

Bhtv-2015-10-01-loury-mcwhorter2

LOURY: Welcome back, I'm doing well. John, this is twice within a two-week's period of time that we would have been talking, so I'm psyched. I don't usually get that much.

MCWHORTER: One of those times.

LOURY: We don't usually get to see that much of you so frequently on the *Glenn Show*.

MCWHORTER: Been a big couple weeks.

LOURY: We are -- it has been. So I'm Glenn Loury of Brown University and speaking with my interlocutor, conversation partner here at *Bloggingheads*, John McWhorter of Columbia University and this is part two of a conversation we began last, 10 days ago or so, that's gone up on the site about the Black Lives Matter Movement and the contemporary racial politics in the United States. It's one of our beats. We've been talking about this kind of stuff for years. We want to pick up where we left off. We got some critical comments in the comment section at the *Bloggingheads.tv* site, from people who feel that we're naysayers, that we're curmudgeons, that all we're doing is criticizing, we don't have anything constructive to say. That you know, coming down on Black Lives Matter and moreover, in the time that has intervened between our previous conversation and this

one, the MacArthur Foundation has announced the winners of its MacArthur Prize Fellowship, the so-called Genius Award, that one recipient of which this time around is one Tanehisi Coates, author of *Between the World and Me*, a writer at *The Atlantic*, African American social critic who's been very prominent of late and who has come in for some criticism by us here at this, at this site.

So John, it seems like we are facing something of a challenge here. The world would appear not to agree with us about these matters and with me being my 60's, man, I'm starting to feel like I'm out of touch, I'm just getting old. You know, the situations are moving past me. You're a younger man so you've still got your bright future ahead of you, but (laughs) help me out, John. Are we crazy over here? Where did we go wrong? How come we're not with the zeitgeist, man? What's wrong with us? (laughs)

MCWHORTER: No, we're not, we're not. We're not, we're not crazy. (laughter) What we're seeing with our dispute with people on Black Lives Matter is that at heart there are a great many people who feel like what they really want to do, what's most important to do is to fight racism. And so what they want to do, what jumps to their mind as important and urgent is to get these white cops to stop killing black

people and I support that effort wholeheartedly and nobody can say that I don't, I have now written a long, long string of pieces in national media all over the place for several years supporting those efforts. I'm not just making some backhanded compliment when really I'm concerned with something else. But when it comes to all about getting the kind of traction that it is, I thoroughly believe that a real Black Lives movement that was concerned about helping black people, not helping people, you know, outside of the black community, or black people outside of poor black communities feel good about themselves.

Helping black communities. The idea that you focus on what the cops are doing, when what they do to black people is something they do much less than certain black people in those neighborhoods are doing to one another, doesn't make sense and I think a lot of our critics are thinking really deep down, but, but, but, but if you talk about those black guys in the neighborhood, well, that's not racism. Or that's the result of racism, although that's a very weak argument. But really no, I say no, remember, the idea is not to only battle racism, because racism today isn't the only cause of problems in those communities. You should do both. It's not to leave the cops alone, but the whole

movement should be about stopping black lives from being taken unjustly. And in closing I'll say and I think I mentioned this analogy to you the other day and you said you didn't like it, but I still kind of like it, it's like some people say, "Well, that's like telling somebody they shouldn't fight litter because there's also hunger."

No, the analogy is off. It's like watching somebody who says, "I'm going to fight litter," but they only seem to be picking up soda cans. And you say, "What about all this other stuff?" and they say, "No, the soda cans are shiny and well, they make noise when they hit the ground. I'm going to get the soda cans and well, what's wrong with me just concentrating on this," and you say, "Well, I thought what you wanted to do was pick up litter. Why don't you go put those diapers in the garbage bags and the wilted lettuce," "No, I'm just going to get the cans. Why do you have to get on me for doing what I'm doing?" It's the same thing. That's where we are. I stand by what I've been saying. How do you feel about this?

LOURY: Oh, John, OK, so I'm tired. That's one thing that I feel. To be perfectly honest with you, I think I may have announced a couple of years ago in one of my *Bloggingheads* conversations and that was going global and you know, I was

going to be more interested in South Asia, economic development in Africa and you know, race and religion on Europe and you know, I was going to go global and so free myself from the endless, tiresome, repetitive, humiliating, frustrating "conversation" about race in America. I've said everything I have to say. You all either want to hear it or you don't. Sounds like the plurality don't, at least the plurality that hands out the prizes and such and so therefore, you know, man, time to move on.

It's kind of how I felt and that was two, three years ago and I haven't moved on yet. I guess I can't move on, I guess you know, (laughs) I'm stuck caring about the situation. I'm stuck with, you know, four decades of intellectual labor, you know, on and around the edges of this problem. I'm stuck having laid down markers, you know, I mean I think the self-help argument, which aversion which I think you kind of just made, I don't want to tar you with that brush but I still think it has a lot to say about it, about African American agency, about cleaning up our act. About restoring the family. About morality and you know and virtue and things like that, I mean I know they're old fashioned words -- I still think they have relevance. I still think in terms of the enemy without,

which is white racism and I'm against it just like you are, I'm against police brutality and abuse, unaccountable use of force against black people just like you are. Have said so many times. Was two or three years ahead of Michelle Alexander in blasting mass incarceration and its racism disparity impact.

MCWHORTER: You were, yeah.

LOURY: I was years ahead of the curve on that issue. I'm supposed to be a black Conservative, how come I'm standing up in front of the Tanner lecture audience at Stanford University, decrying through racist implications over structure of punishment and crime reaction in our country that had tacit if not explicit racism written all over it. I've said it once, said it twice, etc., etc. So I'm weary. I'm weary of a world in which you can't raise a question about the efficacy of affirmative action about a ton of bricks falling on you. I'm weary. I'm weary of a world in which you point out 50 years after the Civil Rights Movement, that people are still recycling the same arguments with the same excuses for the same unacceptable conditions and unacceptable behavior. I'm weary of trying to defend the humanity and the integrity of "my people" by calling on liberals to stop making excuses for our failures and start asking about us as they would of anybody in this

society, to live by a set of standards and a code that, that offends our humanity and that is consistent with a normative consensus. You know, I'm tired of defending America as a nation that is susceptible to reform, notwithstanding its racist history. I'm just weary, I'm tired. And finally I'll say, because I know (laughs) I'm going on, thank you for listening, John, I'm hurt.

I'm hurt by being passed over. By being tacitly and explicitly dissed. I'm hurt by being right in my opinion about a lot of stuff and not being recognized as such. I'm hurt by the fact that my accomplishments and I'm not the one to make this speech, I should not be the one to have to make this speech. My accomplishments as a scholar, as a teacher, as a writer, as a social critic, as an intellectual, as a technical economist, tower over the accomplishments of some people who've gotten a lot more play than I have in this field, which is so important to my country. So you know, at the end of the day I'm shrugging, I'm befuddled. You know, I look around and I don't get it.

And like I say, being a man of a certain age, I'm starting to think, maybe I'll never get it. Maybe it's passed me by. Maybe, you know, my time has come and gone. I don't

know. I don't anybody feeling sorry for me. And if I sound like I'm feeling sorry for myself (laughs) it's probably because I am. (laughs) There you are, John. You asked me and I told you. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: No, I get it. I can put myself in your head. I can imagine. And I mean I'm not, you know, I'm just a man, I'm actually turning 50 on Tuesday. I'm imagining if I had been around for 10 years and more than that and kind of feeling like I had done my life's body of work and it seems like you know, certain other types of people are getting the fancy awards. And you know Glenn, this isn't going to help you, I imagine, but to tell you the truth, I was a humble linguist and then in the year 2000, rather accidentally I started being known as a, as what used to be called a "race man", ever since then I've done those two things. But I realized about five years in that to have the kinds of views about race that I have, there's a, (laughs) I guess you call it a sort of glass ceiling. I thought, if by some chance I was amazing, that was never going to be acknowledged because the best you can do, as somebody like you or me, is for people to say that you make some good points. But for the vast majority, plurality of people, as you put it, that that's the best that we can ever do. It couldn't be that you're just right.



Nobody, no matter how well you did, a Tony Scott in the *Times* would not say that anything you wrote was "essential like air", the way he did about Ta-Nehisi Coates's book, it just couldn't happen. I think it's partly -- now, that's not to say that I ever thought I did anything that was absolutely amazing, but it was clear to me that I could never be acknowledged as having done such a thing, because of the religion where everybody feels that their duty is to decry racism. And so the best it can be is that you make some good points and I frankly think that you were considered somebody who absolutely excellently "makes some good points" but I think that the kind of person who gives out those prizes, who says those certain things, who anoints you, that kind of person, it would never occur to them to put you on that kind of list.

And so for me, I have always kept the linguistics, too and I enjoy it and I frankly get a certain kind of attention in linguistics that I will never get when it comes to race. And many people say, well, that's because your race stuff is wrong, but I think you and I know that that's a rather hasty judgment. But yeah, I would at 50 already feel exactly like you. I would feel hm, I'm working hard. I'm

more prolific than a lot of these people. I think I'm more original than a lot of these people and yet they get A, B and C (laughs) and all I am is somebody who makes some good points. Yes, I feel you. That must be extremely frustrating. Because you know that what you have to do is stand outside of it all and evaluate yourself. But let's face it. That alone doesn't always get you through the night. I hear you. It's true. But we're up against something that we can't, that we can't, we can't fight.

You know, I stopped giving live race talks in 2008. Because I just thought, I'm not going to travel anymore into a situation -- nobody was hurting me or yelling at me but I just thought, the best I can do is you make some good points. That's it. No matter how empirical (laughs) I am, you make some good points. And I just thought, I'm going to do live talks on something where every now and then somebody tells me I'm amazing. And that was the language. Is there anyway that you could do that? Like really step away and just do say pure economics as an alternate, instead of stepping into somewhere where everybody in the room is primed to think that say Ta-Nehisi Coates is the dead center of empirical reality and then anything you say is just some good points.

LOURY: Well, yeah, John, there is, you know and I do, I mean, I'm a teacher, you know and I teach Ph.D. students in economics, I teach them pure mathematical economic theory. We, you know, go through the canon of what it is that a, you know, a well-trained professional economist should know, largely based on the work of Nobel Prize-winning scholars in the last quarter century, many of whom are my friends and colleagues, some of whom I've collaborated with. You know I mean, I have a life. I mean you know, I go give lectures all over the world on my research. I do most, I'll give lectures and indeed all over the world about race and social policy in America. There's no necessary inconsistency between the two. You know, come on, there's no way for a person to listen to us here and not think, you know, sour grapes, you know, it's like these guys are grouching because you know, whatever, whatever you know, they're just jealous of the success of somebody, whatever, their self-important with academics, you know.

You've heard these comments. You've seen these remarks. And I suppose to a certain degree there is some sour grapes running around here. There is a little bit of resentment and a bit of you know, disappointment and whatnot. Don't want to seem too self-important, given that the things we

talked about, poverty and you know, segregated ghettos and you know, hundreds of thousands of people incarcerated and millions of people not developing their human potential to the fullest because they've been betrayed and let down by the politics and institutions of the country that they were born in -- these are serious things. Our lives, you know, are pretty cushy, you know. We're well into the middle class, we're secure. We have, you know, liberty to pursue our intellectual interests. We get rewarded for doing things that we probably do in our spare time that we weren't even being paid for it. We travel the world.

So you know, at some level there's nothing -- if my little Christian, you know, sensibilities were to kick in I'd, you know, I'd just be grateful, thanking God for what he's doing for me every day and you know, not looking over my shoulder and all of that. So I don't know, maybe this is enough about me. Yes, I have a life outside of racial commentary, I do.

MCWHORTER: Now you're getting me thinking about this sort of thing. Go ahead.

LOURY: (laughs) I'm a fellow of the econometric society. I think I've already said that. I'm a member of the American Philosophical Society. There are only a couple thousand of

us in the world. I think I've already noted that.

(laughs) Have been vice president of the American Economics Association. Got students that win MacArthur Prize Fellowships. You know, people that I taught much of what they know, who've gone onto be acknowledged and honored in this way. I don't think I have anything really to, to you know, be crying in my beer about.

MCWHORTER: Do you think that those big name prizes are that important? I really never have thought about them much. But you're now making me think about it. But how come it has to be the MacArthur or the National Book Award? Why those, that particular imprimatur? As opposed to just being somebody who's well known and constantly asked to speak, etc. Is that not enough? For me it usually is.

LOURY: Yeah, I mean I think it had better be enough for the fact is that almost nobody's going to (laughs) win those prizes, I mean they're only giving out one a year, so to speak and so a lot of good people are going to be left off the list. Not every brilliant economist who has made fundamental contributions will be honored with the Nobel Prize and not every writer who writes a book that's very much worth reading and will be worth reading in a quarter century is going to be honored with a national book award. So yeah, it had better be enough to do your work and you

know, make a contribution, even if you're not recognized at the highest level like that.

On the other hand, yeah, I think those prizes make a difference. First of all, they're handing out real money over there at the MacArthur Foundation. I don't know about you but half a million dollars in my bank account would actually make a difference in my life. Secondly, it gives you cachet. I mean you know, most people are not sufficiently informed about the internal, you know, sort of rankings with accomplishment. They're not sufficiently well-trained in the specialized areas of inquiry to be able to evaluate and so forth, so they go back, they're labeled. And when you get one of those labels and if the label is "genius" you know, slapped on you, it changes your life.

You get more speaking, more speaking invitations, you get an easier reception at the, at the editorial office for the piece that you may have submitted. You know, your name gets mentioned and people say, "Oh yeah, he won the Genius Award last year," or three years ago, whatever. So I mean, I would like to think that probably does (laughs), it does make a difference.

MCWHORTER: I guess, I guess one thing that, and I mean just mean from that sort of thing is that I guess I'm kind of a dilettante who's always doing a bunch of different things - - I wouldn't want anymore speaking invitations. I get exactly as many as I need. I wouldn't, the life of some of these scholars where they spend their lives in airplanes, in hotel rooms, jumping all over the place -- I genuinely wouldn't want it. I like my, I like my stuff and I'm really tired of airplanes. But I see what you mean. You know, far be it for me to give advice on this because now you've struck a chord. I'm thinking about myself at 50, you know and I'm where even at 50 you begin to think, is this it? And I'm pretty sure that I'm at it and is it enough? Something new?

LOURY: So now, now let's get down to cases. Ta-Nehisi Coates. (laughter) OK. He is the ghost lurking in this conversation because he just won a MacArthur Prize Fellowship Genius Award, with the 600k that comes along with it and all the cachet and he's riding very high. His book has been on top of the best-seller list for a while. I don't believe any of your books have been on the top of the best-seller list for any such period of time and I can tell you for a fact that none of mine have ever gotten on the best-seller list, let alone to the top of it.

MCWHORTER: I will have you know that *Losing the Race* was number 28 on the *New York Times* best-seller list for about 10 seconds and (laughter) the bottom half of the list isn't published, so nobody knew. But that is the closest I think I will ever get to that. Anyway, go ahead.

LOURY: OK, so if you're riding high on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list, number 1-2-3 and if you're up there for a couple of months you're selling hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions of copy in the text and you're getting, you know, you're getting royalties of, I don't know, depends on the contract and whatnot, but it could be three, four, five bucks a pop. Understand? Anybody can do that arithmetic. That's, that's, that ain't nothing. Moreover, you become the person who frames the conversation in the editorial boardrooms, in the corporate boardrooms, in the community activist meetings, your text becomes influential in a very deep way, it resonates in the lives and in the minds of people you become a household word. You become the go-to person. These are all very, very, very good things, you know so you know.

Again, again, the question I move to ask is if the world is rewarding something that you and I are so sharply critical of, doesn't that kind of tell us that there's something



wrong with us and if the answer to that is no, then we're left with the problem of explaining why the world is crazy and we're so smart. You know, in economics they have this thing, if you're so smart, why aren't you rich? Maybe it's not just economics. Maybe that's a Jewish proverb or something. I'm not sure what the origins of it are. If you're so smart, why aren't you rich? You know. Well, if you're so smart, why don't you have the prize? If you're so smart, why aren't people buying your books in the bushel load? Yeah.

MCWHORTER: Yeah. You know, I, (laughter) I still haven't read the book, but I have read many, many reviews. I am fascinated by the phenomenon from a distance. I mean, it's at the point where I've read so many quotes and things that I almost feel like I've read it and --

LOURY: You probably ought to read the book, John. Did you hear what I said?

MCWHORTER: Yes.

LOURY: I said you probably ought to read the book. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: Yeah, I know I ought to, but I have a big stack (laughs) (inaudible) also. I, I have a policy on Coates, which is that I, and I've had this for many, many years, a good seven, eight years. I don't talk about him at all. However, I'll make an exception here as I did with one

other conversation with you, because it is at the point where one cannot not talk about him at all and I'll just say that where that book is, is, it's anthropologically interesting to me because what all of this says is that things are much better than he is claiming in that book and in his last two particularly noted magazine articles, because I think that the view of race in that book anybody can see is Manichean, he's exaggerating. He's talking about an America that has not existed for a very long time.

It's extremely subjective. Everybody knows. However, the fact that everybody of influence, and especially white people of influence, are bowing down to it and, and thinking of it as something that needs to be part of a conversation, although nobody seems to specify just how it's going to be part or what purpose it will serve, but it's going to be part of a conversation -- that means that something really seismic has happened in the social fabric of this country. Not with every white person alive, but it's actually something to be joyous about. The pendulum has swung a little too far but it'll come back to reality.

But the thing that strikes me the most about that book, there's a passage about how he is in Harlem and he doesn't

like when the young white couples with the big carriages are taking up space on the sidewalk. He sees dominance in it. He's got a passage where he sees his son frolicking with, you know, the non-black kids at school and internally he says to himself, "Wait, you can't know what those people might do to you -- you don't know what they might have in store," that and then the comment that he's made to the media that he's surprised white people even care about his work. I think, I hypothesize, I don't know the man, but I hypothesize that Ta-Nehisi Coates is the kind of black person who when white people aren't around says, "You know, I don't like white people," that's just my guess. And it's not only my guess, but it comes from the book that he wrote. That's a book written by somebody who has a major beef against white people and not just in some abstract, collective way, such that he sees two white people who probably read his stuff walking down the street in Harlem with a carriage and thinks of them as Vikings who were dominating space as white people always do.

I find it interesting that the sort of people who he clearly doesn't like adore the book. I wonder if they know that he doesn't like them either. I think they might think that he doesn't like the firefighter and the working class

white person who's on the barstool and doesn't understand what's going on with the blacks. I wonder if they realize that it's a fair reading that really, he just doesn't like white people in general, because of America's past and present and that they are indicted as well. Maybe they feel, they feel goodly in supporting their own indictment, which is the basis for my whole religious comment about all this. That's where that book is in my mind at this point. I have spoken of Ta-Nehisi Coates. Now you speak of him.

LOURY: Oh, OK, well, I want to speak of John McWhorter for a moment, at least about what you just said. Doesn't like white people, OK, so you impute this, too, and you don't really know, we don't know what he actually thinks. In a way it's kind of maybe a little unfair to be speculating about somebody's state of mind in the absence of evidence. OK, so there is some anecdotal evidence based upon passages in the book and so forth and so on. I don't know.

I mean, here's what I'd say about Coates and white people from my reading of the book -- I don't know Ta-Nehisi Coates. I'd say his beef is with whiteness. His beef is with people who need to think of themselves as white, OK. The indictment that I take from the book is with the very notion or category of whiteness, as a privileged category

of people who are sort of unreflectively the beneficiaries of a structure that advantages them and disadvantages people of color, that who in some sense are, you know, retreat behind their whiteness or something. I mean, I do justice to, to this argument here. In any case, it's whiteness. Now white people, OK, you can point to some of those anecdotes. I've heard them, too, I mean read them also, saw them in the book. But I --

MCWHORTER: Glenn, just very quickly, you read it. Do you also get the sense that he would be that kind of person who would say, "You know, I don't like white people,"? Not whiteness in that modern abstract way, but just that. I mean and we can't know, but --

LOURY: Hey, I mean, (inaudible) this is your speculation -- I'm not necessarily joining you in it in the sense that --

MCWHORTER: OK. How much longer?

LOURY: I mean, I don't want to say no to you because you know, there is a certain kind of racialist, romanticization, I mean of you know, Howard University in his years there and stuff like that. He talks about the beauty of black people and all that. I mean he's, you know, does that add up to not liking white people? It may add up to loving yourself, you know, loving black people in

the face of, in the face of a world that hates us, with being perhaps the way you might put it.

MCWHORTER: Exactly, correct.

LOURY: So, but I've said this, Harold Pollack and I discussed this book a few weeks ago here at the *Glenn Show* and I agree with you about the Manichean view, I mean, it's a world of black and white, of good and evil and whiteness and white people and white America are evil. It's a world in which black people have been sold a bill of good, this American dream, I find it profoundly ironic -- here is Ta-Nehisi Coates living the very American dream that he doesn't believe exists. (laughs)

MCWHORTER: Well remember, he thinks he's an exception. Right. He'll say, "I got lucky, but you know, you have to think about everybody who doesn't get as lucky as me."

LOURY: No, no, but your point, your point is well taken and I say this vis-à-vis the Black Lives Matter thing also.

America is capable of reform. This is --

MCWHORTER: To a degree, you know.

LOURY: This is not a society that is so corrupt, bankrupt, self-indulgent, oblivious to its own character, incapable of self-criticism that it can't reform itself. Quite the contrary. And the bandwagon that goes around indictments such as those that issue from Ta-Nehisi Coates is evidence

of the capacity of the society to reform -- I'll end this with the observation that the very mass incarceration that people are pointing to as a, as clear-cut evidence of the racist character of the society and its contempt for black bodies is being undone, even as we speak it's early on, I don't know what the future will bring, but I'm darn sure that there are movements afoot across the political spectrum involving white people as well as black people.

MCWHORTER: The Koch brothers, yeah. Mm-hmm.

LOURY: That are dead set to try to roll this thing back.

I've seen Conservative Republicans financed by the Koch brothers stand up and left with tears in their eyes, preach and decry, preach against and decry the cul-de-sac that we wandered into, in terms of excessive punishment and its racial disparity. This country is certainly capable of reform. The Civil Rights Movement proves that. So, so the election, the elevation of Barak Hussein Obama proves that. I mean no, it doesn't erase all the racism. No, I didn't say we were living in a post-racial society. What I said is, the society is not so bankrupt, corrupt and you know, bereft of the capacity for reflection and self-criticism that these things can't change. They're worth engaging with these white people and these issues are worth fighting with coalitions that are broader than simply people of

color. And by the way, if anybody is obsessed with race, it's my man Ta-Nehisi Coates is obsessed with race.

He imagines that every white people looks at him and the first thing they see is a black person. I'm almost certain that that's not true. What I'm certain of, however, is that every white person he sees, the first thing he sees is a white person. All right, John, you've joined me down there into the gutter with you. I'm attacking my man Ta-Nehisi Coates, but yeah, I think there's some problems there.

MCWHORTER: We don't know him. We don't, we don't, we don't know him and I should underline, (laughter) I'm just, I'm just guessing and I should also say that if he doesn't like white people, there's a reason that is understandable. I'm not saying that he's a racist in the same way as a white person is a racist and it is a bad thing. I mean I can see where he would get it, although I think that there is this Manicheanism in his general worldview. But still, and you know, one more thing -- talk about getting each other down on --

LOURY: John, you know, excuse me for interrupting, John, the comment section is going to eat us alive. I just want you to know that. Brace yourself. Brace yourself. (laughs)



MCWHORTER: Oh, I'm sure, this is the world we live in. When I was about eight, eight, yeah, I went to a Montessori school which was, you know, quintessential Montessori school, although I imagine there was some sort of effort to bring in socio-economically disadvantaged kids. I was too young to know but there were a lot, comparatively for a Montessori school, a lot of black kids who were not from as middle class homes as I was. That was great. That was there. Anyway, there was one family of kids like that where they had an older brother and I imagine he was in his 20's, maybe even his 30's and he came and he visited one day. And these people, I guess they lived in something like poverty. And actually one of the girls was my first "girlfriend", to show you that I knew these people.

We were friends. But the brother came in. And this is somebody, he was, you know, kind of from the hood, as people would have started saying later. And I was told that he had not enjoyed his visit. He didn't like the school in terms of what was going on with the black kids at it, like me. Because he thought that we were playing too happily with the white kids and we didn't realize that life wasn't going to be the way it was at that school. And he was disgusted, he really couldn't stand watching the black

kids running around with the white kids, as if everything was fine. And you know, I remember back then and of course, I was just a kid, I remember thinking, I don't like that. I think that he's living in the world of the past.

I already had a sense that there had been a revolution of some kind and I thought he doesn't understand that things are changing. I don't believe that my relationships with these white kids are false and that at a certain point they're going to turn against me as a little, as a little nigger. I think that this guy is caught in something and I kind of resent that he has contempt for my happy life in seeing me running around with a multi-hued bunch of people.

And I must admit that I see some of that in a view of life where here, in say New York in 2015, all these people around us are white and you know, unintentionally malevolent and to be comfortable with them because yes, I am, my wife is quite white and my social life is about 55% white. (laughter) The idea that that's all a sham and that I don't understand that really these are the same people who in a different mood are going to shove my daughters on an escalator, it gives me a feeling that I can't say is the most positive one. But you're only getting me thinking

about that. Ordinarily my statement is just the one about the not liking (laughs) white people. But yeah, you got me talking. So that -- are you mad at him?

LOURY: At Ta-Nehisi Coates?

MCWHORTER: Mm-hmm.

LOURY: No man, I'm not, I'm not mad at him. I mean I am in disagreement with him about some things. I'm not exactly sure (inaudible) stated the disagreement. I'm actually interested in engaging him. Come on the *Glenn Show*, Ta-Nehisi, let's talk. I'm interested in engaging him around some of these questions where I think there are arguments worth having. I might be mad at the world who loves him and he seems not to love me nearly as much, (laughter) but you know, mad is not a very constructive posture, man, you know I mean, that's not a place one wants to dwell. I think one wants to push back against that kind of a feeling. But -- just on his point about racial boundaries and so on, I do think I would not advise my son as Coates has advised his, to the effect, don't drink the Kool-Aid. Don't relax. Don't get comfortable. You know, watch out.

The world hates you, it's coming to get you because you're black. I mean, I would not tell my son, in the wake of the grand jury declining to indict police officer Darren Wilson

in Ferguson, Missouri -- see there, one more proof that we don't count. No such thing. I wouldn't cultivate in my son, looking forward to the middle of the 21st century, the attitude that pigmentation is an absolutely defining line of demarcation in this society and you're always going to be on the short end of it. And I wonder if one tells one's child that, what one would think if they came home with a girlfriend, a prospective spouse who is, as you say "quite white", "quite white", what they would think about bridging -- I mean because this is intimacy now. Here we are making babies together. Here we are planning a life together, OK.

Surely it's got to be right that if there's going to ultimately be a solution to the racial problem in this country, it will involve not only this, but it will intimately involve an expansion of the extent of interracial intimacy, cohabitation, marriage and reproduction, as people's lives blend together and this line gets, you know, to be partly and partly and progressively erased, just as the line between Catholic and Protestant, between Irish and English, between German, Slavic and all of that, Italian, Jewish, has been progressively diminished in American society over the course of the 20th century. Surely that's what we have to

hope for. So there's something, I'm not mad at him, but I mean I think very wrongheaded about the direction that he pushes us, which so many influential people like the prize awarders at the MacArthur Foundation seem willing to follow.

MCWHORTER: It's interesting, I guess 999 readers out of a thousand of that book would never dream of telling their child something like this or would disapprove of the idea of any black child being taught to grow up that way. I think it's a rather open and shut case. But I think that people are reading this book and looking at that message and I think the good white person's job is to shake their head and say, "Yeah, look how bad it is, that he feels the need to tell his son that, look how bad it is," and if you've shaken your head and you say, "Look how bad it is," that means that you understand that racism isn't gone and you have done what many people do consider the most important moral act that America can do, which is to say, "Racism isn't gone and it's serious," and that can genuinely translate into people, people judging a piece of work to be significant, I mean even genius level.

That's what I mean by we can't think of it and I said this at the end, the second to last blogging as we did, it's not

that it's to be read as facts. It's not that's even to be read as argument. It's scripture. Nobody puts it that way. We don't use that word, but it's scripture, and that just makes it easy to me, although I do understand your, your frustration, because we don't always use the words as precisely as we might -- the vocabulary doesn't fit the phenomenon, so we don't call it "scripture", we call it a book. But you know, it actually makes more sense as a scripture.

LOURY: John, I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm going to have to go in a minute or else I'm going to miss lunch and --

MCWHORTER: Oh, you have lunch, OK.

LOURY: Yeah, I have a lunch that they serve at a specific hour here. But what I want to say is, as my last contribution, the functional equivalent from the white side of the way in which race gets talked about in between the world and me, would be somebody telling their child after he picks up the newspaper and sees a black criminal who's you know, raped or robbed or preyed upon somebody who's white, telling their kid, "You see there? You can't turn your back on these people. Every time we look up one of them is doing something horrible to us," and then going on with the racist rant that that person would go on with.

And of course, we recognize that immediately as profoundly, morally wrong and the miseducat-, and the mis-education of that child, OK, while I would like to say it's not the same thing but it's a functional equivalent, that telling a black kid that America is bankrupt, don't believe any of these promises, the dream is a nightmare. It's going to come back to bite you. Don't trust them. I have to protect you from a world that hates you because you're black -- while this kid may not have the same power that a white kid would have to, you know, perpetrate wrongful deeds on the basis of such a way of looking at the world, it is still nonetheless, a wrongful way of looking at the world. That's what I would say.

MCWHORTER: I, you know, we could go many places from there and so maybe there's a, there's a "to be continued" but yeah, there are many levels to these issues and I think that somebody like Coates would agree with you in a way, although of course, the idea is that his view is reactive, whereas the white person who would say this is supposed to understand that the white person created any of the behavior that might make them uncomfortable. There's a piece by John Derbyshire that actually pretty much is what you said, that came out two or three years ago and created a big fuss. Yes. You are correct. But these sorts of

discussions are not what creates the estimation of books like Coates's. We're approaching it in what I think is almost the wrong way. And there it is.

LOURY: John, I've got to go --

MCWHORTER: Enjoy your lunch.

LOURY: Or else I'll be hungry. (laughs) OK, thanks, John.

We're going to take a beating on this though --

MCWHORTER: Talk to you soon.

LOURY: You know that, though, right?

MCWHORTER: Well, I'm used to it. (laughs) That's OK.

LOURY: OK.

MCWHORTER: Talk to you soon.

LOURY: Bye-bye.

MCWHORTER: Bye.

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