

John McWhorter on 2016-09-30 at 15.14

LOURY: Hello, John McWhorter, how are you doing?

MCWHORTER: Hello, Glenn Loury, how are you doing?

LOURY: I'm fine. Here are on a Friday afternoon this is Glenn Loury at the Glenn Show, Bloggingheads.tv with my friend and my conversation partner, John McWhorter. He's at Columbia University, I'm at Brown University. We're Ivy League professors, we're black, and we're here to talk about politics and about what's going on in the news today. John, I'm so glad to be talking to you.

MCWHORTER: You, too. I think we're supposed to talk about whether Trump is a racist again.

LOURY: Oh, no, not that, not that. I thought we had already talked about that.

MCWHORTER: You know something, Glenn, to tell you the truth, that man doesn't interest me as much as he does other people. I think that we tend not to understand what a simple soul he is. I think that there is a -- people are almost giving him too much credit. He never surprises me. And so he did a terrible job in the debate --

LOURY: Yeah, he did.

MCWHORTER: -- and of course he talked about law and order --

LOURY: He did.

MCWHORTER: -- in an unreconstructed way, as if it was 1969 and we were back with the southern strategy, of course, that's the best he can do. The only thing that I found interesting was that he certainly would not have had any disapproval of the use of the word super predator 25 years ago. He would have been right in line with that; he started it out with the "bad people" that he talked about. And, yet, clearly his piece had told him to use the super predator episode against Hillary Clinton with him now pretending to think it was offensive to use a word which he himself would have happily taken credit for coining. That was the closest thing to clever that he came to in the whole debate. But I guess what we're really supposed to talk about is that he's a racist and we're supposed to talk about what a terrible thing that is. Isn't that terrible, Glenn, that he's a racist?

LOURY: Well, yeah, he's a racist, it's very terrible. We'll come back to that. I'm saying that with a certain ironic cast.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, I meant that a little ironically.

LOURY: I'm interested in your he's a simple soul, he's transparent, he's done nothing to surprise you, he's very clear, almost child-like, he plods ahead, predictable in every respect, he is what he is, he never really pretended

to be anything different, and there you have it. And so therefore, you can't go running, screaming from the room, "Oh, my God, 40 percent of the electorate want to elect somebody like this." You see him for what he is, you understand his shtick. You might not be buying it yourself but you can see how it would appeal to certain people, and it sounds like you -- supposing he were to win the election, John, would you move to Canada or some such?

MCWHORTER: No, I would suffer. I would think it was a terrible thing. It strikes me as highly unlikely. What with the dueling polls and how often the polls have been wrong, I'm not terribly scared that he's going to wind up president of the United States, but the fact that there are certain people who like his shtick, and are less interested in the details of policy than the way he feels and the way he makes them feel and a vague sense that he might be a leader, is that surprising? I mean, most people are policy wonks; I would barely consider myself one. These things are the way it's always been. Trump has gotten further than we would have expected because of the nature of the media and the fact that we can hear him up so close all the time. But unless he's president, I really have gotten to the point -- I turned down something today -- I'm tired of having to even pretend to take that man seriously. He is

as -- who put it this way, Kristof, he's that seventh grade bully. He's there for some (inaudible).

LOURY: That's what Nick Kristof wrote in the newspaper recently. I want to challenge you, John. First of all, he's got a 35-40 percent chance by most people's calculation at this moment of getting elected. Therefore, you have to take him seriously, I would argue, because he well might become president of the United States whether you or I would like that. Secondly, I would say that I think in the contrast between policy wonkery and a kind of comprehensive mastery over the vocabulary and the details of various policy calculations on the one hand, and a kind of charismatic or inspirational visionary demagoguery. I mean, I'm not going to call it anything other than demagoguery. I think the trade policy stuff doesn't add up when you try to look at it with the economist green eyeshade. Hillary Clinton is right, we are five percent of the world's population, 25 percent of the world GDP. We can't exist on an island; we have to trade with the rest of the world. Pulling up the drawbridge is not the answer to the problem. I mean, I think that that's basically right, but still, people are hurting and Trump gives a voice for some of their sense of frustration and whatnot, in the sense of "I want to make America great again". It's a

terrific slogan, John. I know I shouldn't say that. I know I'm supposed to say everything about him is bad, but it's not a bad slogan, it's not a bad sales pitch. Think about it as a marketing problem. OK, how do you sell something? And I remember hearing the novelist, Mario, the Peruvian novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa. You know who I'm talking about.

MCWHORTER: I do.

LOURY: The great writer. *The Feast of the Goat*, this magnificent fictional history of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. *The Dream of the Celt*, this comprehensive historical novel about Roger Casement, the Irish nationalist, who ended up getting -- Sir Roger Casement getting executed by the British crown because he collaborated with the Germans in World War -- this is Mario Vargas Llosa, he's a great man. Anyway, long story short is he ran for president of Peru in the 1990s and he lost. He came to Boston University where I was on the faculty at that time and gave a lecture, and John Silber, the president, the tyrannical megalomaniacal Napoleon complex troubled president of Boston University, the late great --

MCWHORTER: Was he small?

LOURY: Huh? Yeah, he was like 5'6, he had a withered arm, but he was a dynamo. He was a brilliant man, he was

fierce, he was ruthless. He was a great leader of Boston University in a very tyrannical way, but he really put the university on the map. But anyway, long story short is he had run for governor and also lost. I think he had ran against Bill Weld, the guy who's the vice president on Gary Johnson's Libertarian ticket now. And so they had a convocation in which intellectuals who had entered politics reflected on what they do. So Vargas Llosa, in this brilliant speech, was describing his experience in running for president of Peru where he lost badly to Fujimori, Fujimoro, whoever the Japanese Peruvian politician.

MCWHORTER: Fujimori, yes.

LOURY: And what Vargas Llosa wanted to convey was he thought that rationality was the currency of the realm, and he was smarter than his opponent, and he had better plans. But what he learned was that, and one of the voters taught him this in a meeting, we want promises. What he learned was the people wanted to be told stuff that would excite them, that would make them feel good, that would give them hope, that would move them. They wanted to be moved, they wanted to be inspired, they wanted a vision. They didn't necessarily care whether or not the sums added up. They simply wanted to know that the person who put themselves forward to be their leader had their back, understood

their gut, and was prepared to hold up a banner, hold up an ideal even if it wasn't clear how it was going to be achieved. Now, of course, that's demagoguery. I mean, that, and democracy with mass voting, can lead to disaster, can lead to people getting into power who screw things up and that well might be what happens should Donald Trump ever get his hands on the reins of power. But the idea that wanting to inspire people is itself kind of disqualifying. I mean, no one is actually quite saying that. But in a way they are saying that because this guy - - I don't know if you watch these rallies. These rallies are a scientific (inaudible). The people in these rallies are rabid. They're over the top with their enthusiasm. They're being profoundly moved. Now here's my point, I don't want to be misunderstood by everybody out there. They could be wrong-headed. They may be rabid and enthused for the wrong reasons. They may be being titillated by stuff, which we in our reflection, would want to critique or would need to reject. But they are our fellow citizens and they are being moved. The notion that we won't take that seriously, that we can sit in our parlors in Manhattan or up here in the Boston area or whatever, and sneer at these people and exhibit without any sense of self-consciousness a contempt for the fact that they are moved

and not ask ourselves what's moving them and not ask ourselves why are we not ourselves moved --

MCWHORTER: Well, of course, Glenn, remember that it's not that we were quite sure, we in the enlightened society as to what moves these people, and it's that they're racists. That's the thing to say because in our society, from an anthropological perspective, what is considered important above everything else, logic be damned, is identifying racism in other people and spraying yourself for it as much as possible. So, of course, the Trump rallies, and many of the things they say and even many of the things they feel, lend themselves to that. But what you're talking about, that most human beings are more moved by promises and theater and appeals to the emotional, rather than strict intellectual engagement and things following from A to B to C, and I know that sounds condescending, I genuinely do not mean it to be condescending, I think that relying on logic from A to B to C as obsessively as people like you and I do, is very peculiar and can get us in trouble in a lot of ways, I genuinely mean that. But that is the way most people are -- there's a photograph that I actually have hanging that always reminds me of this. And my strategy for it is to just try to make whatever I think have more of the qualities that people like Trump use. And it's

actually -- it's of Malcolm X and Bayard Rustin who was crucial to getting the march on Washington arranged. You know, black leftists who did an awful lot to get an awful lot of things done, especially in the '50s and the '60s. There's a picture where Rustin and Malcolm X had had a debate, a civil debate at some school, I forget which one. There's a picture of them after the event conversing on stage while people are milling around. And you can see in the picture, I love pictures like this, Malcolm has that (inaudible) on his face. He was considered to have won the night using the aphorisms and the charisma and the quotable lines and the (inaudible) stuff in the air. Baynard Rustin is (inaudible) standing up and bending, Baynard Rustin is in this position. He's sitting and (inaudible) his hands and the way his mouth looks. His mouth looks like this. He's making a point. I don't even need to hear the audience. Rustin is saying something like, "Well, how can we do X if we don't have the Y in this thing? So I've been trying to A, B and C." And Malcolm X is just sitting there being himself. Now Malcolm X was a very intelligent man, but he won because he was sexy. Whereas Rustin was sitting there with the data, he was the Hillary. He's making the points and he lost that night because he wasn't sexy. And my thought with that is it's too bad that somebody like

Rustin put his words into the mouth of somebody who had that kind of oratorical charisma that Malcolm has. Today I wish that Hillary happened to be somebody who could get off more snappy lines in the way of Trump because that's the only thing that's ever really going to work. Trump doesn't surprise me. I think, yes, that's people. And here's Hillary who's this twisted sort of person who has trained herself out of talking and thinking that way, and it ends up working to her disadvantage. She's the Rustin. It makes me sad.

LOURY: No, I think I may even be able to envision this photo that you're talking about. Certainly I have come across a transcript of that exchange between Rustin and Malcolm X --

MCWHORTER: I would love to know what they were saying.

LOURY: -- and where there was charisma and what moves people and so on but what about their ideas themselves? So we've been talking about race and racial inequality in America, Black Lives Matter, police killing unarmed black men. We've been talking about the effects of various social policy initiatives, mass incarceration, welfare policies on the black population, the persistence of the disadvantaged status of African Americans, what's the solution to all of these different issues, affirmative act -- these are all things that you and I have talked about, John. So now here

we are at the campaign of 2016. We're not getting any younger. I don't know how many more campaigns I'm going to witness before the Grim Reaper takes me in. You know, a finite number, you can be sure of that. Probably can count them on one hand or two hands and maybe even on one hand. Anyway, the long and short of it is -- certainly on two hands you can count it. Long and short of it is, though, that the question of the plight of African-American communities, urban communities where jobs have fled, where unemployment is high, where violence is rampant, where incarceration is the ubiquitous experience of people who live there, is actually being discussed in this presidential campaign. It's being discussed explicitly because Donald Trump has made it an issue. Let me repeat that. The issue of what to do about the urban enclaves of depressed and marginalized social and economic experience, which are largely populated by black people, is on the agenda of a presidential campaign in a serious way for the first time, and I can't remember when because Donald Trump has made it an issue. Let me say that for the third time. I mean, I just want to be clear about this. Donald Trump has, as a matter of discretion, chosen to orient his campaign in such a way that he brings this issue up at every one of his stump speeches and presses it forward.

OK, maybe I exaggerate. Maybe it's not only because of Donald Trump. Maybe I have to give Black Lives Matter some credit and talk about the police stuff --

MCWHORTER: I think that the reason is Trayvon Martin. The reason is George Zimmerman and the fact that by then social media could spread it around. Y'all could say it's Black Lives Matter and Bernie Sanders have made Hillary more attendant. I don't know if it's Trump.

LOURY: No, no. Rebuild these communities, employ these people, keep them safe. We want to rebuild these communities. These communities have not been well served by the conventional political order. I'm a change agent. Amongst the changes I intend to make, one of the first things that I want to attend to, is changing the way in which we address the problems of these communities. "I can fix it. Let's fix these problems." Now the easiest response to that is he's insincere, he's an idiot, he's an asshole, he's asinine, he's a megalomaniacal, narcissistic, adolescent bully, and a long string of such adjectives which render him beneath contempt. So far outside the ambit of legitimate consideration that we don't even have to address what he says, OK? We don't even have to address it. Meanwhile, the fact -- that's amusing, but indeed, that's what we're supposed to say -- the fact is these

communities have been governed by liberal democratic political machines for a half century. The fact of the matter is that there is an emergency there. He's being criticized for describing the very problems that the race card players are constantly calling attention to as they press their own claims. He simply has reiterated what they've already been saying. How many people are in prison, how bad the economy is, how many people are on food stamps and welfare, how there aren't any jobs, how the schools don't work. Now rather than engage these questions, no, liberalism hasn't failed. In fact, the Great Society has been good for black people. No, there are some problems with schools and those problems are they don't have enough money and we need to attack the rich and get the money in there. But the National Education Association, which is a constituent element of the Democratic Party coalition, is not a part of the problem, it's a part of the solution. No, the violence issue does not require more law enforcement. It requires more sensitivity training and implicit bias training for police officers. That will solve the problem of violence in the cities. And, oh, by the way, if we had strict gun control, the gangsters wouldn't be able to get any guns. Rather than making those arguments, all of which are ridiculous,

you can't tell me that there aren't some issues with the teachers' unions. There are some issues. You can't tell me that the regime of regulation and taxes has no implication for the extent to which private money is willing to invest itself in places that might promote the employment of poor people. Of course it's relevant. That's like saying jobs in coal country don't matter for people in eastern Kentucky. They can all make solar panels. You can't tell me that the voice of the people in those communities within the consoles of the Democratic Party is in a minor key and is barely audible. They are dragged out when it's convenient to drag them out. He's right. Election time, all the banners are flying and all of the rhetoric is just pouring and the Joe Bidens and the so forth are out there telling us about how much they care and about how black people have suffered and blah, blah, blah, blah, and blah, blah, and blah, blah, and yet we are now a half century past the Great Society, 50 years, and we're still talking about these same things. Now, somebody comes along and they want to talk about it in a different register. They could be wrong. They need to be engaged. You're not taking me seriously if you don't take that conversation seriously. You think I'm a chump? You think I'm simply supposed to salute? When you call on me I'm

simply supposed to salute? I mean, don't play me like that. I feel like I'm being not respected by the cognoscenti when they say to me, "Be a good little black boy, fall in line." I mean, did you hear what the president said? The President of the United States said he'd be disappointed in us black people if we didn't vote for his candidate. He didn't give us a program. He's been in office for eight years. He didn't specify how those problems were going to be solved in his home city of Chicago or any place else. He didn't tout a record in which he had engaged himself systematically in restructuring education in the inner cities or in bringing jobs to those people. He said none of that. Instead, he said, "I'll be really disappointed in you, your first black president, if you don't vote for the candidate whom I designate as my rightful successor." My reaction to that is you can go straight to hell. Forgive me, Bloggingheads audience, hate me if you will. My reaction to that appeal is you can go straight to hell. I'm not your concubine. I'm not your lap dog. You don't simply call on me and tell me what to do out of you being the first black president. Will you please give me a break? I'm not an idiot. I'm sorry, please, help me, John. Bail me out. I'm way out on a limb here.

MCWHORTER: Well, you know, Obama does come up with my brother's keeper. I think that there are people who have philosophical problems with that.

LOURY: There are, he has.

MCWHORTER: That's something. Obama is smart to have tried to follow in the line of what to do for black people in 1969, and he also had a congress that wouldn't have let him do much (inaudible) but the reason that all of this gets by is because we are stuck, not only in the patronization, but we are stuck in America having learned the wrong lesson. I wonder what precedence there are for this in human intellectual history. I had an experience the other day with a very nice person, who I sincerely hope does not watch Bloggingheads because they would know who they were if they were watching this, but it's too bad. I was having a talk with somebody who is going to be very useful in publicizing my next book. And she was white and I would put her at about -- I think she said she was about 55, NPR, the New Yorker, lives in a certain neighborhood in Brooklyn, that demographic of person, and we're talking about this and we're talking about that, and then it was almost as if she had lit a certain set of candles and I could tell what was coming. She said this partly because I'm black and she thought I wanted to hear it, and I

understood that so I just played along, but she said, "For example, because we don't want to talk about race in this country," and you can just fill in the blanks and that went on for about three minutes. And I just felt to myself, here this comes. And she thinks she wants -- she thinks that I want to hear it. I understand why she thinks it, and we're not talking about those issues, you have to pick your battles. But as if we don't talk about race in this country. She had opened up the New York Times that morning and read about either Colin Kaepernick or, I hate to say it, but whoever had gotten shot by a cop that week, we talk about race all the time, so does she. And, yet, she's sitting there looking me in the face, and I have to sit there and pretend to agree with her that race is something that nobody wants to talk about, or even -- that phraseology is sloppy. It's really nobody wants to talk about racism; that's what people mean. But we talk about it all the time. And, yet, the current regime is such that because what's supposed to be important is whether or not you're a racist or whether or not you're tamping down your inner racist, and that is as important as Jesus is to so many people. I know that to her it makes sense to look me in the eye and that I'm going to agree with her that we don't talk about racism when both of us read about racism

in the paper exactly that morning. But it means that she's forcing herself and she's forcing me to be illogical and fake. That's how pernicious this ideological movement that we're living in is now. And there's a part of me on a good day, I just think there are worse things. I think you and I do know what Aleppo is, unlike Gary Johnson. There are worse places we could live. A lot of this could be seen as intelli-hash tag intelligencia problems. But there are other times when I feel like to have conversations with a lot of people who I respect in the world that I live in, I often have to hold my breath and go into la-la land for ten or 15 minutes, rather than make waves. Or if I make waves, it really is as if I have blown on a tuba in church, and it's not that I'm going to get attacked, but you're really going against the grain and it's frustrating. That's the world you live in, too. You don't understand why people won't make sense. And I think I do understand why people won't make sense. Trump's appeal doesn't get across because he's not doing that. He's not interested in showing that he's not a racist, and therefore, you can't listen to him no matter what he says. Isn't that sad? But that's what we're stuck in and that's true of your colleagues, too.

LOURY: It is --

MCWHORTER: If you're not faithful to Jesus, you will not be listened to.

LOURY: I feel that we have an obligation, people like you and I --

MCWHORTER: Would you have said that to that woman?

LOURY: I might have said nothing but what you said, which was to kind of play along, understanding the situation to be what it is. I am often myself in similar kinds of situations, not only from the point of view of a liberal philosophy about race, but also in my world where I'm a free speech advocate in the academy where free speech is under assault, except that the social justice ways argue that free speech is not under assault. Free speech is, in fact, a weapon that certain reactionaries use to try to protect themselves from the imperative of having to adjust the way they do business in the face of the demands for social justice coming from people of color and others. That's what they would say. But my allies in the free speech movement, if we want to call it that, in the argument to protect the academy from political correctness, are mostly older white guys. And I often have a similar kind of encounter with them in which they presume that we are all kind of on the same page about how the barbarians are at the gates, how the culture warriors, the social

justice warriors, the diversity mongers or so forth are undermining the currency of the realm and are tearing down the citadel, and they expect me, the black person, and often the only black person in the room when such a conversation is unfolding, to nod, to affirm, to give them cover, to say, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's not a racist thing for you to feel the way you do. So in the same way that the religion, as you call it, of anti-racism requires a certain kind of conformity to these fake performances that are enacted constantly in which people --

MCWHORTER: (inaudible)

LOURY: -- signal their virtue by affirming certain nostrums, like we need to have certain conversations about race, in the same way on almost the other end of the spectrum, where I sometimes live, similar fake and not really conversations at all, but rather opportunities to exhibit conformity to a certain line taken to be a kind of religious totem takes place. So I think this is a feature of social groups very, very broadly. But the other thing I want to say is --

MCWHORTER: Like *True Believer*, by Eric Hoffer.

LOURY: Yeah, the paranoid Hoffer.

MCWHORTER: No, that's Richard Hofstadter. But *True Believer* about these sorts of movements and how the past was always -- you're looking towards a future that's going to be

absolutely wonderful. There was a distant past that was wonderful, but the present is all wrong and a certain group-think is encouraged. And if you go outside of the group-think, you're a bad person. A lot of it is about fear of being an individual. Hoffer's idea -- I think the book was 1951 -- was that the truth was being an individual thinker, being an individual person unconnected from others, is not a natural human state, and that what people really tend to yearn for is being part of a group, part of a network and this seems to certainly apply to a lot of the young men attracted to radical Islam today. And a lot of that is this, I think. It's hard to be an individual (inaudible) people could.

LOURY: Let me ask you a question. The question is, don't we have a responsibility to push back or break the mold or to stand outside of this? I know it's hard and it's a burden and there's no reward for it. And, yet, I feel disrespected to a certain extent when I'm talked down to by people because who think because they see me and see the complexion of my skin, they both know how they're supposed to behave toward me and how I'm supposed to react in the context of that discussion. And I -- and this may just be the contrarian in me -- I want to disabuse them of those presumptions. I feel like it's an act of integrity, it's

an act of self-protection to not go along with it. So when the latest of these shootings happen, and you can imagine the scene, and I'm in the bar having a drink after a long day's work, and the person at the next -- the ties are loosened and, you know, we're both upper middle class and we're both professors at big tony universities and what not, and he's white and I'm black --

MCWHORTER: I know the scene that way, yep.

LOURY: You know, and the thing is playing on -- over the bar there's a television set and the thing -- the new is reporting and the correspondent is telling us about the unarmed black man and so forth, and he leans over and he says, "You know, it's just terrible what the police are doing these days." And what I am supposed to say is, "Yeah, of course, goddamned police, racist, et cetera, et cetera." But what I think really is A, it's way more complicated than that. The guy actually had a gun. He wasn't unarmed. It looked like he was actually trying to hurt the cop and we don't have all the evidence. So why don't we -- that's what I actually think.

MCWHORTER: But you can't say that.

LOURY: But I kind of don't want to say that. And, yet, I feel like I ought to allow myself to be recruited into this cheerleading, thoughtless, mutual backslapping, we're

better than the rest of them, did you see what that conservative politician said about this? They're all a bunch of racist kind of thing. I feel like I want to fight back. I can't say that. I feel like I have -- and I feel like the Glenn Show at (inaudible) TV should be a place in which that kind of oppositional stance is --

MCWHORTER: It's the fighting back. Yeah, the police is definitely one of those things. I know people, I'm friends with people where when those things come up the assumption is that the police are racists, not even subtly, and the reason they shot that person is because they thought he was a nigger and that's it. And these are white people, Asian people, and black people who think this way. And whenever one of those things comes up, it's expected that all of us have that same view. It's people of Columbia and you have to pick and choose who you're going to resist with if you feel that the narrative is more complicated, which it usually is. I'm not -- I think you are more contrarian about the cops on an episode by episode basis than I am, but it's often talked about that a few cops came out and shot this person down because they could, which is what intelligent people think about in every one of these cases. Like even right now with Keith Scott, what happened with the guy who got out of the van and his wife saying, "Don't

shoot him," and she says he doesn't have a gun but they found one. I've already had a couple of those conversations where it's just assumed that the police must have planted the gun. No questions asked. I'll admit -- that bar scene, Glenn -- I did that at a place not far from my house. I hate to admit there have been so many of these shootings now that I don't remember which one it was but it was about a year ago. That came up on TV and it was exactly that configuration. I doubt if the people catty-corner from me were professors, but they were urban professionals, one of them was white, one of them was black, that came up on the screen. I was about half way through my glass of wine and I thought, this is bar, people are open enough, and it's a bar where they kind of know me. I thought, I know where this is going to go. I know what they're going to expect me to say. I could just say it and let it go. But it had been a long day and I didn't feel like acting. I didn't feel like not being myself. So I just chugged the wine and left some money and I went home because I just decided I know it's coming, and I would like to be myself, not by myself but myself. And, you know, how do you fight back? Bloggingheads is one place. Although, sometime I think, Glenn -- did you read that article in *The Atlantic* that Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff wrote about

the coddling of the American mind where they wrote that the way we are treating students goes against the basic tenants of cognitive behavioral therapy? Sometimes I think there should be an article where somebody, I don't know who, says -- and in a way we're turning the tables -- we're saying we feel almost discriminated against in that you're assuming that all black people think alike when it comes to something like Black Lives Matter because I doubt if you and I are alone. However, if it's only you, me, and 98 other people, I don't think the article is worth being written. I don't know if there's a critical mass out there who feel the way we feel. But it's tiresome.

LOURY: It is. Let me ask you something, John. This is an interesting, to me, an interesting conversation I want to ask you because I know you follow -- maybe not as closely as I do -- the comments that some of our viewers of the Glenn Show offer about our conversations.

MCWHORTER: I read all of them but the last one, for the record.

LOURY: So, we have our fans, and thank you out there in Bloggingheads land for being fans and encouraging us. We appreciate it. We also have our detractors and one of the arguments of the detractors is that we're an echo chamber. You and I agree too much about being the only sane African

American commentators in the sea of predictable and hackneyed kind of reflexive anti-racism rhetoric, and I think we are actually the only -- among the only sane voices in the conversation but I would -- I would think that, wouldn't I? So that's one kind of reaction. But another kind of reaction is, like I said, we have this echo chamber thing going on here where we only talk to ourselves and we don't talk to the other side. And you and I have discussed this, and I would really like you to share your thoughts about that because people may not understand how difficult it is to actually have a constructive conversation with the other side.

MCWHORTER: I think -- it's the first time I've ever addressed the commenters but you've got me paying more attention to the commenters. Folks, I don't know if you understand that the kinds of people Glenn and I are talking about -- should I address -- this is interesting --

LOURY: Yes, go ahead, you're doing well.

MCWHORTER: -- the kind of people I'm talking about. They would be highly unlikely to want to talk to us at all. These are not issues that many people see as about just strict logic; this is religious, and so for a lot of the people we're talking about. And I'm not going to mention a certain name, it's obvious why he's not on the show, but as

far as all of the others, some of whom we don't -- let me mention one, for example. Charles Blow isn't going to call on this. For one thing, he doesn't have to, he's got his audience. Two, why he ruin his day by having a conversation with people who he knows don't agree with him, and, frankly, somebody like him, he's a very even-tempered person from my having met him a couple of times, but somebody like him often thinks that people like Glenn and me are not just of a different opinion -- now, of course, that's what people say in formal settings. Everybody says that they're open to many opinions, but that's just one layer of life. The other layer, how we all really feel, the way they really feel is that there's something wrong with us that maybe we're traitors -- and I think you would often get traitor. What I get, maybe because I'm a little younger and maybe a little lighter skinned, although, it shouldn't matter -- what I get is I'm naïve, that I just don't know that the cabs are passing me by, that I don't know that my wife doesn't see me as a full person, that I'm just a wide-eyed little (inaudible). There's a certain (inaudible) And so they're not going to come on. So, the reason Glenn and I only talk to each other is because the number of people who would disagree with us in any real way, who would be interested in going back and forth with

us is small. They would consider themselves sullied or they would consider it trivial. You would have to -- Glenn, I'm almost done -- you would have to see the expression on the face of some of the people like this in civil settings. I remember one time I was at a party at U Rochester and there were a couple of people who knew me as what I just described. Nobody's going to say it, but it's very much in the air. The look is something like this. That's the look you get all night. I'm going to do it again. Nothing disrespectful but kind of like, "I've got your number. We're not going to talk about that shit you said on NPR a year ago. We're just going to drink our wine and talk about kids, but I got you."

LOURY: We know who you are.

MCWHORTER: That's the way most of them are like. So that's why, Glenn, it's just you and me because people like that consider us beneath contempt. They're not going to say it but they do. Glenn, does this make sense to you?

LOURY: It makes perfect sense to me. I want to reiterate some of what you're saying. I want people to understand that I speak for myself, but I think I can speak for you in saying this, too, we would welcome the opportunity to engage in vigorous exchange and argument on the basis of logic and evidence with people about the things that we're

talking about. We do not believe that our mouths are prayer books and that we have some kind of mainline insight into fundamental truth. We're groping along just like everybody else trying to figure out what's going on, thinking for ourselves, looking at history, evidence, politics, and so forth, and then come to the conclusions that we come to. The fact of the matter is we're not being engaged by people and you're not seeing us engage with people because they don't take us seriously because our trenchant criticisms of their positions are not received in terms of, "Oh, did he say something logical that might actually cause me to rethink my faith?" They're received in terms of, "What kind of friggin' Negro would say such a thing in the hearing of white people?" They're interpreting it in terms of what our motives are and what our character is; not in terms of our reason or our logic. And I want to give a concrete illustration of this. I'm a faculty member of Brown University. I'm a professor here, I hold a chair. I'm one of the most prominent members of this faculty. I'm sorry, but it's just true. The provost has a lecture series. He asks prominent members of the faculty from the sciences, from the humanities, from the social sciences, and so forth to stand up and talk for an hour and a half to the rest of their colleagues over dinner

about what they work on. And I have been to some of these dinners and they have -- I've learned about Confucian philosophy and I've learned about Italian renaissance art, and I've learned about political change in Germany during the Weimar Republic --

MCWHORTER: And asparagus and filet mignon.

LOURY: So these are things that people -- so I was asked. So my theme was -- which is what I've been working on for 40 years amongst everything -- why has racial inequality persisted into the 21st century, OK? So I had an argument. I won't try to rehearse it here but core of it was bias was the 20th century meme, development should be the 21st century meme. By which I simply mean history, it definitely was a heavy-handed racism excluding black people. But the current situation is one in which that hand has largely retreated, but the opportunities can't really be seized unless we deal with the consequences of having been excluded historically, most of which are manifested in terms of our unreadiness to seize the opportunities. I could explain further, but we don't have the time right now. Bottom line is I make that argument and here's what I want you to know. One hundred of my colleagues turned out. Took over a ball room in the tony private club down the corner from Brown University where they'd been having these

kind of soirees for a hundred years. You know, the wood paneling and the portraits and the chandelier and the high ceilings and the Persian carpets and the fireplaces with the marble mantels and all of that kind of stuff. One hundred of my colleagues. I was the only African American in the room. I spoke to the faculty of Brown University about the fundamental question of persistence of racial inequality as one of the most distinguished students of that question in the United States of America or on this planet, for that matter, and not a single one of my colleagues of color came out to hear from me. Let me just say that one more time. None of the people of color were in the room when I was talking.

MCWHORTER: This is very important.

LOURY: OK? So do not criticize me for not having them on Bloggingheads. I've tried and I've tried and I've tried again. They won't engage me because I'm beyond the pale as far as they're concerned. So I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep on trying to see as best as I can what's going on, and I'm going to tell it like it is, and they can read about it in the newspaper as far as I'm concerned, and I'm done with it.

MCWHORTER: I would add one thing, Glenn. It must be clear that Glenn and I are not talking about certain colorful,

hot-headed people that you may have seen on TV that become well known because they happen to have hot personalities. This is behavior that you also find in very mild mannered polite people. None of it is overt but it manifests itself in -- for example, Glenn Loury of all people, Glenn Loury, the star, gives a glittering talk at Brown University, there are a hundred people there. All of the 99 others are white. It's a snub.

LOURY: No, there were some Asians.

MCWHORTER: Right, nobody was picketing and I doubt if all the black people at Brown got together and said, "Let's not go." But the corporate response to Glenn giving that I'm sure very widely advertised talk was, I don't even want to go hear the man. I'm going to stay home and watch Scandal or whatever anybody was watching on TV. That's what it's like. That's why Bloggingheads does not have more of a diversity. And this is not everybody. I mean, there are people -- both of us have debated other black people on Bloggingheads. I did Randy Kennedy, I did Richard Ford. You've done -- you've done other people.

LOURY: Yeah, I've done others, yeah.

MCWHORTER: It's not everybody but it is a critical mass.

LOURY: Yeah, I did Sandy Darity, the economist at Duke, for example and others. I had an interesting experience, John.

This is apropos of nothing at all particularly. I went to Yale and I spoke to the Yale Political Union, which is a debating society modeled on the House of Commons kind of culture of the British Parliament where the Tories sit on one side and the Socialist -- Democratic Socialists sit on the other side, where they bang their fists on the table when they hear something that they like, and they hiss when they hear something that they don't like. Where somebody stands up and gives an appointed argument in response to a debate proposition and then the podium is open for people from the floor, members of the Yale Political Union, to come from either side of the aisle and to offer their five minutes rebuttals or affirmations of whatever it is that they speaker is -- my topic, John, the resolution was resolved: End affirmative action, and I was in the affirmative, John, God help me. I was in the affirmative. And what I tried to say was, "Look, I'm not trying to slam the door on the fingers of our children and keep them out, the African Americans who want to come to places like Yale or Brown. I want to see our children, our young people included in these elite venues where opportunity and access to the citadel of American power is being rationed. I certainly want our people there. But I don't want us there as a permanent matter on a certain kind of dispensation in

which it's argued that while we recognize you don't quite measure up in terms of the normal criteria of competition, we nevertheless are going to admit you because we need to have racial diversity." I said, "That's fine as a transitional undertaking for a period of time, but we started that in the 1970s, we're four decades down the line now, and, you know what? It's becoming a way of life and it's really not equal.

MCWHORTER: They do it for a generation.

LOURY: My point was you can never get to equality by being patronized.

MCWHORTER: No.

LOURY: Ultimately, you have to perform. Now, I could be right or I could be wrong about that, but that was my argument. There were relatively few African Americans in the room, although there were plenty of people who disagreed with me. But the reason I'm mentioning this is because the experience was really uplifting, the experience of argument, of engagement, of the fact that that was a question which could get you disinvited as a commencement speaker if people thought that was the speech you were going to give. If I were sitting on a federal court somewhere and had handed down some opinions to that effect, I would be persona non grata. I would be in a class with

Clarence Thomas and they would think I was unfit to be given an honorary degree if otherwise people thought to honor me in that way. And yet, this institution at Yale, it's a little small thing, but it's something I believe that needs to be affirmed and cultivated and replicated in other environments where the coin of the realm is argument, it's not the content of the argument. Among the resolutions they had stuff like the British monarchy should be eliminated and there were people who were for it and there were people who were against it. Stuff like gay marriage is an abomination. I mean, this is the kind of thing that they were prepared to consider, OK? And, you know, I'm going to channel John Stuart Mill here when I say there's deep and profound edifying value in argument, even over things that we think are largely subtle principle. Even over things that we believe we know the answers to because it says John Stuart Mill and I believe there's profound insight here, we don't want to know the answers as a matter of kind of stale repetition and invocation of doctrine --

MCWHORTER: You lose sight of what the beat of the argument is.

LOURY: Yeah, we forget why. We forget why we believe the things that we believe if we don't have to refute people

who believe differently and who are relatively intelligent in being able to argue against what we believe. So we -- in order to keep vital and alive our beliefs, we need to have them challenged on a regular basis and that's why an openness to discourse on the campus is an essential to the purpose of the university. It's not a luxury; it's the actual coin of the realm, it's what we do.

MCWHORTER: And, yet, Glenn, the thing is a certain kind of student might have seen you having that debate and broke out into tears and walked out. And a certain kind of white or non-black faculty member would look upon it and publicly talk about students' right to protest and how things can -- a controversy can be difficult. After a glass of wine in private would say, yes, PC is going a little too far, but they would never say it in public, and that's the state of it today. John Stuart Mill is considered to be fine except when it comes to things having to do with the descendants of African slaves in a particular nation called the United States in the beginning of a particular century, the 21st. Things are somehow different. And talk about the unexamined idea, no one really ever quite defends why these matters are so different when it comes to just that thing. It seems to just be whatever makes people feel good. Glenn, the truth is I have to go home.

LOURY: Yeah, I don't blame you, man. We've been talking for almost an hour, it's Friday, God love you for coming on the Glenn Show. We appreciate it, John.

MCWHORTER: I will be back. So have a good rest of the day.

LOURY: All right, you, too. I really appreciate being able to talk to you, John.

MCWHORTER: Sorry I delayed this time. I couldn't do it just (inaudible).

LOURY: No, no, don't worry. Take care and my best to your family.

MCWHORTER: You, too.

LOURY: Bye-bye.

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