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GLENN LOURY: Interview with John McWhorter. How are you doing, my friend?

JOHN MCWHORTER: I am pretty good, Glenn. I'm a little bit under the weather today, but I'm sure that you can get me started. How is life out there in California?

LOURY: I will do my best. Oh, the sun is still shining. I still have a beautiful view from my study down the hillside onto the Stanford University ca-- I ain't complaining. Although, when I go out to ride by bicycle, I almost get overrun on the paths by a herd of incredibly fit men and women.

MCWHORTER: That happens out there.

LOURY: None of whom are more than half my age who just zip by me at lightning speed, you know? I mean, I feel like a really, really old codger out here, trying to get around on a bicycle. And they go up and down these hills that are completely intimidating to me, OK. I don't know how anybody gets up and down these hills, so I'm just impressed with the youthful vigor of my compatriots out here. It ain't half bad. A guy could get used to it -- I'll be honest with you. But that is not what we came here to talk about. John McWhorter, welcome to the Glenn Show.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, I know.

LOURY: This is the Glenn Show with Bloggingheads.tv, and I am the host, Glenn Loury of Brown University, currently on leave at Stanford University, and John McWhorter is at Columbia University. Our audience knows us well. We're the black guys at Bloggingheads.tv, and we are back to have a conversation -- we haven't talked in a while -- with so much going on around us in the news having to do with race on the college campuses. The University of Missouri, where the president was forced out by student demonstration, and Yale University, where controversy that starts with a Halloween costume debate continues to bubble over there. We can name other places -- Ithaca College, Claremont McKenna, where demands have been made, and in the Claremont case, as far as I know, the person has actually stepped down. Four administrators just stepped down because of racially insensitive behavior on their part. All of this turmoil in this post-Ferguson moment that we live in of people challenging institutions and getting the support in the liberal magazines and the opinion columns, my friend Charles Blow has addressed himself to these matters in a manner that, you know, I've become accustomed to hearing him deploy when he addresses these matters. And so --

MCWHORTER: Glenn, I think that, if I may interject, Roxane Gay's piece --

LOURY: Oh, you may. You may, please do.

MCWHORTER: -- Roxane Gay's piece in the *New York Times*, I think, also was a pretty standard response from the left to the students, very much in favor of what they were doing. Anyway, go ahead.

LOURY: Jelani Cobb at the *New Yorker* in --

MCWHORTER: Yes, that's true.

LOURY: -- a similar manner. I'm sure if we went to the *Nation*, we'd be able to find somebody, and in fact, I read something there. I just don't remember who it was. There have been some counterpoints in the commentariat about the coddling of students, the closing of the American mind --

MCWHORTER: Conor Friedersdorf in *The Atlantic* is particularly good in being civil but firm.

LOURY: That was a very strong piece. I found myself in much agreement with it. I agree that Friedersdorf piece deserves to be highlighted. Anyway, both of us, you and I, are black, and both of us are faculty at Ivy League universities, and therefore, we have a birds-eye view here of what's going on, and undoubtedly, we have opinion. And John, I'm just eager to hear from you what your reaction to these tumultuous events might be.

MCWHORTER: Well, I'm trying to wrap my head around what's going on. And because we have the birds-eye view, I personally cannot just dismiss these people as, quote-unquote, "whiners." I know them. I see them. Some of these people are in my classes. They're not idiots, and so I'm really trying to break bread with the whole thing. The tone -- I have no compunction against saying -- is not useful. And I don't mean that you're supposed to only tug on sleeves politely, but I wrote a piece for CNN.com that seemed to get around that said that the rage is seductive, but one of the most inconvenient things about having a passionate commitment to something is that you can't apply the full range of your feelings to creating change. Because with rage, the sad but ineluctable fact is that you end up turning off even people who want to agree with you. If you're going to use this fever pitch and you're going to be abusive, the natural human response is to recoil.

But let's say that some people listen to that. So for example, at Amherst, they seem to have been trying to hold off on that kind of rage. I guess what it comes down to for me -- and you and I are going to differ on this because of a certain generational differences that -- I went to college in the '80s, and I very much had the feeling that,

"Wow, if I had been doing this 20 years ago, I would have been living in class bigotry and segregation." And yet, at that time, I was at Simon's Rock early college and then Rutgers in New Brunswick. This debate, this idea that there was supposed to be a safe space from racism, that hadn't started, and I certainly encountered racism, such as walking into a German class and having the teacher say, right to my face, "I'm sorry, but you're in the wrong class."

LOURY: Yeah.

MCWHORTER: And the only possible reason could have been the color of my skin.

LOURY: Right.

MCWHORTER: That was going on. But now, what I'm looking at is that these students are saying that things like that -- and I would even venture to say that they are less likely to encounter something that bold, but still, there are definitely these things going on -- that there must be this kind of protest against it, that the campus is still a racist place. I'm trying to wrap my head around one, whether or not a person is legitimate in saying that it's a racist place -- and too many smart people are saying it for it to be nonsense -- and then, too, whether or not anything could be done about it. What do you think?

LOURY: OK. I agree with your point about a certain just basic human sympathy for our students of color -- let me use that language -- who are human beings. They are young. They are vulnerable. I don't want to overwork that, but it's so. And we are, as members of the faculty -- and there are relatively few black faculty at these institutions -- people that they are going to look to for support and for wisdom and so on. And to just take pot shots at them, it's just too easy, you know, to call them whiners and crybabies and whatnot -- even though there may be some validity in that -- shouldn't be the first or the last thing that we have to say about it. We should be trying to be constructive in our responses and so on. So you know, I think that's something that even my generation -- and I went to college in the '60s and '70s -- can relate to. I feel a little bit of pressure. Some of my colleagues at Brown, for example -- and not just some of them -- four dozen of them, I think, signed an open letter to the community. These are faculty members who indicated that they were in support of our students of color -- again, how they put it -- faculty from Africana Studies and Ethnic Studies and Latino Studies and Asian Studies and so on. Not only, but mainly ethnic studies faculty signed this letter. And while I'm -- I mean, gratefully, I'm on

sabbatical, because I don't know if I could personally have signed that particular letter. We could go into this later if you think that's of interest, but I just want to make the point that --

MCWHORTER: I wouldn't have signed it. No.

LOURY: -- oh, you saw the letter. I sent it to you.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, it would have been awkward.

LOURY: The feeling -- I don't feel like I could have --

MCWHORTER: No, I couldn't have signed that.

LOURY: -- signed it. And yet, you know, the pressure to -- if I had been confronted -- I'm on sabbatical, I'm not on campus, nobody asked me -- and I had said no, people would have been so disappointed. It would have been like a betrayal for me to not sign on, and so that kind of pressure. But still, the students oughtn't be targets for the easy critique that you might pick up, you know, the *Weekly Standard* or something and read about them. On the other hand -- and let me just try to frame our conversation here a little bit by calling attention to a few themes that I think are going on -- I've got three P's written down here on my notepad: principles, pedagogy, and psychology. Under "principles," I'm thinking free speech versus inclusion. This has been one way in which the debate has been framed, and the pro-demonstration, anti-racism way of

dealing with that framing is to say that it's a phony opposition to say that free speech is not an absolute value, to say that the people who say that a person should be allowed to express themselves -- even if it makes students of color feel unwelcome -- has a right to express it in the way that -- to respond to them as with an argument, the people who say that are really not sincere about the value of making the community an open community. And you know, things like, at Brown -- where I teach -- going all the way back, two years ago, to the Ray Kelly incident -- that's how we talk about it now -- when the police commissioner at that time was not permitted to deliver an address, shouted down by students and residents of the community because he was purportedly a racist because his policy of stop-and-frisk policing in New York City was not liked by those students. And then, some of us -- myself included -- saying, whatever I might think about the policy, the idea, at a university, that the duly appointed official with responsibility for policing the nation's largest city could not actually speak about his work -- "We don't want to hear what he has to say. We know that he's a racist. The man, appointed by a guy who was elected three times to be mayor of the country's largest city and serves at his pleasure, doesn't deserve to be

debated with. We know the answers. We're just going to shout him down." I felt that that was inconsistent with the basic principles on which our intellectual and academic communities are founded and that the stakes were really very high. I didn't see the opposition between free speech and inclusion being something that I would want to trade off -- the fundamental idea about open discourse -- on behalf of making an environment more --

MCWHORTER: Glenn, could we take that first P first?

LOURY: OK, we can take the first P first. The other two are pedagogy and psychology. We'll get to them. What do you have to say?

MCWHORTER: OK. Yeah, let's get to those.

LOURY: Because I've talked at some length now about the free speech versus the inclusion idea.

MCWHORTER: Yeah. The free speech problem is actually pretty simple. It's that the students don't feel that there's no room for free speech. The students feel that there comes a point when certain things are no longer on the table, and in that, they're not wrong. Nobody is going to say that we should have to debate on a college campus about whether or not women should have the vote. Nobody is going to say that somebody should be able to have a long discussion about how genocide actually has its benefits. That would

be intolerable, and nobody would say, "Free speech demands that that person be listened to, that this topic be discussed." We do feel that certain things -- we've kind of made progress. The whole free speech notion has always been a little bit fig leafy, frankly. And what these students are basically saying is that, when it comes to the issue of racism or sexism or any -ism, that too is off the table, that if a person is a racist and they have demonstrated that, then they don't deserve to be listened to anymore than Adolf Hitler would. Now, the problem is that they have an oversimplified view of the issues. And so, for example, it is not off the table to discuss whether or not affirmative action is now past its sell-by date. It is not off the table to seek to discuss what should be called rape and what should be done about it. These are things that are worth intelligent, moral people's discussion. These students' claim is that that's not true, and if you ask me, it's partly universities' responsibility, that they are under the sincere impression that to listen to Ray Kelly is equivalent to listening to Hitler. They've learned a lesson from the left too well, and they need to be taught that what -- their view of things is anti-intellectual. Now, remember the Yale student who yells at Christakis and says, "No, this is not

an intellectual issue." Well, no, that's wrong. This is an intellectual issue. This is not like arguing about genocide. The students don't know it, and it's probably because they're not taught it.

LOURY: Yeah, no, I think what you just said is absolutely right. I think it was very well put. I agree that some moral debates have been resolved. Slavery is wrong. There was a time when a lot of people, including John C. Calhoun, whose name is on a building at Yale, think -- because he's an alumnus -- and evidently the university was proud enough of John C. Calhoun, the early nineteenth-century US senator who was a vociferous defender of slavery -- you know, they thought enough to put his name on a residential college at Yale, and it's still there. But we don't debate any longer the moral status of slavery. Neither do we debate any longer whether or not women should have the franchise, etc., just as you said. I agree with that. I agree, too, that the move that's being made is to place arguable questions, like, "Is affirmative action a good policy? Is it unjust to the people who are disadvantaged by it? Does it actually do harm, sometimes, to the people on behalf of whom it has been deployed, and so forth? Should it be racial, or should it be based on class?" Things of that kind, or like, "How do you police a

city of eight million people where crime and violence is a very real thing, and getting weapons off the street is a first-order matter of business for the institutions of authority in the city? And what do you do in messy situations where officers who fear for their lives -- and who are armed for a reason -- use deadly force under circumstances that, when reviewed ex post facto, are ambiguous, and so on?" The idea that you can decide, a *priori*, that the policy of stop-and-frisk is absolutely racially unacceptable and that anybody who would defend it doesn't deserve to speak at your university, that strikes me as a problem. But I don't want to agree with you totally, because take this Halloween costume issue, OK. At Yale -- this is at Yale --

MCWHORTER: At Yale.

LOURY: -- but of course, it comes up a lot of places.

Somebody adorns themselves in a way that someone else finds to be offensive, either because it's a cultural appropriation -- that is to say they're white, but they actually present themselves as if they were otherwise -- or because it seems to be mocking or is understood to be mocking or making fun of somebody's culture or somebody's values or something like that, and it's a, quote, "inappropriate costume," close quote. Now, here's the

question that I have. The question that I have is, "Really? It's not permitted to mock? Really?" I decide I'm going to present myself at Halloween as an ethnic thumb-sucker. I adorn a diaper, a baby bonnet, a pacifier, and I wear a banner across my thing saying, "Ethnic thumb-sucker," and what I'm doing is I'm making fun of people who are at a place that, to get an education, costs a quarter of a million dollars, whose parents both are earning six figures, who are on their way to Wall Street, and who define themselves based upon the flimsiest of criteria -- namely, the color of their skin -- as being, quote, "marginalized," close quote. So I decide that, in the good tradition of the *Dartmouth Review*, let's say -- you remember the *Dartmouth Review*, back in the day -- I decide that I'm going to make fun of that.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating this. This is not something that Glenn Loury would do. But you can't tell me that a person doesn't have a right to mock and make fun of stuff that they think is ridiculous. It may be unwise to do it. It may be disruptive to do it. But the idea that they don't have a right to engage in that kind of critical speech -- let me just finish this point, John. You can burn an American flag, all right? The Supreme

Court has declared that you can burn an American flag. I can go to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and burn an American flag in protest against drone strikes. I can wear a sandwich board, on one side of which has a picture of Barack Obama, and on the other side of which has a picture of Martin Luther King. Under King will be the slogan, "I have a dream," and under Obama will be the slogan, "I have a drone." Why can't I wear that Halloween costume? Because I think that what the president is doing -- hypothetically -- is appalling and barbaric, and I want to mock it. I want to make fun of it. I can burn the American flag, but I can't make fun of some of the absurdities that are manifest in this identity-obsessed world of adolescence. Running around, they're the most privileged people on the planet. These kids at an Ivy League institution are not just the 1%. They're the 1% of the 1%, OK? They're going to be Rhodes Scholars. They're going to be presidents of corporations. They're going to go to Yale Law School, etc., etc. Why can't I mock their obsessive concern with the color of their own skin?

MCWHORTER: Glenn, you can't --

LOURY: So to me, the principle here is under deadly threat by politically-motivated people who think they know the answer to all of these questions. They do not, and they deserve,

when they say things that are silly, to be criticized.

Sorry -- yeah.

MCWHORTER: But -- yeah, but you're -- I'm not sure you're trying to put yourself in their heads. They're not making a decision. They're not taking a deep breath and deciding that they are going to determine the terms of the debate. The reason that you can burn a flag is because it's perceived that you're doing it -- as it's often put these days -- from below. But the black student or the Latino student feels that, no, they cannot be mocked. There are all sorts of things you can mock, especially white people. But no, you can't mock a black person or a Latino person because in their minds, that constitutes racism. Now, we can say, "Well, wait a minute, does it mean that at no point, as we move on in social history, can black or Latino people be mocked? Is it really going to be a permanent condition that to mock somebody who isn't white is racist?" I don't think they're thinking about that. They're not declaring, "Yes." They haven't thought it that far. As far as they're concerned, they are people of color, and that kind of mocking can only be perceived as coming from above and is, therefore, abuse, and the way we use the language is we call it "racist." So yeah, as far as they're concerned, all of that makes perfect sense. Mock a

white lacrosse player and, if anything, you're kind of doing your job. Mock the quote-unquote "ethnic thumb-sucker" or, more pointedly, mock "ghetto" culture -- even if you're somebody who, as a white person, loves hip-hop, etc. -- and you are committing what they think of as racist abuse. And remember that we, as black people, do have a self-image problem, and that has not gone away. And so, it's perceived as coming from above.

Now, I think that students need to be told, "Do you really think that what the Civil Rights revolution was for was that black people forever feel vulnerable in that way, that it's always a tort to mock a person of color?" Because that puts you in a position of weakness, I think. I think, really, that's saying, "We are forever children. We are forever delicate." But I don't think the students have thought it that far. I know they haven't, because when I used to give more public addresses and make this point about the n-word, it used to really confound black student questioners. They had never heard anybody say, "Well, wait a minute. Somebody calls you 'nigger,' and you get upset, aren't you the weak one? Aren't you the strong one if you kind of look down on them?" And you can see the wheels kind of getting jammed. They don't know. Doesn't that

make sense? They think it's racist because they're being mocked.

LOURY: Well, you're explaining their behavior. I'm thinking about the institution's responsibilities.

MCWHORTER: The institution [should?] tell them.

LOURY: My examples had to do with a principle. The principle was free speech. You said, "You don't have a right to say anything because some issues have been settled." I said, "Yes, there are issues that have been settled." I agree with you. Slavery is wrong. If someone wants to come and defend slavery, I'm not in favor of inviting that person. I agree with that. But I say a lot of issues haven't been resolved, and the fact that a person has a feeling or a group of people have a feeling doesn't mean that they get to control the agenda of discussion. I understand why they don't want to be mocked. I still have a right to mock them. That's what I'm saying. And I'm saying, as stewards of an institution which is built around the idea of open discourse and argument, that the effort to censor what's being expressed on behalf of protecting the feelings of somebody is a degradation of the institution. It's a small one --

MCWHORTER: Even when it comes to racism?

LOURY: -- it's not the worst thing in the world.

MCWHORTER: But for these people, racism is the exception when it comes to these things. What is your argument to them?

LOURY: Come on. Ray Kelly is not a racist. I'm prepared to say that. And by the way, I want to make the point -- I don't think this can just be talked about in the abstract. I think we do have to get down to cases, OK? Policing New York City is a tough problem. People may disagree about how to do it, but because somebody wants to deploy stop-question-and-frisk doesn't make them a racist. OK, I'm going to say it yet again. It doesn't make you a racist because you're pro-police. All right, public safety in communities of color is a very serious problem. The Black Lives Matter movement have decided they don't want to discuss that, all right. You and I both think that that's a mistake on their part. I think it's a mistake in principle as well as a mistake in terms of pragmatic politics that you don't -- in terms of logical consistency -- that you don't want to talk about that. But somebody actually has to go and sweep up the mess that's being left in the streets of some of our communities of color by violent people who have weapons and who are prepared to use them against others who are defenseless in those communities and can't afford to move out the way most of

the parents of these Ivy League, college-attending people would have done.

OK, now, to debate what works is one thing. To decide from the comfort of the leafy green campus that the guy who actually has to sweep up the mess is a racist and therefore has no right to speak is an abomination, John. And to allow that to happen or to justify it as a member of a faculty or the administration of a university is a betrayal of the trust of what has been entrusted to you. These institutions are important. They're important as sites of deliberation and debate. Make an argument. Present some evidence. Don't throw a fit. And if you throw a fit, then I, as the responsible authority, am going to call you on it. That's a fit that you just threw. We are an institution of ideas and debate. We don't tolerate that here. So I have absolutely no sympathy for these youngsters who decide that because there's an idea that they can't handle or circumstance about which they don't have anything useful to say, they're going to preempt discussion of it by throwing fits.

MCWHORTER: I agree with you --

LOURY: OK. That's --

MCWHORTER: -- I agree with you that the university --

LOURY: -- yeah.

MCWHORTER: -- should be stronger. There should be no resignations. I don't think we're going to see it, but I think that the people in question -- the president and chancellors and administrators -- ideally would be stronger and would say some of these things. I don't think they should say it with your tone, and not just because people need to be polite and hold their little fingers up, but because I don't think that these students -- and I'm not just saying this in order to avoid alienating them because we're having a public conversation. This is what I really believe. These students are not being as willfully obfuscatory as you're implying. They are sincerely under the impression that what we're talking about is something called racism. That is a word that is so overextended. There's a whole conversation we could have about the wisdom of the term "institutional racism" as opposed to calling the phenomenon something else, but that's for another day. The way the term is used, it's all they've ever heard. Remember, they're 19 and 20 years old. As far as they're concerned, there are things that are off the table, and I think that their impression that what's off the table is anything that offends you on a racist basis is not crazy. It's just naïve, and I think that our universities

have become too namby-pamby. People are too afraid of their jobs. People are too afraid of how they're going to look on YouTube to -- also, there are fundraising issues. People don't want to speak the truth, and so people just cave. That is a problem, but the students themselves have just drunk in a way of looking at things that you drink in when you're in college. I think we may be forgetting what it felt like. There are just certain cultural norms, and among them is the idea that racism is racism, and that's it. So I agree with you, but it's just that these students are not the ruffians that you seem to think. They're naïve. That's my true feeling about these uprisings. It's not pretty to watch what they do with the naiveté. And yes, some of them are drama queens. That's human nature. But it's not their fault that they have an overextended sense of what racism is and, therefore, is off the table. You know what I mean?

LOURY: Yeah, I know what you mean. I don't agree with it, John. You can't split --

MCWHORTER: Glenn, Glenn, very quickly -- one very quick thing. This is what I mean, for example. When I was in college -- many people would find this surprising -- I thought that to be a Republican was to be evil. I barely knew anything about politics, but what you drink in from

the second you hit the threshold of your dormitory is -- especially if you're a black person -- "Republican, bad." And Ronald Reagan had just been elected, and so I just assumed it. I didn't question it. I was interested in language and music, not politics. I just assumed it. When I was in grad school, I had reasons to get to know some Republicans just by issues of proximity, and I gradually realized, "Wait a minute, a lot of these people are actually capable of making sense." But I would never have dreamed that I would have thought that when I was in college, because it was all I drank in. That's these students now. That's the sort of thing that I mean.

LOURY: Yeah, well, that may be the students, but it ought not to be the faculty and the administration. I think --

MCWHORTER: I agree, yes.

LOURY: -- I think that we have responsibilities that extend beyond making people feel comfortable. We have --

MCWHORTER: I agree.

LOURY: -- pedagogic responsibilities. That was my second principle. Comfort is one thing. Enlightenment is another, teaching people how to think and how to make arguments, making them aware of counterarguments that run against their initial predilections, laying bare the complexity of issues that turn out not to be always

expressible on a bumper sticker or a postcard, teaching people how to assemble and evaluate evidence. Notice the sciences are nowhere in this debate. I had -- I mentioned earlier in this conversation a letter of support from faculty at Brown for the students of color. One of the issues that had prompted concern amongst the students at Brown was opinion pieces published in the student newspaper, one of which made a Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* type argument about why the Eurasian landmass might have been predisposed -- because of natural environment and endowments and plants and animals -- to develop a civilizational structure more rapidly than Africa, and people found that to be a racist expression, and they attacked it.

MCWHORTER: Wait, that was racist?

LOURY: Yeah, they said that -- you have to read the column. The column was not artfully expressed, and it did offend people. But yeah, basically, it was entitled, "The Racial Privilege of Cows." That's what the column --

MCWHORTER: Oh, OK.

LOURY: -- the opinion. And they were saying, "OK, you people are complaining about white people being ahead of the game. Well, let me tell you -- the reason that European

civilization outstripped African civilization is because of Jared Diamond-like arguments about," you know, sort of --

MCWHORTER: Right, geography and -- right.

LOURY: -- geography and flora and fauna and so forth, domesticated animals and so forth. Cortez brought horses to the New World, whatever, whatever -- Pissarro, whoever did. And this person is making --

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: -- that argument, and yes, that argument was called racist. And in the back and forth after the piece was published, people were saying it has been established that race has no biological basis, OK, and just like that -- just like that dismissing any idea about exploring the interface between human biogenetics and racial categorization. Now, everybody in the debate pretty much signed off on this idea that race has no biological basis, and I kept waiting for some real population geneticist, for some real neurobiologist, for some real people who did research in the area of human genetics and racial classification to speak up. Of course, their voices are nowhere heard in the discussion because of the political environment, which would have made any nuanced effort to parse what we know about the extent to which, for example, certain medical therapies need to be conditioned on the

genetic basis of -- and some of that might have a correlation with race or whatever. I don't want to try to make a defense of any concrete position here, because what I'm trying to point out is the absence of any actual scientific discussion about (inaudible).

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: So now, if I'm running a university, and I've got ethnic studies departments and cultural studies and modern media and all of that, and I've got people making pronouncements about issues that are actually the subject of ongoing inquiry of a technical and rarefied character in these disciplines that are sitting on the very same campuses, right -- by the way, most of the students of color, quote-unquote, in those disciplines are going to be Asian. The African American and Latino representation in the technical curriculum, as we know, is de minimis. Am I going to chalk that up to racism too? Is that because the chemistry department is racist? OK, so yes, it is a display of weakness when students point to the underrepresentation of faculty of color at universities as if it were a manifestation of the racial neglect of the university when you and I know that we can write our own tickets -- that is, you and I -- pretty much any place in this country that we want to go because every one of those

universities is keen to hire -- I'm going to use the word "qualified." Go ahead and get mad at me. I guess that makes me a racist too. It makes me a racist to notice that in a biochemistry department, in a physics department, in a mathematics department -- hell, in an economics department, in a political science department, the number of, quote, "qualified," close quote, faculty of color relative to the number of qualified persons who are white or Asian is so small that every one of these universities is scrambling for the services of the relatively few people who qualify, like you and me. Yes, I said it again. I said it another time.

Now, if you're serious -- if you're serious about having the science curriculum reflect a greater degree of racial diversity, then you need to deal with people learning modern chemistry, mastering modern cosmology and astronomy and so forth, and that begins very early on in the educational cycle. And the fact that the number of Asians are -- and by the way, we're a global community. These universities -- let me say it a third time -- this is a global institution, a Brown University, a Columbia University. So you're not playing in the real game if you're standing there with a picket sign complaining about

something that really rests upon the performance of people, and that's where you need to be addressing your attention. So now, don't we faculty have a responsibility to speak the truth, even if it's painful to the people who are our charges here? I mean, to capitulate to this cartoon characterization of twenty-first-century racial inequality in America -- it's all about white supremacy and white privilege. To capitulate to that by incanting slogans rather than focusing people to confront the objective reality of their condition -- it's a global community, and the world is moving fast. You're going to look up tomorrow, and you're going to be a footnote in history. You've got the microphone -- or I should say the megaphone, right now -- but you don't have any chops.

MCWHORTER: Yeah, Glenn, I agree with you on this. And of course, there are two stories involved. One of them is that even among we grownups, when we discuss this issue of -- I guess we'll say -- qualified black and Latino -- I'm not going to say "minority," because what we mean is black and Latino faculty -- the way you're supposed to talk about it is that if there is outreach and a candidate isn't found, then you haven't done enough. And I'm sure you and I have both seen that you're not supposed to discuss it beyond that. Clearly, you aren't looking hard enough.

There's no such thing as saying, "There weren't enough people," and that the reason for that clearly has to do with society and history, but there simply aren't that many qualified people. You don't say that. You always assume that you are not making enough outreach.

Now, as far as the kids -- which we're talking about -- if you think about it, they have no way of knowing what the reality is, and they probably have less of a way of knowing it than you or I do.

LOURY: That's why -- excuse me, John --

MCWHORTER: As far as they're concerned --

LOURY: -- that's why it's our responsibility to tell them, not to placate them. Excuse me.

MCWHORTER: Right. But I'm just saying, as a result -- you know, they haven't even been out on the market yet. Most of them are not going to be the kind of academics, in terms of subject matter, that you and I do. They really do think that the school -- if there aren't that many, it must be that there are squadrons out there not being hired because of the operations of, maybe, unintentional racism. And so yes, I do think that students who just simply say, "There aren't enough minority faculty," need to be told about the realities. But Glenn, this is the problem. Can you really

imagine the people who we know run these schools -- including our own -- actually telling the students this and, you know, even resisting when the occasional student say that this must not be true and that they must not be trying hard enough? I think, frankly, of one person in my experience who -- I'm sure that there was a search for the kind of person we're talking about, and this entity instead decided to hire somebody who was transparently less qualified. That person has gone on to make their lesser qualification in their position known despite getting tenure, and the people surrounding this person would never be open to the slightest conversation about that person and qualifications. You would be considered morally equivalent to a Klan member to even talk about it, despite the fact that the particularities are quite clear. These people are typical. And so I can't see the students getting this message from the academic culture that we know, and I find that frustrating. I'm not going to say that I find that forgivable because I don't, because it leaves the students under an unfortunate and erroneous impression about how minority hiring goes in these institutions.

LOURY: OK. I want to again concede something to you. I conceded at the outset that one wants not to just lecture to the students and berate them if they behave in a

childish manner by calling them "ethnic thumb-suckers."
One wants not to do that out of a humane concern for their wellbeing and a kind of empathy and identification with their circumstance. In being a faculty person, quote, "of color," close quote, I will be looked to for wisdom and guidance and support, and I shouldn't berate my students. OK, so I conceded that point. I reiterate it here. I want to also concede that if you're the provost or the president or the dean of college life or something at one of these institutions, it's a very, very difficult job, and you can't give the speech that I just gave a moment ago about how, "You may have a megaphone, but you don't have no chops." You can't give that speech, because if you give it, it doesn't matter whether you're right. The reaction is going to be so vitriolic --

MCWHORTER: Exactly.

LOURY: -- that it's going to basically enable -- you know, the institution isn't going to be able to function, and you're going to end up having to step down.

MCWHORTER: It would interfere with fundraising, yeah.

LOURY: It's going to inter-- it might interfere one way or the other with fundraising, because some of those alumni out there are very conservative and will be deciding they're not going to write any checks to one of these

institutions if the institutions don't uphold their conservative views. But yes, it gives you bad press, OK? And if you got a career in academic administration -- you know, you're provost here, but you hope to be president over there one day -- you certainly don't want to be tainted as the guy or the woman --

MCWHORTER: Exactly.

LOURY: -- who was unable to handle it. You don't want a student occupation of the administration building that stretches over weeks.

MCWHORTER: No.

LOURY: You don't want your faculty censuring you for your lack of sensitivity to the students' demands and so forth and so on.

MCWHORTER: Your career would be over, yeah.

LOURY: So it's a very difficult management problem, and I have to confess I don't have those skills, and I don't have that experience to think about how you handle -- I'm an egghead. I can sit back and say, "This is right, and this is wrong," but being right is not enough. I'm prepared to concede that. Being right is not enough in a sensitive situation -- knowing how to balance various equities, how to make people feel comfortable, how to get people around the table and keep them around the table, how to make sure

that they can hear you when you're talking to them. Of course, you have to express concern for their sympathies, and being angry and right about something may be alienating in a way that ends up being counterproductive. So I want to acknowledge that, as well. I don't know how to run one of these institutions. I just have the feeling, though, that the integrity of the institution is on the line and that, while one has to be solicitous of, sensitive to, empathetic with, supportive of, at the end of the day, the integrity, the intellectual and academic integrity of the enterprise is the highest value. It can't be a compromise. So I just made statements that may not be consistent with one another. It may not be feasible to, at one and the same time, maintain the integrity of the institution and avoid the explosion. That well might be the tragic circumstance in which we find ourselves, but such is my feeling in any case.

MCWHORTER: This is tough. And I know we need to get to the third P, but I want to say -- what we're up against -- and I know that I'm a broken record now. But everything you're saying is true, but the reason that we're in a culture that puts up with this dissonance between logic and truth and what a university is supposed to be is because we're running against the religion. I mean, there was a time 300

years ago when at a university, you had free speech and inquiry, except you were not to inquire about things such as God and Jesus. There was just no question. I mean, most of the people were at the institution in order to become religious figures. That was the culture. Now, we're in an institution where, although nobody would put it as such, there is a religion observed. And so, when it comes to these certain things that you and I happen to be in the middle of, no, you cannot have a frank conversation, because you will be ridden out of town on a rail. Now, the way people discuss the fact that you can't have that conversation is rather obscure in the same way as it would have been about religious questions in 1750. But nevertheless, that is the reality. I'm less upset about it than you because I knew this was coming. This is just -- not that you didn't, but this is what we live in. Of course, nobody at this university is going to say that there's no such thing as God, which is what the equivalent of the sort of things that you're talking about would be. And now, we're running up against the fact that that does mean that students cannot be taught something, that they can walk around comfortable in the idea that there is something that they can be anti-intellectual and even

vicious about. Did you read about what happened at Dartmouth, I think, yesterday?

LOURY: No, tell us what happened --

MCWHORTER: Where black --

LOURY: -- at Dartmouth. I don't know about this.

MCWHORTER: Black kids were -- at first, the idea was to protest in favor of Black Lives Matter.

LOURY: OK.

MCWHORTER: Fine. But then, they went through the library, and a certain fringe of the black crowd -- and I want to say it was a fringe. It was not all of them. A certain fringe started yelling at white students, "Fuck your white tears." And apparently, there was at least one, maybe two incidences of a white person being pushed hard up against a wall. So that's where it is. That's an extreme, but we have students that feel that this is as defensible as Stokely Carmichael yelling and H. Rap Brown talking about guns. They feel like all of this is the same thing.

LOURY: Well, if your description is accurate, John --

MCWHORTER: Yeah, that is where we are.

LOURY: -- that's intolerable. I understand that conference attendees at the William F. Buckley forum at Yale were spat upon --

MCWHORTER: Yes.

LOURY: -- during an altercation that took place there because people thought that some statements made in that conference had been racist. Genocide is not --

MCWHORTER: And the statement we should say was that somebody had said, "These students are acting as if we're advocating Indian genocide." And then, the very idea that Indian gen-
- Native American genocide was brought up was deemed to be worthy of people being spat on.

LOURY: "Genocide is not a joke." That was the banner on one of the signs.

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: People being spat upon -- I mean, "Fuck white --"

MCWHORTER: (inaudible) spit on people?

LOURY: -- "Fuck your white," you know, and then pushing people? So...

MCWHORTER: It's the same religion that has produced various other things we've discussed over the past couple of months on Bloggingheads. All of it comes from the same [conviction?]. But what is the third P? Pedagogy --

LOURY: The third P was psychology, and I wanted to talk about this issue about safety, safety and comfort.

MCWHORTER: OK.

LOURY: And I wanted to talk about people's perceiving themselves as victims, and I wanted to talk about their

identifying themselves by one dimension of their complicated identities -- namely, the color of their skin or the fact that their ancestors, some generations removed, may have been slaves -- and the primitive character of that modality as a posture for approaching our complex humanity in the twenty-first century. I wanted to say that class doesn't get mentioned, OK? Anti -- this is reminiscent of this piece that I know you've read by the political scientist at Penn, Adolph Reed, who says that, "Anti-racism is not really a progressive politics." He, in so many words, says this, because he says, "The campaign against racism as such, which does not delineate and specify the specific mechanisms of disadvantage and oppression, ends up being a politics of feeling good about being against racism, but not a politics that actually ever touches the ground in terms of directing our attention towards structures that need to be reformed." And I'm thinking about class. I'm thinking, for example, about a working-class white guy who happens to be a security officer for an Ivy League university confronting a privileged 18-year-old who has had too much to drink and, let's say, putting handcuffs on that person because the person behaves in a way that the officer regards as warranting to be treated in that way. And then, the debate being, "Racist white

supremacist institution oppresses marginalized community," when, in fact, what may be going on in that particular instance is working-class Joe from a poor or lower middle class neighborhood in Providence, Rhode Island, confronts privileged, supercilious, and self-important, smug person of color who happens to be on their way to Goldman Sachs, and ends up getting tarnished with the race card being played on him, when, in fact, the underlying structure is really very different.

Now, I make that up. I'm not trying to refer to any particular incident, but what I'm saying is not implausible as a description of some of what's going on. And anyway, the psychology of victimhood, the psychology of obsessing about one dimension of one's identity -- you grow up in Montclair, New Jersey; Shaker Heights, Ohio; Berkeley, California. You got to either one of the best public schools in the country, in the world, or to a private academy. You don't have much contact with, quote, "real black people from the hood," OK? You get to an Ivy League campus and you decide that you need to find your, quote, "true identity," close quote, and you submerge yourself in one narrow dimension of that identity. "My ancestors were slaves." Yeah, some of your ancestors were slaves, but

guess what. If you're a Negro in the United States of America, some of your ancestors were Native Americans, and some of your ancestors were Europeans, too. Those were also your ancestors. You stand in the twenty-first century with the world as your oyster, and yet you define yourself as a member of a marginalized community. This is a psychology which ought to be challenged, it seems to be. When I say "challenged," I don't mean negated. I don't mean dismissed. But I mean probed, questioned, pushed at, so that our young people grow to see themselves in their fully humanity. And yet, we have settled in on this one in the academy. We take it as for granted, without any question. We have ethnic theme houses. We have programs for students of color to get oriented before they merge into the general population. We have ethnic studies curricula that are designed to reinforce these predilections, when perhaps the most important challenge that should emerge from, quote, "ethnic studies," close quote, would be to probe, challenge, and question these predilections. So that was the third thing that I wanted to call to our attention here.

MCWHORTER: Well, you know, but it's -- I don't -- I'm not sure I have any glib answer to what you're talking about, because this brings us back to what I was saying in the

beginning about trying to wrap my head around these things. I mean, I think -- I'll say, first, that we have to remember that -- you're saying, "Why are you focusing on this one little aspect of your identity?"

LOURY: Yes.

MCWHORTER: Roxane Gay -- the person who, now, has been writing for the *Times* -- writes about how she was at Yale in the early '90s, and she was constantly -- I don't know how often "constantly" is, but certainly a whole lot more than once -- constantly asked for her ID on campus by cops who questioned whether she belonged there. So I think it's fair to say Roxane Gay would say, "No, it's not that I'm obsessing with one part of my identity. It's that it's thrown in my face all the time," and we both know that is certainly what these students would say. Somebody drives by in a truck and says something. "I had a roommate who did this." Or at Yale, apparently, there was a party where they weren't letting black people in. That, apparently, really happened. And so many people would say, "No, I'm not making this up. I'm not obsessing over something. It is this racism that's constantly thrown at me." But my question always is -- and maybe I need to get a little older before I really can understand this -- when I was in college, things like that happened. You know, I could give

you one anecdote to match almost all of these things except the cops and the ID. Every now and then, something like that would happen, and it never occurred to me -- and it's not that I walked around sticking my chest out and thinking, "I must be a strong black man and withstand the slings and arrows." It wasn't that. It never occurred to me that I was supposed to be that upset about those things because as far as I was concerned, 99.5% of my college experience was not that. And whenever some person would pull something like that, I really, quite spontaneously, thought of them as like gum on the bottom of my shoe. "This is some parochial hold-out."

Now, it's years later that I realize that apparently, I was missing something. And I don't know, Glenn. I really think that -- is it that I am a uniquely arrogant person, and that that gets in my way sometimes, but I am just so self-satisfied that I can't let something like that bother me, but that, therefore, it's unrealistic of me to expect that of other people? Or is it that I happened to be going through that in a slightly different time? Because all of these -- these people, today, are not going through more than what I did. It's not like I was going through it in 1930, but I think we can assume that all of it was worse

among those first generation, white college students in New Jersey in 1984 than what's going on now at Columbia or Brown. And nevertheless, it never even occurred to me, and I had plenty of black friends where it was the same thing. You laughed about it. Now, what's different now? And I'm trying to decide -- were we behind the curve, or is there something that we need to teach the ones today? I genuinely don't know the answer to that question. That's my statement about psychology.

LOURY: Neither do I, and I grant you that the profiling issue -- Roxane Gay being asked for her idea, she figuring that's because she's black -- she's probably right about that, in New Haven, Connecticut. I grant you that is a serious issue in New Haven, Connecticut. Charles Blow's son is accosted by --

MCWHORTER: Yeah, that happened.

LOURY: -- is accosted by a police officer. There had been some burglaries. His son matched the description, and Charles Blow acknowledged that he matched the description, but the officer apparently pulled his weapon out of the holster. There's a dispute about whether the officer pointed his weapon at Blow's son. He did force Blow's son to get down to the ground, and after producing ID, he allowed him to go, but Charles Blow worries that his son

could have lost his life there if he had made a wrong move because the officer pulled his gun from the holster. Yale is investigating. The officer has been put on administrative duty until the resolution of the investigation. That's what I understand. I think, indeed, the investigation has been concluded. I believe that the investigation found that the officer did not act inappropriately under the circumstance. There is a dispute about the fact of whether the officer pointed his gun at Blow's son, and what I read --

MCWHORTER: Right.

LOURY: -- in the newspaper was that the video that's available doesn't show the officer points his gun at the son on the video, although it could have happened at some point when the video wasn't recording the situation. Anyway, here's what I want to say. Brown University -- it sits in Providence, Rhode Island. Every other day or two, I get a notice or three -- but it happens frequently -- about some robbery that has taken place, kids having their cell phones taken away from them, someone being accosted and having their wallet taken at knifepoint, you know, etc. Descriptions are given of the perpetrators who are being sought by the authorities, and sometimes they'll say, "Hispanic man of a certain build," you know, "medium

complexion," or something like that. They'll call attention to racial characteristics in the description of the robbery, and now, Brown students are wanting that not to be done because they say it fosters profiling. If you're a university in the middle of an urban area that is largely -- that population, that is -- non-white and that has some issues with safety, crime, violence, property theft, and so forth, you're going to have this kind of messy thing. Security services ought to be trained in a manner to be especially sensitive, although I can imagine it's going to be impossible to avoid every situation in which a perpetrator looks like a student, and a student is stopped and asked to produce their ID. I grant you that that is burdensome to the student of color, because he knows that, if he had been white, he wouldn't be stopped and asked for his ID, because if he's in New Haven and he's white, he's unlikely to resemble a suspect in a burglary. Officers should be polite. They should apologize. They should presume that the person that they're encountering is a student and not a thug and behave accordingly. Though they may have to ask for the person's ID, you could ask the question about whether or not a student of color in such an environment has a responsibility to cooperate with officers who are trying to

keep them safe and so on. But even as I say those words, I squirm in my chair, because that's asking a great deal of such students. So here, we have another difficult problem.

MCWHORTER: You know, I agree with everything you're saying. I wrote -- one of the hardest things in my book *Losing the Race* in 2000 was writing about exactly this, where I was trying to say that people like me have to be accustomed to this extra attention because of the realities of crime in certain urban locations. It's unrealistic to suppose that people of color, especially men, are not going to get more attention from the cops, and that, ultimately, it's to protect you, especially if it's in an inner-city community. That was tough, and I have found over the years that that argument reaches very few people who weren't ready to be convinced already.

LOURY: Yeah.

MCWHORTER: And I know one argument I used to hear -- and I'm not sure where to put it, especially since I don't care much about clothes, and so I don't look at these things -- is that the cops should understand subtle differences in dress style between a black college student and a black, quote-unquote, "thug," that it should be clear. And I don't know whether the cop could do that. I mean, there's a part of me that thinks that -- especially over the past

20 years -- the "thug" kind of dress seems to have influenced the way other people dress just as a matter of fashion, and it may be unrealistic to expect the cops to be able to attend to that, but I don't know enough about it. But that is what people often say, and it keeps the debate going. It's another one where I get the feeling people like you and me end up hitting a wall, because the Kelly episode up there makes it clear there are people who are simply not prepared to listen. And they're not going to, I think, because of their sense that these issues don't -- you don't have to do the hard work of thinking, that we've already done the thinking. We don't need to read the works of Susan B. Anthony and figure out upon what basis she justified women getting the vote -- been done. As far as these people are concerned, that's why you don't have to listen to Ray Kelly speak. And it's hard, because yes, you would like to tell the students this, and I try to tell students these things to the extent that I can, within the confines of my classes and what the subjects are. But I'm just one person, and they're not going to hear it from the culture in general of the campus. And so we end up in a situation where, yes, we work for institutions which cannot infrastructurally address racial issues with pure logic, and that does get really hard. It can be difficult. I've

tried to learn to accept it, but at times like this -- I'm here at Columbia University. I assume that there might be some unpleasant incidents coming soon.

LOURY: Yeah.

MCWHORTER: It is hard, because you feel close to these students. I personally care about them. I remember being them. And it's hard watching this because it's hard to see a lot of what's going on as wisdom. There's no doubt about that.

LOURY: I'm going to say one final thing, John, if you don't mind, and that is that --

MCWHORTER: Sure.

LOURY: -- we're in this post-Ferguson moment, and I think attention should be explicitly drawn to the connection between the movement that has sprung up about black lives mattering and about the policing of communities of color in situations like Ferguson or like Baltimore, and about the kind of network of organizing and activist energies. It happens that the University of Missouri campus in Columbia is a couple of hours away from St. Louis and Ferguson, Missouri, and no doubt, there are intimate connections between the student population at the campus and the activist organizing activities on the ground of movement that's sweeping the country, so there's going to be copycat

or other kinds of, "I'm inspired by," or demonstrations in solidarity with and whatnot. So this thing has its own sort of social, psychological dynamic, and if you're not willing to insist on objective fact in a discussion about the, quote, "murder," close quote, of Michael Brown, if you're not willing to take the forensic evidence as best it can be parsed by local and federal panels in a situation like that as dispositive about what actually happens, if you're prepared to allow for the intimidation of witnesses who would be regarded as snitches if they told what they saw, which ran contrary to the narrative, or the proliferation of a, "Hands-up, don't shoot," characterization of what happened, even after it has been shown to be inconsistent with the evidence that's available, and you're going to insist upon, in effect, the virtual truth about circumstances like that -- because after all, whatever may have happened on that street, we all know that the oppressive structures of racism are such as they are -- if you're prepared to say in a context like Baltimore, where there's rioting going on and the destruction of property, there's arson, and there's looting, that, "People are so frustrated. What else can we expect them to do?" If that message gets reinforced, even from the highest levels of government, if that becomes the

religion of the day, than how can there be any surprise that an institution of higher education that's supposed to be devoted to objective inquiry and enlightenment could be seized by the same psychological orientation of, "I'm not interested in discussing. My humanity is not up for debate. I don't want to hear about ideas. I don't want to hear about enlightenment. Free speech is a dodge. I just want to tell you how I feel about it." How can it be any surprise that we would find ourselves in that circumstance?

So I'm trying to draw a connection between turmoil on campus and the zeitgeist, more generally, around racial issues. And I'm trying to say that conceding ground with respect to the, you know -- all these case, Trayvon Martin was a -- the jury in the George Zimmerman found that Zimmerman was not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin, that he acted in self-defense because Martin was pounding his head into the concrete at the time. That's what the jury found. I mean, I feel uncomfortable even telling you what the jury found, OK? Because we all know that Obama's son, if he had had one, would have looked like Trayvon. We all know that Trayvon Martin was murdered for having some Skittles in his hand and being in the wrong place at the wrong time by a racist vigilante. We all know that, OK?

So if you're prepared to allow the public discussions about issues of this kind to be seized -- at the *New York Times* op-ed page amongst other places -- by narrative over fact, feeling over objective truth, if you're prepared to do that, you can't be surprised that the universities would be on the chopping block. OK, so there, I've said it.

MCWHORTER: Glenn, I want to add one little thing, just to put on the public (inaudible).

LOURY: Thank you.

MCWHORTER: You are correct --

LOURY: And then, let's sign off.

MCWHORTER: -- yeah, you are absolutely correct that all these things are of a piece, and I was surprised. I am thankful that, after 15 years, I'm at a point where if I have an opinion about race issues in the United States -- I have pulpits. It's never any one place. But I know that, if I think something, there are about seven or eight places -- one of them, maybe two of them are going to take what I have to say. I feel blessed in that. I tried to write a piece saying that Black Lives Matter should address inner-city murder as well as what they're doing. I said I agree with what they're doing, but they should have a second branch. I have never, in 15 years, had a harder time getting something published. Even my surest, warmest

places would not take it. Finally, thank you to the *Washington Post* for having the guts, but apparently, it was a matter of having guts. There is an orthodoxy out there when it comes to what is sometimes called the "mainstream media." You and I are fighting against it, but yes, this is real, and it's not just the campus. It's a whole way of looking at race in America, and something seems to have changed in particular, I would say, since Trayvon Martin. These are very difficult times.

LOURY: All right, John. We have laid down [markers?]. You and I have different positions, but they do have some similarity in them.

MCWHORTER: Yeah.

LOURY: I'm glad we were able to spend an hour talking about it at the Glenn Show.

MCWHORTER: [That's right?].

LOURY: And this is the first of many conversations that you and I are going to have --

MCWHORTER: Yeah.

LOURY: -- I mean, not the first. It's one of many, and so we'll continue to talk about it.

MCWHORTER: Very good. Have a good one, Glenn.

LOURY: Thank -- you too.

END OF AUDIO FILE