remember --

MCWHORTER: Oh, yeah.

LOURY: -- the one who grabs her son by the collar and smacks him about the head?

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: Well, she was there with her -- adorned, looking very nice, with her mom necklace that spelled "boss." It spelled "boss," B-O-S-S, across there, and there is her son, and it was quite a politically and sociologically interesting event. I admired the president's doing it. It was -- they had policemen, a police officer. In fact, they had -- the lieutenant governor of Texas was one of the people who asked the president a question, and a police official -- also from Texas, I think from Dallas -- asked the president a question. I thought the president was very good in his interactions with the ordinary folks, with the young man who asked him, you know, something about did he have issues when he was young of being profiled, with the father of somebody said what he -- you know, he gives his son the talk, and this is what the talk looked like. One kid, a mixed-race kid, said his white -- from Texas -- said his white father had given him a prescription, basically, a

card that you pull out and read to the police officer. Keep your hands on the wheel. "Officer, my license is right here. Officer, I am about to," you know, I mean, exactly a protocol for how to interact. I thought that with the people, with the mothers, the grieving people who had lost, the young man who might be susceptible, that he was quite good. He was personable. He was even funny in places. He was relaxed. I thought that, with his political enemies who were in the room -- I don't know the politics of the police officer from Dallas who asked him a question. I do know the politics of the lieutenant governor of Texas; he's a dyed-in-the-wool Republican and he's a conservative. I'm sure he's said some stuff that's not flattering to the president somewhere along the line. He was not very good. I don't know exactly what he could have said, but it was not impressive, and they were not impressed. I was looking at the policeman who asked him a question, which was basically, "Have you got any idea that our morale is in the tank around here? You've got people going out there risking their lives, and they don't feel like they have any support." And the president gave a formulaic, meandering, not very Obama-esque response to that that sounded like what you say at a press conference when you get asked a difficult question.

MCWHORTER: That's the part I saw.

LOURY: There wasn't any real human contact there, and they're certainly wasn't any simpatico. He brought up My Brother's Keeper and some of the more radical -- Kimberly Crenshaw has something up on Facebook that's being shared around a lot -- that she just blasted. "How dare you bring the mother of Walter Slager into this thing and put her next to --" I'm sorry, again, I don't remember. It might have been Alton Sterling's mother or relative -- female relative. It might have been her. In any case, it was a relatively fresh demise at the hands of police next to kin. They were almost paired. They were like cereal. Kimberly Crenshaw is saying, "Darn it. How dare you? That's like bringing the mother of a lynch mob leader into the company of the -- into the wake where you're mourning the death of the person who was lynched. How can you do that?" While I think that language is harsh, I take her point that the predicate for that juxtaposition never got laid. It was the idea of where does the ground that we're standing on from which the moral equivalency implied by this juxtaposition makes sense? Slager --

MCWHORTER: Well, this is the one who shot him running away.

LOURY: In the back!

MCWHORTER: How would you feel, though, if it was, say, Eric --
the guy who choked Eric Garner?

LOURY: I'd feel different.

MCWHORTER: Where we know that he didn't mean to do it.
Would that be different?

LOURY: Yeah, it would be very different. By the way, I'm not
embracing Kimberly Crenshaw's position. I'm just reporting
that people are objecting about that. I would feel
differently. That would have been different. I think
everyone would have to judge it a little differently. I'm
not saying it was wrong to bring his mother in there.
She's grieving. Hasn't he been convicted of murder or
something? His life has been destroyed. He made quote, "a
mistake." Close quote. OK. Using those words, I know it
would very loaded. There's a point of view from which you
might regard her as, somehow, victimized by the edges
unfolded. I don't want to make that argument with anybody,
OK? I see Kimberly Crenshaw's point on that.

MCWHORTER: You also know -- I haven't read her quotes, but
she is -- nothing with Slager is that he lied. He was one
of the most utterly, openly, starkly, egregious cases.
With Crenshaw, there is a brilliant person. She's a fine
writer. She's a fine speaker. I'm sure that you know of
her critical race theory politics.

LOURY: Intersectionality. She's the mother of that concept.

MCWHORTER: I've been on a stage with her. To be quite honest, I don't think she could -- she's not polite, but she couldn't abide anything that you or I were saying. We would be unable to penetrate, and there would be a part of her -- I don't care if she's watching me say this. There would be a part of her that would think we were misled, at best, and coopted at worst. She's not crazy. She's not an adolescent. She is, actually, a brilliant person. That's what this is up against. I don't know how she would respond. If she saw the list --

LOURY: She's your colleague at Colombia, is she not?

MCWHORTER: No, I'm thinking to myself, she could be on the floor below me. If she saw the list, I think her first response would be to resist its findings. Everything that's wrong with it, she would pick it, including her example. The issue of 18 versus 24. The list wouldn't make her see these things any differently, I don't think. I feel like our job is to say things that might move her. That happens using some real argumentation strategies. It really forces a person to, perhaps, rethink a little bit of what they thought. Just yelling it at Crenshaw and saying that she is abdicating her responsibility as a citizen --

LOURY: I didn't do that. Don't put words in my mouth. That was the other person.

MCWHORTER: So, you were talking about Black Lives Matter?

LOURY: When I said that, I was talking about Black Lives Matter. I didn't have Crenshaw on mind.

MCWHORTER: Don't you think she would support 96 percent of what --

LOURY: Yeah, she probably would. OK. So, she could, by implication, be included in that --

MCWHORTER: So, is she abdicating her responsibilities as a citizen? I would be loathed to say that.

LOURY: No, no, no. That's not what I'm saying. That's not my comment about Kimberly Crenshaw at all. I'm making two comments about her. She was very upset that the president, or whoever produced this affair, allowed the juxtaposition of the mother of a killer cop who gunned somebody down in plain sight and unjustifiably lied about it and who deserves to go to jail with the mother, if it was his mother, of Philado Castile or of Alto Sterling. Forgive me for not remembering, we can look this up. In any case, with a victim's mother who's in an entirely different moral position according to her. The other thing that she was very upset about was My Brother's Keeper. The president

found a way of mentioning My Brother's Keeper during the town hall.

MCWHORTER: She didn't like that he's criticizing black people.

LOURY: That he's pointing towards a solution that has to do with the modification of black behavior. In other words, we've got a disproportion in the criminal justice system. Let's face it. The thing that you're talking about in the *Washington Post* about race and the police being the last barrier to really dealing with it -- it has a lot to do with the behavior of disadvantaged African Americans, male and female, who are breaking the law and engaging in a socially, disruptive behavior that the police are responding to. OK. I said that. If that gets me in trouble, I don't care. That's just obvious. You could say that that behavior comes out of a structure. We could talk about that all day long. I'm talking about the behavior right now. Clearly, the frequency of difficult encounters between black people and the police, which too often result in violence, has something to do -- not just with the police, but with the behavior of black people. The overrepresentation of African Americans in violent crime has something to do with the nature of the encounters between the African Americans and the police. I'm saying

that. I've said it three times. I'm in as much trouble as I'm going to get in. So, the president wants to talk about how you're going to change that behavior. Your colleague, my colleague in an extended sense -- we work on race in America. Professor Crenshaw was very upset. She calls it a kind of respectability politics on the president's part. She says, "What? We have to become fit -- behaviorally fit before we are entitled to the basic protections of not being preyed upon by the agents of the state? You've got to fix us, and then we're going to fix this problem? You've got to fix black folks? Is that what you're going to do?"

MCWHORTER: You know something? One of the best things about President Obama has been that it's easy for you or for me to get caught up in the views of people like Professor Crenshaw. You and I often feel like those sorts of views are quote-on-quote, "winning". They are winning with the intelligence. So, yes. (inaudible) has conquered the intelligence. But let's face it, that's a minority of human beings. Academia and the people who read *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* are not most people. It's easy for you and me to forget that, because those are the only people we know. Except, we do know other people. My strong sense is that the idea that the black teens shooting

each other and going to jail are not responsible for themselves, except in their way that their grandmother might smack them on the head or something. The idea that what they're doing is the structure's fault. There's no way that we can say anything about how they now change. That's restricted to legal theorists, academics, and people who read *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*. If you're talking about ordinary black folks, as it's often put, most black folks don't believe that. One of the nicest things about Obama is that he's on the side of the folks when it comes to that. Most black people don't think that it's only black people's fault. They think that it's two things. Oddly enough, the laymen is, actually, more open to these sorts of complimentary influences than the academics. I've always found that an interesting thing when it comes to how racists talk about now. You and I both know that I'm just going to come right out and say it, Obama is right. He's correct. He's empirically correct. He's morally correct. In that, he's more with my cousin, Buster, than he is with a critical race theorist. I'm in total agreement with you, and I just want to offer you some evidence on behalf of your hypothesis -- which is, I've seen the Ice Cube sequel, *Barbershop 2*. OK?

LOURY: The first one was a wonderful movie.

MCWHORTER: Now you know. I've seen the second one. It's not as good as the first one.

LOURY: That's cute.

MCWHORTER: Once you've seen the first one, it can't quite have the same effect. This point, I'll just tell you this. This is not a spoiler. Ice Cube, the barber who's running the barbershop, is in Chicago. The bodies are dropping left and right. You know, with (shy rack?). He's afraid that his business is going to be ruined and that his life is going to be ruined. He's thinking about moving to the north side of the city where the streets are leafy green, and it's safe. Mount Airy. The Chicago equivalent of Mount Airy. But, he doesn't want to do it. So, they decide that they're going to call it Moratorium. They're going to have this communal, organized effort of collective -- we stand for peace, and they're going to just stay open 24 hours a day and give free haircuts to anybody who comes. That way, they're going to kind of witness and represent for the idea that we don't have to be killing each other. That's ridiculous. Just to show you that I didn't watch from my hotel bed, while I was getting ready to go to sleep, and this was the only thing I could find that would keep me awake for 15 minutes. I didn't watch every minute of the movie. Every minute that I watched, reaffirmed

exactly what you're saying. The dialogue and the characters -- there would be the character that would come in there like this. Most of them would like saying, "Come on. Give me a break, man. You guys going around shooting up everybody? That's ridiculous. You being poor and black is not an excuse for going around shooting up everybody. Come on. We're not going to live like this. Don't ask me to live like this, because you're angry." Like that. That's where they were coming from. We should call it a day, John.

LOURY: Yeah, actually you're breaking up in sound and picture, so I'm hearing you like you're speaking German. We've been going about an hour. So, yeah. I think we did it.

MCWHORTER: I think we did. Good to talk to you. Stay prolific, John.

LOURY: Well, I'll try. Talk to you next time.

MCWHORTER: Right. Bye.

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