THE GRADUATE SCHOOL PUBLIC LECTURES
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Tim Wise

PUBLIC LECTURE TRANSCRIPT

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INTRODUCTION

Dave Eaton

Dean, UW Graduate School

Good evening, everyone. I hope you're as excited as I am for this evening. I'm Dave Eaton, and I'm the Dean of the Graduate School and I am really thrilled to welcome you here this evening. I have a few things to take care of before we introduce our speaker: the usual, please turn off your cell phones or at least put them on vibrate. There's not to be any recording, audio or visual recording tonight. So please be aware of that. Many of you are aware that tonight's series was inspired by President Ana Mari Cauce's Race and Equity Initiative more than a year and a half ago. But it was also inspired by you.

Last year, we had a series on equity and difference. How many of you attended any of those? Yeah, quite a few of you. So, you know, that at the end of each one of these lectures, we have a questionnaire and we will ask you tonight to fill that questionnaire out. And last year we did a questionnaire after each one and one of the questions was "What would you like to see this year?" And overwhelmingly, you told us you wanted to create a safe space to talk about privilege. And we listened. And here we are tonight.

Tonight, we proudly present our inaugural lecture addressing privilege and the intersection of politics. Now, I don't want to say that we were clairvoyant, about nine months ago, when we, when we invited our speaker tonight, Mr. Wise, but what incredible timing we have, there's never been a time when his words are going to be more important to listen to. This is the sixth of our 10 scheduled lectures that will address privilege within the realm of race, history, education, arts and environment. So, we hope to see you again and again and again and again. So please remember to complete your post-lecture survey because we do listen and it does make a difference for how we schedule our lectures in the coming year.

Now, at the end of the lecture this evening, you will have an opportunity to ask questions. And there's two ways that you can do that. One is you can text us a question, and it's very simple. You saw it on the screen earlier. It's simply maylask, M-A-Y-I-A-S-K, maylask@uw.edu. And those questions will pop up on my little pad here and I will sort through those and read some of those. So that's one way. The other way is, you'll see microphones on the side aisles there. Please go to the microphone and line up in an orderly way and we will work our way back and forth to those. Mr. Wise assured me that he would like to take as many questions as he can. We will eventually probably run out of time but we'll hopefully be able to get everybody in.

So, I know why you're all here, and you're here because Tim Wise is among the most prominent anti-racist writers and educators in the United States of America. He spent his past 20 years speaking to audiences in all 50 states, over 1,000 college campuses, high school campuses, hundreds of professional meetings, and community groups throughout the country. He's the author of many books, including his latest called *Under the Affluence: Shaming the Poor, Praising the Rich and Sacrificing the Future of America*. Other books include *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority*, and his highly acclaimed memoir, I'm sure many of you read this, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. That's just to name a few. He's, was named one of 25 visionaries who are changing your world by Utne Reader. He's contributed chapters to over, and essays to over 25 additional books and his writings are taught in colleges and universities throughout the nation. His essays have appeared in *Salon, Huffington Post, The Root, Black Commentator*, and *Z Magazine*, among other popular and professional and scholarly journals From 1999 to 2003, Wise was an advisor to the Fisk University Race Relations Institute in Nashville.

Some years ago, he was here in Seattle having a debate with Tim Eyman. How many of you were at that debate? In the early 90s, early 90s, he was Youth Coordinator and Associate Director of the Louisiana Coalition Against Racism and Nazism, the largest of many groups organized for the purpose of defeating neo Nazi political candidate, David Duke. He's been featured in several documentaries including the 2013 Media Education Foundation release, White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America. He's also appeared alongside legendary scholar and activist Angela Davis. And in the, in the 2011 documentary, Vocabulary of Change. He appears regularly on CNN and MSNBC to discuss race issues and was featured in a 2007 segment on Twenty Twenty.

Mr. Wise graduated from Tulane University in 1990 and received anti-racism training from the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond in New Orleans. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Tim Wise.

FEATURED SPEAKER

Tim Wise

Anti-racist writer, educator

Nice crowd. They told me this hall seats 720. But I'm doing, I'm doing the Trump math. And so I think there's at least a million of you. Just great. It's great. I'm going to demand a picture that actually demonstrates a million of you. I'd like for UW security to get on that please as quickly as possible so I don't have to call the Park Service. Yeah, it's going to be that kind of night. It's good to be back. It's good to be back here at Kane Hall at UW. And as you heard in the introduction, you know, there's a little bit, again, it was certainly not clairvoyance. But there were folks who wanted to put this event together, I think before we knew, sort of, you know, what we know. And the idea originally, which I think was a good one, was that this talk would be about sort of, you know, white privilege talk, I don't know if it was intended to be sort of a generic white privilege talk or whatever, you know, because I talk about that stuff a lot. And so maybe that was the idea. And I was fine with that, you know, I had my outline already for that. I was good. I had it on my calendar, and then some shit happened. And then, and then the shit that happened, makes it necessary to alter the remarks, you know, just a wee little bit, not because the stuff that happened isn't about white privilege, because it sure as hell is in about a million ways that we really don't have enough time to rattle off this evening, but I will mention a few. And then I want to get back into the larger substance of what needs to be said.

Certainly anytime that we talk about Donald Trump or the rise of Trumpism as a political movement, we are talking about white privilege. And here's how we know this. I want you to imagine for a second that in 2007, and 2008, as Barack Obama was campaigning for the presidency of the United States, that he had been caught on tape, acknowledging that he was indeed a sexual predator, acknowledging that he grabs women by the genitals without their approval, and that's on tape. I want you to imagine what the likelihood that a man such as that, a man of color, would be elected President of the United States in spite of acknowledging his commission of a criminal act, because that is what our current president did, and yet was still elected. That is white privilege. I want you to imagine that Barack Obama, while he was campaigning, was encouraging his supporters at rallies to beat up people protesting him because, remember, there were lots of protesters outside of Obama's rallies, they were carrying sock monkey dolls made to look like the president. They were carrying signs that told him to go back to Kenya. They were yelling things like "bomb Obama" at rallies, right? Imagine that Barack Obama had said to his followers inside the hall, "just beat the hell out of them and I will pay your legal fees." Imagine the likelihood that a man such as that, a Black man such as that, would become president of the United States. If you can even fathom the possibility that such a thing would have happened, as it did, in fact happen this year when the current president encouraged his followers to beat up protesters and said that he would pay their legal fees which was just one of another thousand lies that he told during the campaign because he didn't actually step up to do that, surprise. If you believe that Barack Obama could still become president while encouraging violence on the part of his supporters, especially if they happened to have been some of his Black or brown supporters in those rally halls, then you are on the bad crack and probably need to get clean. Because there is no way that a person of color could have said those things, been taken seriously as a candidate, and become president of the United States.

But white privilege, if it is nothing else, is the ability of incredible, almost stunning mediocrity to rise to the top anyway, so long as it comes in an alabaster shell. It is the ability of white folks with very little actual skill, talent and an awful lot of hot air and even potentially criminal behavior to find themselves in positions of high power anyway. White privilege is the ability to take over your father's 230 million dollar real estate empire and then still convince people that you're a self-made man and billionaire by dint of your own hard work and effort.

Do you know how hard it would have been to lose money in New York in real estate in the 70s with a 230 million dollar head start? Any y'all ever go to New York in the 70s? The place was falling apart in the 70s, in the early 80s, right? So if you had 230 million dollars as a cushion, you couldn't not make money. But we're supposed to say this man is a genius because he made money in the easiest real estate market, at the easiest time, with a 230 million dollar cushion. White privilege is what allows us to believe that, to buy into that notion of the self-made man, this rugged individual. By the way, if you learn nothing else this evening, and I expect you will learn a bit more, but if you don't, please know this. And this has nothing to do with Trump. This is

just a general social truth. There is no such thing as a rugged individual. In fact, I would go so far as to say there is no such thing as an individual abstracted from their social context, which is important when we talk about things like race, and systemic inequality and privilege, right? Humans are inherently social creatures. We have never, any of us, been raised on an island by a dolphin. Or whatever the hell is around the island. I don't even know if that's a remotely good metaphor, but you know what I mean? Right, there are no such things as rugged individuals who make it on their own.

If you ever actually meet a creature that is a rugged individual, you need to run like hell from that thing. Because they will be dangerous, they will be feral. They will not have language, they will not know anything about the taboo that says not to eat you. So you need to run and run fast. But we have this mythology of the rugged individual that I would go so far as to say that that is at the root of our problem when it comes to race. Because as long as we believe that where you end up is about your own effort, right, then it becomes very easy to look around and see a structure, where some are up here and some are down here. And the look of those up here is disproportionately white. And the look of those down here disproportionately of color, the look of those up here, disproportionately men, the look of those down here, disproportionately not men, women or others on a gender fluid spectrum not defined as men in this culture. It is rich people up here, it is working class and poor people down here. It is very easy, isn't it, if you have bought into the idea of rugged individualism and meritocracy to then conclude without any intentional bigotry, right, without any hatred in your heart without any blatant prejudice that these people just must be better and these people inferior, these people just must be smarter and these people less so, these people must work harder. And these people must not have the same work ethic. In other words, racism and sexism and classism, and all of these forms of, narrative forms of oppression become almost the default position of a culture that teaches that rugged individualism uncritically, right.

And it's a real privilege to buy into that mentality. Those who don't have privilege, obviously tend to see things a little more clearly. But when you have it in any one of those categories, let alone several of them, right, it becomes a lot easier to default to these ideas of inequality as natural, right? Of inequality as something that is ordained by biology or perhaps embedded culture. And so we have to take that myth apart, not only vis-à-vis, our current president, who was certainly not earned what he has, in terms of his money, and in terms of his riches, however, however much they may be, because we don't really know right? It's like I can tell you right now that I'm a billionaire. And you'd be like, really prove it. No, no, I don't have to prove it. Lots of people say I'm a billionaire. Lots of people believe me when I say that I'm a billionaire, everybody knows that I'm a billionaire, right? Some people just say it, see, again, another white privilege because Black folks, Latino folk, Asian American folk, indigenous folks, y'all know that you can't just stand up and be like, yeah, I'm a billionaire. I'd like a loan for another billion dollars, please, you can't just walk into the bank or to your local friendly Russian mobster, and ask them for another billion dollars on the basis of the 6 billion you claim you already have. You have to actually show some documentation. Privilege is when you don't have to. And that's not a privilege that many quote unquote non-white peoples have. So there's that. But I do want to discuss privilege in a little different way than perhaps we normally do. When we talk about it. Yes, on the one hand, some of the basic things are still true and perhaps need to be said, so for instance, it is true that when it comes to wealth and asset,s net worth, the typical white family today in this country, has about 15 times the net worth of the typical Black family, 13 times that of the typical Latino family.

It's not because we've worked harder or prayed harder. Certainly not because white people have superior investment skills. The collapse of Wall Street should have proved that to you if you weren't clear on that. White folks lost a hell of a lot of money, y'all, a lot of money. No help from Black people. No help from Mexicans, be they documented or not. No Asian American, Pacific Islander folk, no native folk in the room, just a handful of the smartest highest MCAT and SAT-score-getting white boys in the banking industry and they lost or stole $12 trillion of other people's money. Now that takes skill y'all, to lose 12 trillion with a T, 20% of the accumulated net worth of the country that it took over 230 years to build up and these white boys wiped it out in 18 months. Damn, that’s talent. That's some rugged individualism right there. So that 15 to one wealth gap can't be about intelligence or skill, because you don't lose that kind of money if you're real good, right? So it must be about a head start, it must be about the ability that some had intergenerationally to accumulate stuff when others couldn't. So that's one aspect of white privilege. It's worth noting, but it's not what I want to talk about tonight. And it's also true according to the Labor Department and Census data that right now, they're certainly privileged in the labor market for white folks, I know we don't believe that, because I get emails all the time from folks, I got one last year from a young

man that you know, was yelling at me electronically, with the capital letters and the red font. Don't do that shit. Like, if you're mad at me, just write me a normal email. You don't have to be all capital letters and red font. In fact, I'm probably not going to read it most of the time, when it's red font and capital letters because I know it's going to be ridiculous.

This guy sends me an email. He says, "I can't get a job because all the good jobs are going to Black people and Mexicans." Really, all the good jobs? All the good jobs are going to Black folks, where the hell are Black folks and Mexicans taking all these jobs? Right? Which job, are these in Second Life? Where the hell are these jobs? On Minecraft? What jobs are these, right? African American folk have twice the unemployment rate of white folks, even when they have college degrees. Latino folk have 50% higher unemployment rates than white folks even when they have college degrees. Asian Americans have 23% higher unemployment rates than white folks even when they have college degrees. Our indigenous brothers and sisters have two-thirds the unemployment rate of white folks even when they have college degrees. So wherever the hell people of color are taking these white folks jobs, they are not taking them far. Like one block and that's like yeah, I'm done with that, here, have it back. Right.

Not to mention, it's white privilege and entitlement, isn't it, for white folks who say, they took my job. For real, they took your job? Did you have it yet? Because if you didn't have it yet, that shit wasn't yours. That's how that works. I mean, I guess if the bosses of America were like just willy nilly firing white people to fill the slots with brown folk, then you might have an argument. But that's not what's happening. It isn't your job until you actually have been hired to do it. But a sense of privilege and a sense of entitlement and a sense of expectation says that they must be taking our stuff even when the data says very clearly, that isn't true. So that's privilege, yes, but that's not what I want to talk about tonight. I mean, I just did but this is a rhetorical device, you know. It's the shit that speakers do to build drama.

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And yes, it is true that the essence of white privilege can be found in our criminal justice system where we know for instance, putting aside the different rates of police violence, we know, for instance, unarmed African Americans are three times more likely to be shot by police than unarmed white folks, even when neither are posing a direct threat to the officers at a given time. Some communities, it's worse than that. I was just in LA, the rates there are 20 to one over a 10 year period that was studied, but nationwide, three to one. So that's a certain degree of privilege, right? The assumption that police apparently make at least a disproportionate amount of the time that the unarmed white folks that they are facing are not dangerous, whereas the unarmed black folks that they are facing are, and yes, we know the war on drugs is about not about drugs, that's for damn sure. We know that. Well, I mean, if you don't know that, let me just explain to you without even the statistics, I'm gonna throw you a few in a second, but I don't really need to, I can just assure you that if the war on drugs were about drugs, I don't know who'd be given this talk tonight. But I'm pretty confident that it wouldn't be me, because I don't think they let you Skype this shit in from prison. And that is where I would be, I can tell you this now because the statute of limitations has expired so you can't touch me. But we know the war on drugs is not about drugs, right, the data from the National Institutes of Health National Institutes on Drug Abuse, CDC, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, every private study you could potentially consult, they all say the same thing. The rates of drug use, even the rates of drug dealing roughly identical across racial lines, often even higher in the usage category for white folks than for people of color depending on the age group that we're looking at. And yet, African American folks: four times more likely to be arrested for weed than white folks, even though usage rates and dealing rates are the same. So clearly, right, there's some privilege embedded in the way that the so-called war on drugs is operated, but that isn't what I want to talk about tonight.

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What I want to talk about is how we can understand white privilege not only as an operative thing that gives advantage to those of us so-called, but, and this is an important piece that to some extent, we often leave out, and I think we do so at our peril if we're trying to build movements for social change, if we're trying to build movements of solidarity, if we're trying to build movements against oppression that involve all oppressed people fighting together, rather than fighting against one another. I want to also talk about the way that that system of privilege as real as it is, and as much as it provides relative benefits to those of us called white, how it also sets those very same people up and creates an untenable, unsustainable system that in the long run is actually not healthy, even for the vast majority of those people who believe it is. Including the vast majority of those people who cast their lot with Donald John Trump because they felt he was going to solve their problems, because he told them that he would. That's what I

want to talk about, because that's the question, isn't it since the election, people want to know, why did all these people fall for this? What is this? And there are two sort of operative answers, right? The answer that says, well, it's all racism. You know, Donald Trump is a racist, all his supporters are racist. It's simple bigotry. And then there's the other side that basically says, Oh, that's horrible. You shouldn't say that about those folks. They're not racist. They're just responding to their economic frustrations and anxiety. But what if both of these things are true? And what if they are true directly in relation to each other? What if it is about race, but specifically in the context of a system of economic inequality that pits us against one another? And what if it is about class, but only because of the backdrop of a system of white supremacy that has made whiteness salient within that system? So that's the complexity that we don't like to talk about, because we don't like complexity when we talk about race. We like to be very straightforward.

So after the election, folks would sort of ask me my opinion, they email me they, you know, on Facebook or whatever, I'd run into folks and they would say, do you think Trump is a racist? You think Trump is a racist? Do you think Trump is a racist? Is Trump a racist? What do you think? Is Trump a racist? And from the very beginning, I was just so incredibly bored with that question. It's a totally irrelevant question. Right. Now, some of you may think, well, the answer is obviously, yes. And others may think it's obviously no. I just don't care. You know, to ask whether Donald Trump is a racist, right, it's like asking if a drug dealer is also an addict. Right? I don't know. I don't know if the drug dealer is an addict. And I don't know if Donald Trump is a racist. I have no idea if he gets high on his own supply, but I know what he's selling. Do you understand? I know what he's selling. So if he's dealing that, if he's dealing that, whether that's in his heart, whether that resides in his heart is some, you know, deliberate, effective thing, I have no idea but it isn't the point.

It's about whether one is willing to go to that place to utilize racial bias, to utilize racial resentment, to utilize racial anxiety, to utilize a politics of prejudice in order to gain power because that kind of thing has been going on for a very long time. Remember, it was Lee Atwater up until Karl Rove, perhaps the best known conservative Republican political consultant in American history, he worked for Reagan, worked for George HW Bush. He worked in a number of conservative senate campaigns, he was sort of the, the guy if you were trying to organize a conservative Republican candidacy in the 80s. That's who you turn to, right. And in 1981, Lee Atwater was recorded on tape admitting that the strategy of the right for years, not just in some abstract sense, his own strategy, because he was talking about what he was doing, and what people like him, were doing, at the time, he didn't have any shame about it now, about a decade later, when he was diagnosed with cancer from which he would ultimately die, he did have this sort of epiphany and he apologized for much of what he had done. Right. But in 1981, he really didn't have any shame about it. So he just laid it out. He said, on tape, he said, you know, 1955, you just get up and you say, and it's the N-word, I'm not going to say it, but he did three times, you just say that over and over and over again. And, you know, you can get away with that, if you're trying to hurt Black people. Then by the late 60s, you can't say that word anymore. It hurts you. It gets you in trouble. So now you start using other things. You start saying states rights and talking about crime and taxes and welfare, right? Because it sounds more abstract. And now he says, at some point, you're getting so abstract that it sounds like you're just talking about economic stuff, but the real bottom line is black folks get hurt more, hurt worse than white folks, and that's the point. In other words, he was acknowledging that the strategy of the right for many years up until that point, had been what, to use what Anthony Lopez calls dog whistle politics, right? This idea that we can't be as blatant and as obvious but will appeal to that same lizard part of the brain with the same kind of coded words that Nixon used in the southern strategy that Atwater helped craft for Ronald Reagan. Right? Or George HW Bush with the Willie Horton ad and now comes along Donald Trump, who apparently didn't get the memo that you're supposed to be subtle about, you shit. Right, like dog whistles and and and and foghorns are decidedly different. Right? But what's said is, right sort of scary and you used to have to do the dog whistle, because if you did the foghorn you would not get anywhere.

Apparently, we have moved to a place where one doesn't even have to be subtle, that doesn't say anything good about where we are as a country, but he didn't sort of near the end. So he sort of tried to use some of that at Atwater-like subtlety, right? So when he would start talking about those areas that he likes to call the inner city, because apparently he hasn't kept up with basic linguistics in the last 20 years to know we don't really use that term anymore for urban space, right. But he's still stuck in the 80s. You know, where he still thinks the Central Park five are guilty inspite of DNA evidence that says they're not and a guy that confessed "I did it," and Trump's like, nope, I think those five guys still did it. Because science doesn't matter. A confession doesn't matter. Lots of people think I'm right. I

never apologize for anything, because I'm never wrong about anything. Y'all do know also that he said he was the best baseball player in the city of New York as a young man. No shit, I just thought I'd throw, that's not even in the notes, but I just like he said that I was the best baseball player in New York, yo, they got the Yankees. Right? Even the Mets in those days like, come on. Like really? You're the best base— Yes, the best baseball player, the best. And the standing ovation that he got at the CIA the other day, right was the biggest, no shit, this is what he said, the biggest standing ovation since Peyton Manning won the Super Bowl. All right. All right. All right. So, so a room with like 300 dudes in it. Even if they all stood up, Peyton Manning won a Super Bowl in front of like, 75,000 people in a stadium. It's math. It's math. But he said, he says it and people are like, I like him because he just says whatever is on his mind. I got two children. They did that shit when they were four. You didn't vote for them for President. But that's not what I want to talk about.

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Anyway. Back to this other stuff about Atwater. So he started using this code when he talked about the inner cities, right? So he didn't actually go to one. He just, he just went to like a white suburb that was sort of close, like, eight interstate exits away, or whatever, from actual urban space where Black people live. And, and then he gave a talk about, you know, how he wanted to help the poor benighted souls of the City of Milwaukee or wherever. Right. And he did it with some of this sort of dog whistle politics stuff, he started talking about, you know, crime and violence, and how you can't walk out of your house without getting shot. Right, and how nobody has a job and nobody has an education. Now, of course, at the time people said, oh, see, he's being sympathetic. He's trying to signal that he cares about those people. That wasn't the signal. That wasn't the signal. The signal was to remind white people in those suburbs, how much they fear those Black and brown folks who live in the cities by reminding them of just how dangerous and how horrible their lives are even if that's not actually accurate, you know, the reality is the vast majority people in those spaces do have a job. The vast majority of those people in those spaces do not in fact get shot every time they walk out the door. Right. He just went in on John Lewis and said the fifth district in Georgia, which is Atlanta, and a handful of suburban areas around Atlanta, was a cesspool of violence falling apart. Really? Atlanta. Really? Right. Violent crime is actually down by two- thirds since John Lewis became a House Rep in 1987. Now, you can't get credit for that when you're a congressperson, because obviously a congressperson can't control the crime rate in their own district. But right, the idea that crime is out of control in Atlanta, or for that matter, most places in this country, not true. The reality is the violent crime rate in this country is 40% to 50%, below what it was in the late 80s and early 90s, in spite of a handful of outlying cities like Chicago that yes, are in the midst of a crisis. But even Chicago's violent crime rate today is lower than it was in the early 1990s and in the late 1980s, Washington DC's homicide rate, the lowest it's been since 1965. The overall Black male homicide rate in this country, the same or lower than it was in 1950. See facts matter. Right? At least they matter to people who are interested in them and interested in being truthful as they try to lead the country. But if you use that language, about decay and dysfunction and pathology, its signals to people, you should be afraid of them.

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That was the foundation of Trumpism. It's not to say that everybody that voted for Trump did so for racist reasons. And it's not to say that all Donald Trump did was play upon race. He did talk about other things, but the foundation of that house without which the other floors don't remain standing, right, just like when you build a real house, the foundation of that house was about race. How do we know? How did he burst onto the scene? Politically, I mean, right, with the birtherism phenomenon, right? This idea that the president of The United States wasn't born in the country, folks were going to rallies with those signs, go back to Kenya and they had pictures of the president dressed as a African witch doctor with a bone through his nose. So how can we deny that birtherism was about the racial and cultural othering and the religious othering as a secret Muslim, whatever the hell that means of Barack Obama, it was always about appealing to the most base, racist Islamophobic, cultural supremacist mindset of a certain segment of America and that's what he built his political entree on. And then fast forward to his decision to run for president, he comes down that tacky ass gold escalator in Trump Tower. Right, Trump Tower, you ever been in Trump Tower? That's like, you know, that's like a poor person's version of what rich people like is all that tacky, golden golden, gilded shit. Like, look, it's like I'm in the Roman Empire. Look at the, I mean, what the hell like it's just ugly. It's hard. He comes down this damn escalator. He's waving to everyone. They're all clapping, ah, great, gets behind the golden microphone or whatever the hell and he, and what does he say? He says, starts talking about what, not trade, at least not in the abstract, starts talking about the Chinese as screwing us on trade. So it's about those people, starts talking about the Mexicans, screwing us on trade, those

people, Mexicans coming over the border, who are what, rapists and murderers and drug dealers, but I'm sure some of them are good people, is what he says. Right? He's othering people from the very beginning. It's about bashing Islam, which is not a race, obviously. But let's be honest, in a post-911 environment, can we really deny that Islam has been racialized? Of course not. It's been racialized. We know that because when the Boston Marathon bombing happened, remember who did that? Two white guys. We don't like to think of them as white because we don't like to think of Muslims as white. But these are, they're from the Caucasus Mountain region, y'all. The Caucasus Mountain region. That's where we get our anthropologic physical name and shit. Like they're whiter than damn near every white person in this room. If your people are from England, yeah, you ain't white. The Tsarnaev's brothers, they're white. Right? But every, every cartoon of them, every image of them was darkened and made to look quote unquote, Middle Eastern. They're not from the so-called Middle East. Right? But it makes it easier, isn't it, if we racialize Islam.

So that was the entire foundation of Trumpism at the beginning, which is to say, yeah, he starts talking about other stuff later, about bringing jobs back and infrastructure and, you know, going after hedge fund managers and raising their taxes. Hadn't heard much about that one since he got elected, but he didn't talk about that stuff. But that was like the second floor of the house, third floor of the house, attic on the house. But none of that stuff matters if you don't have a foundation, the foundation was rooted in white racial anxiety, right? White racial resentment, and it was appealing to the notion of white privilege of seeing America, this sort of this insipid white nationalism. Right, not the white nationalism of Richard Spencer and, and those fools but I'm talking about the white nationalism that's very mainstream in this country. Right, one that sort of perceives America as a fundamentally white space, that it once was and shall be again, you know, make America great again, right? The slogan was again, not particularly subtle.

I have to say the other day when Milo [Yiannopoulos] was here and I, I wasn't going to say a whole lot about this. But I did sort of find it funny. I watched it on, I watched some coverage of it and I saw some pictures of you know, his supporters with the, with the MAGA hats. I find it hilarious, just as a side note, when 20 year olds wear hats that say Make America Great Again, like, what America do you even remember? If you're 20, like for real, like, what are you saying? Like you want to go back to juice boxes and play dates at Gymboree? What the hell does that even mean to a 20 year old? But that slogan was very deaf, wasn't it? It was very deaf, because it's a way of suggesting we have this last glory, right and those people, and I'm going to tell you who they are, the Mexicans, the Chinese, the Black Lives Matter protesters, the people who are different from you, the Muslims, the LGBTQ community, these folks are the ones who you need to fear. Right. It's a very old tactic. And it isn't the only thing that he did, but it's the foundation. So we can't understand Trumpism without understanding that.

Having said that, it would also, I think, be wrong to assume that that was all that was going on. Right. So when people make this argument about economic anxiety, or you know, economic frustration, I think we have to ask ourselves, to what extent was that about that and how do we understand that? Now, first off, let's be clear, I think it is absurd to believe that white folks voted for Donald Trump simply because of their economic frustration and anxiety in the abstract. The reason I say that's absurd is if economic anxiety were all that was required to cause somebody to vote for Donald Trump, Black and brown folks would have flocked to Donald Trump. For the reasons that I mentioned before, yes, I mean, if Black folks are twice as likely to be out of work, three times as likely to be poor, one-fifteenth the net worth right, then I think it stands to reason, white folks might have some economic anxiety, but Black folks have got some too and quantitatively in quite a bit greater numbers.

So if economic anxiety were enough to make you vote for that man, Black and brown folks would have lined up around the block to do it, but they didn't. So it can't be about that in the abstract. It doesn't mean it's not about that at all. And I'm about to explain to what extent I think it was, but we can't accept this sort of, sort of narrative we're hearing in the media, which says, oh, it has nothing to do with race, it's just about economics. These people are frustrated, they're hurting, Don't you know that? They've been forgotten, you know, unlike black and brown folks, whom we always take care of so splendidly, right. So what was the economic piece? Because I think those who say it wasn't about that at all and it was all and only about bigotry and racism are also wrong and oversimplifying. Here's why I think it was about economics but only in the context of white supremacy. It was interesting, resonant to hear folks say things like, you know, we want our jobs back in our communities in the rust belt, in Appalachia and coal country.

Right, these jobs, first of all, keep in mind manufacturing jobs have been fleeing this country for the last 43 years, really began happening in earnest around 1973. This is not Obama, right? This is not about the last eight years; this has happened through Democratic and Republican administrations,

conservative, liberal, moderate, whatever terms you want to use. It's been happening since I was five years old, it isn't new. Right. And yet, only now are people freaking out enough to join or become part of this movement that we're looking at in terms of Trumpism even though the pain has been real for a long time. Remember, Billy Joel wrote the song Allentown in like 1983. That's some old shit, right? And that was a song about deindustrialization in a place like Allentown, Pennsylvania, in the rust belt.

So, you know, some of this stuff has been coming for a very long time. But what's interesting is when you hear white folks talking about how their towns are dying, and that that pain is real, that's a very real thing. But you sort of have to start to wonder about why it has been so much more difficult, apparently, for some, those persons in those communities that I'm talking about, to cope with that economic anxiety than it has been for people of color. And here's what I mean. There was a survey taken a couple years ago, it found that Black folks were the most optimistic racial group in America. Right, and white folks were the most pessimistic racial group in America. Now help me with this. If I am a member of a group that has twice as much of all the good shit, on average, and half as much of all the bad shit, right, how is it that I think the wheels are coming off? Right? I'm more likely to have a job, I'm less likely to be poor, I got more money in the bank, but I'm like, oh my god, everything is terrible. And the group that has less of the good stuff and more of the bad stuff is like, I don't know, things are looking up. How does that make sense? There's only one way in which it makes sense, right? Only way in which that can make sense is that perhaps those white folks who are still considerably ahead under every indicator of social well being that you could possibly point out, are falling behind relative to their expectations. Right. And people of color, even though they're still behind on every indicator of well being are seeing openings and opportunities that are allowing their expectations to rise.

Now see, that is a really interesting phenomenon, because what that means is this: if I'm white, and I've been told that all I gotta do is work hard. All I gotta do is work hard. Put in maximum effort, do the right thing, play by the rules, keep my head down and my nose clean. Go to work on the weekend, skip the vacations if necessary, do all that I can. And I'll always have a job and I'll always be able to pay for my kids' college and I'll always have money for health care and I'll always have money for retirement, if I've been told that and I've had the luxury of believing it, then I'm in trouble when the economy shifts under my feet like wet sand. Black and brown folks never had the luxury of believing it in the first place so they didn't get knocked off stride, see, Black and brown folks when the recession hit and a lot of these white working class folks that aren't coping very well right now and they're in real pain, and we ought to feel sorry about that and we ought to have great empathy for that and we better do something about that. But let's understand something. When double digit unemployment hit the rust belt in 2009 and 2010 that was not new for Black people. That was not new for Latino folks, that was not new for Southeast Asian folk, that was not new for indigenous people, double digit unemployment was called Monday in those communities.

And it is precisely because white America, including white working class America had had the luxury of never thinking it would get quite that bad. Now it had before, but it had been 80 years since the Great Depression, we'd had three generations of white folks who would never know that level of collective insecurity. And so all the sudden, if you've been told my life's going to be at eight, nine or 10, as long as I bust my ass, as long as I'm a rugged individual, the old saying was, as long as you're strong, have a strong back and can lift stuff, you'll always have a job. And so if you were white working class, you could believe that, you think black working class folks took that for granted? You think Latino working folks took that for granted? You think indigenous working class folks, they never assumed that they'd always have a job just because they worked hard, just because they were strong and could lift things. But white working class folks could, they could say, well, my daddy worked in the coal mine, his dad, he worked in the coal mine, his daddy worked in the coal mine, his dad, he worked in the coal mine, I work in the coal mine and by God, my son's going to work in the coal mine. They don't ever talk about what their daughters are going to do. Which is another issue. This is also about patriarchy and the assumptions of masculinity. Right?

But what does it mean that you just assume that you'll always have that coal job. And those coal jobs, by the way, are not being eliminated because of the EPA regulations. It's not being eliminated by environmentalism and environmental activists. Those jobs are being eliminated because coal companies decided and discovered they could do it cheaper by just blowing mountaintops up and going after the coal that way rather than doing the labor intensive way they had always done it. It's about corporate profits. Right. But Donald Trump doesn't want them to blame corporate profits and greed on the part of the coal mine owners, right. He wants him to blame the liberals, the environmentalists, whatever. Right. And so if I've always had that sense of entitlement, that sense of

expectation, that privilege of believing that the system was going to work, that's a privilege, isn't it, to believe the system actually works as advertised? Right? Marginalized people know better, right? But white folks don't. And so that privilege sets you up. It leads you to believe the world works like this. And as long as it keeps working like that, everything's good.

The minute the economy shifts, and those jobs goes, go away, and they're not coming back. Right, those jobs go away. And all of a sudden, folks don't know how to cope. So that's what I want us to talk about. I want us to talk about how the economic anxiety which is very real is nonetheless tied to a sense of white expectationalism that has set people up. That's how privilege is dangerous for white people. We know, understand how it's dangerous for people of color, but it's dangerous for white people because it sets us up to expect certain things that maybe get delivered nine times out of 10 but that one time out of 10 is the one that really matters isn't it if you always thought you'd have work and now you're out of work for 26, out of work for 26 weeks. How do you cope with that? Think about it, especially if you've been told, what did I say before, the myth of meritocracy and rugged individualism. We've all been taught that.

So if I'm taught that all my life, that wherever I end up is all about me, see, wherever I end up, it's all about me and my effort, my hard work, my intelligence, and then all of a sudden, I'm struggling. What happens? Psychology 101, right? How do I deal with this sense of frustration? Right? I have to figure out a way to explain it because the original default position is going to tell me what? Something wrong with me. You're not working hard enough. You need to work harder. You need to double down on your work effort. You're working 50 hours a week, work 60, work 70, work 80, right? Right, because that voice in the back of my head, the voice, the narrative of the culture, the secular gospel, the creation myth of America, this notion of meritocracy tells me that if I'm winning, it's because I'm the best, if I'm losing then I'm to blame. So if I'm losing now, I'm blaming myself, but psych 101 says I got to deflect that onto somebody else. Because I don't want to deal with that, I can't deal with the shame that comes from that failure in a culture that attributes that failure to my own inadequacy. So now I got to start casting around for other villains upon whom to put the blame. And along comes a candidate who says, I got your villain. It's those people, it's Black folks in the cities, who menace you with their crime. It's those brown folks coming over the border. Right, to take your stuff.

It's interesting, isn't it, we're only worried about this border. Nobody seems much concerned about the prospects of crafty Canadians sneaking in to take advantage of our superior health care system. We're mightily worried about these. Right? Nobody seems much concerned about the fact that 40% of undocumented people in this country didn't come over any border illegally, quote, unquote, they came with visas either for work or education, overstayed them, a disproportionate number of those are from Canada or from Europe, not from Mexico or point south. Nobody seems to care much about that. That's not about legality and illegality, documentation or lack thereof. It's about deciding that these people are inferior, it's racialized, intensely, right. But if I come along and say that's why you don't have jobs, we just build a wall. Just build a wall and those jobs will come back. Everything will be fine.

Really, you think, you think that's how that works? You build a wall, and suddenly capitalists, like fold, like a cheap tent. Right? Like all of a sudden capitalists, when you build a wall, are going to be like, damn it. I mean, we, we've been screwing you all this time, right? Paying you crappy wages, cutting your benefits. But now that you figured out the hustle and built the wall, I guess we're going to have to give you a raise. No buttercup, that's not how capitalism works. If you build a wall, like for instance, do you think the wall is going to stop capital from moving? Like is the wall also in cyberspace like a firewall? And so when rich people go to move all their shit to the Cayman Islands or move the plant to Sri Lanka, they're going to hit the button and all of a sudden it's going to be like boop, nope, it hit the wall. Oh, damn it. The wall, forgot about the wall. No capital will always be mobile. Capital will always be mobile in search of the highest rate of return. Goods will always be traded and mobile across borders in search of the highest price. And if capital can move in search of the highest rate of return and if goods can move in search of the highest price, but labor is chained to its country of origin, basic economics will tell you that the game is inherently tilted against workers not just south of the border, but north of that border as well and in favor of capital. So tell me again how this benefits working people? It does not.

But if I tell you, that's the source of your pain, see here's the thing that's real deep about this. Y'all probably have seen the reports about the opioid crisis in white America, right? It's funny how we call it opioid crisis when it's white people. There was an opiate problem in the cities of America in the 70s, usually around street heroin, and we just call folks junkies. And we didn't have a lot of sympathy for them, just like we didn't with crack in the 80s.

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And so we just locked people up. We treated drug addiction as a matter of criminal law and not a public health issue. But now it's white folks on oxy or whatever they're making now, you know, so we got to get these people some help. We have a whole different opinion of drugs when it's white folks, right? That's why y'all legalize it, set up shops and shit. Weed shops, 95% of the owners of the weed shops in the states that have made it legal or white, are overwhelmingly white men, making millions of dollars selling something that black and brown youth are sitting in jail for right now. And the only reason they're in jail and the white folks are making millions of dollars is that the other folks sold their stuff too soon and without the proper occupational license and the money to get a storefront. Right. It's crazy.

But that's not what I came to talk about. So this is like jazz. It's gonna be all over the place. And it's not, it's not linear. It's not linear. I'll be back on track here in a second. But the point about the opioid crisis, right, what is an opiate? So we have all these stories about white rural areas, and particularly where folks have gotten hooked on opioids and what is an opioid? An opioid is something that is intended to block pain receptors. Right? That's what it does. It blocks the pain. And that's why I think it's fair to say that Donald Trump is a walking, talking, breathing opioid. Right? Because he's someone that folks have decided they will give their power over to to block their pain. See, the pain is real. For many of these folks, the diagnosis is horribly false. And we need to be able to be radically honest about calling out the falsity of the diagnosis, but radically empathic about acknowledging the pain. See if I have a pain in my side, and I decided to consult Dr. Google, which is a horrible idea, by the way, don't ever consult Dr. Google about anything, because Dr. Google will have you convinced that you are going to be dead by the morning. Right? If I have a pain in my side, and I consult Dr. Google and I come to the conclusion that I have cancer, the odds are incredibly good that I'm wrong. The diagnosis is flawed. The pain, however, is real. And I would hope that I could get some help from my pain or something to attend to the pain. But I would hope that it would be the proper diagnosis.

The problem is that scapegoating works and it has always worked and what Donald Trump has done, sort of play into a very old narrative in that regard, that works with people when they are desperate, and precisely because they are because really, if you wanted to understand the history of this country in one sentence, when it comes to the issue of race and class, if you just wanted to sum up the history of our country with regard to those concepts, this is the sentence: The history of America is the history of rich white men, telling not rich white people, that their problems are Black and brown people, period. That is the history of America. And if you don't believe me, let's trace it out.

Real quick, very brief history lesson, go back to the colonies before we're even a country. Right, at a time when you had African enslaved folk, you had European indentured servants, just one level above enslavement themselves, right? And oftentimes these individuals because they were all being screwed over by the elite landowners and the colonies began to recognize they had some commonality of interest, in spite of different skin color, in spite of different customs, in spite of different cultural heritage, they began to realize that they had more in common and they would commit rebellion, Bacon's Rebellion being one but certainly not the only example of that. And so what did the elite landowners do? Because keep in mind, they were outnumbered, weren't they? They were a very small percentage of the population just like the super wealthy are a very small percentage of the population today, that's always been the case. They were outnumbered by the peasant class, both Black and now called white because remember, there was no such thing as white people yet. Hope you know that. That's what's so fascinating about the white nationalist movement, right?

How the hell are you going to have a movement based on a nationalism of a group that didn't even exist as such until 400 years ago? There was no such thing as the white race. We didn't spend our time in Europe, one big happy family, what the hell, you think we were one big team in Europe? We spent our time killing each other in Europe. That's what we did. The history of Europe is the history of killing each other and trying to figure out who the witch is. That's it. So you could just boil down history to a couple sentences, sometimes, it's real easy. I mean, you know, the Anglo hated the Irish. The Irish hated the Anglo. Northern Italians didn't even think Southern Italians were Italians. The Germans hated everybody, and everybody else hated their ass right back. There was no such thing as the white race, but in the colonies, there needed to be one. Because if you got these Black folks enslaved and these European peasant class folks, indentured servants, or maybe just one level above that, right, eventually they're going to figure out the game and take your stuff. So you got to figure out a way to divide and conquer these folks.

So what do you do? You say now you're a member of this thing called the white race. You're on our team. Yeah, you're wearing our uniform, you're at the end of the bench, you're not starting in the game, but you're on the team, you understand, we're going to put you on the slave patrol, by the way, give you a gun and a badge and a horse. And you're going to help us keep those people in line, give you a little taste of power, let you testify in court, let you enter into contracts, if you're a male, let you vote. And we're going to get rid of indentured servitude also. So you won't ever be confused with those Africans who will always be the floor beneath which you will not be allowed to sink. They began creating what WEB Du Bois would later call what the psychological Wage of Whiteness, right? The idea that I might not have much but at least I'm not black. I might not have much but at least I'm not Mexican. I might not have much but at least I'm not Chinese brought here to build the railroads in the transcontinental economy I might not have much but at least I'm not indigenous, you see, giving you the idea of superiority even as they continue to kick you in the ass every day, in the name of their own profit, in the name of building up their own stuff. Right?

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Fast forward, it continues to work, you get to the Civil War era and my people in the south, you know, I'm from the south all my life, my people back in the day, didn't have any shame about telling you why they wanted to see, they were real clear. Because back in the day, my people weren't ashamed of the system of enslavement. They were pretty chill with it. So at the time that the south decided to break away, what did the elite say? They're very clear. Alexander Stephens, the Vice President of the Confederacy doesn't mince words. He says the very cornerstone of our new government is what the idea, the great truth that the Negro is not the equal of the white man. He didn't talk about trade policy, didn't talk about tariffs, didn't talk about states rights in the abstract or whatever nonsense we'd like to say now. I mean, really what states right do you think my folks were fighting for? You think it was fighting over the proper recipe for a mint julep? Was Alabama fighting with Pennsylvania over the proper way to smoke a port butt? What exactly do you think the right was? The right was about the right to own other human beings and extend that system of enslavement into the newly conquered territories to the west after we jacked half of Mexico in a war of aggression that our country started on false pretense, another, another, because you do understand, I hope that that's the history, like Mexican folk are coming home, y'all, like coming home to land, coming home to land that their people were on long before damn near any of us, if not all of us, in this room. And yet they're the stranger. They're the, it's like if I come to your house, kick you out of it, put all your shit on the curb and then you try to come back. I'm like, nope, change the law. And then we call that justice. But that's not what I came to talk about.

The point being right that the southern elite acknowledged at the time, that it was all about white supremacy and enslavement. That's what they wanted. That's why they broke away. Alright now, here's the thing, though. Sort of tricky, isn't it? Because the rich wanted to break away to maintain their interest in slaves, right? Their property interest in other human beings. But here's the thing, they didn't want to fight. Because rich people don't go to war, right? Whether we're talking about the 1800s, the 1700s, or, like now, right, rich people don't go to war, they get poor people to do that, rich people don't go to war. Here's an example rich people get doctors to write them phony ass notes claiming they have heel spurs, so they don't have to go to war. And if you're not sure what that reference is, by all means, consult Dr. Google on that one tonight because that you will find and it will be accurate. Right, rich people don't go to war. Rich people get poor people to do it. So now you got these rich southerners that are like, yeah, this is about keeping our stuff. But I want you who's poor, who doesn't have any stuff to go fight, to protect my stuff. That's like a hard like, that's a puzzle like how to, why would you do that? Right? It's weird. It's like, I'm not rich. But you know, for those of you who are students, I probably got more than you.

So here's the thing, like if there was a war next week, and there was an invasion on my block, and some army was marching down my street, ready to take my stuff, I doubt very seriously that I could call any of you and be like, hey, there's an invasion. And they're about to take my shit. I'd like for you to come and fight for it. Because I'm going to sit out on the back porch and have a drink. Even if you liked this speech, you'd be like, nah. But the rich got the poor in the south to fight that battle, how? Those poor people didn't own other human beings. They barely own the shirt on their back. They didn't have any land. They didn't have any power. But what the elite do, they said to them, well, if these people get free, they're going to take your job. No fool. They already have it. That's the point. If you gotta charge $1 a day to work on that farm or in that blacksmith shop, or building that levy, or working in that house and that owner of human beings can get a Black person to do it for free because they own them, guess who got the gig? Free got the gig. People like free, they're not going to pay you $1 a day for something they can get the enslaved person to do for zero cost. So in a sense, the system of enslavement undermined the wage base

upon which working class quote unquote, white people relied. But rather than realize that and join in solidarity to overthrow that system and take rich folks' stuff, they decided they'd go to war and hundreds of thousands of them died for that lie. That's how deeply ingrained it is. Fast forward. The union movement, same thing yet, corporate leaders that would actually conspire oftentimes with white labor leaders to keep the labor union segregated. Foment racial tension between Black workers and white workers, Asian workers and white workers, Mexican workers and white workers. Right. And so you got all these white labor leaders that fell for it. They're like, yeah, we don't want an integrated union. We integrate the unions, my God, it will reduce the professionalism of the craft. No fool, it'll double the size of your union. And then when you go out on strike, the boss can't replace your happy ass with the Black and brown folks that you didn't want to work side by side with, because they'll be on the line with you. But if you don't bring them in, and you don't make them members of the union, and you don't work next to them, when you go on strike, that's exactly what the boss will do. And they will break your strike using the very people that you didn't want to work next to and then who will you blame, the boss? No, you will blame them for quote, unquote, taking your job. This is an old game that is being run. And fast forward to the present, that's the game, that's the void into which Donald Trump has walked.

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So we have to understand that we're talking about a 400 year process of conning people and it makes it very hard for us, myself included, to know how you break free of 400 years of conditioning. I don't claim to have the answer to that, no one person does. We're going to have to find the answer to that in community and collectively, but please know that is the struggle. That is the work. It isn't about dividing this country into the good people over here and the bad people over here. The folks who want to make it out to, somehow seem as though just all the Trump people are bad, look, not only are not all the Trump voters racist in any real bigoted sense of the word, but not all the Hillary Clinton voters aren't racist.

Remember, remember that in 2008, a month before the election that Barack Obama won, there was a survey that found that like 25% of white Democrats, who said they were planning to vote for Barack Obama and probably did so, 25% of them said that even though they liked him, they still believed at least one if not several anti-black stereotypes to be true. So racism, you see, is funny. You can dislike the larger group but, making exceptions for that guy, or that one over there. I like that one because he's not like these you see, there's racism 1.0, racism 2.0, racism 3.0. But it's all on the same mainframe. That's the problem. Right? So whether you're running the old software or newer, more updated software, the outcomes are similar. And we've had a 400 year head start on this conditioning. And it's the very privilege of assuming ownership of this country, the very way in which whites have been set up to be the very model of what an American is, the floor model, the prototype that makes it so hard for us to deal with cultural change. Gotta be tough, isn't it? To see when you've had 100% of stuff or 90% of the good stuff, to only have 70 must feel like oppression. Think about it. If you've always been top dog and can take it for granted that you'd always win or virtually always win to suddenly have to share must feel like oppression. That's why you get all these videos bouncing around, right? These white folks that are just like popping off at the slightest thing. That woman that got angry because they asked her to buy a $1 recyclable bag at Michael's, she starts screaming at Black people, that white dude that got slow service at a Starbucks like that's never ever happened. But he got slow service and the barista happened to be Black. So he starts going off. If you think that slow service at a coffee shop is oppression, you have just demonstrated your privilege beyond my ability to comprehend. So I don't know what the answers are. But I do know what the questions are. And that's all I want us to think about framing them. How do we have both the radical honesty to call bullshit, but the radical empathy to acknowledge that people are in pain, it's about redirecting that anger, redirecting that frustration toward its actual source, the very people who continue to prey upon their concerns and their fears and their anxieties and don't have any intention about doing anything to challenge the fact that one-tenth of 1% of the population in this country owns the same amount of stuff as the bottom 90% and that's not going to change by electing a billionaire to office. Right? So we need to think about that.

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But here's the good news in all this, there is some good news. Or at least there can be if we decide to make it so, you see there are two sort of, it's not just competing visions of race or white privilege that are at war in this country right now or two political visions, Democrat and Republican that are at war right now. They're really two visions of change and leadership. The one that Donald Trump represents is that great man theory of history, right? He certainly perceives himself as the great man, pseudo Emperor, if you will. And it's a very old school of thought, right? That idea that individuals are who make history I can't blame Donald Trump for falling prey to that because

that's the history that most of us were taught going all the way back to eighth grade. Think about our history books, right? It was filled with leaders, individual narratives of individual heroes, usually men, war generals, founding fathers, industrialists, whatever it wa,s right. And so this great man or great person, occasionally we have some women included, usually men, this great man theory of history leads us to believe that that's how change happens. And it's bad enough when the leadership of the country feels that way. But even some of us, sometimes, you know, in the progressive or left or radical community, we fall prey to it too, because think about how we learn our own movement history, it's a handful of individuals, isn't it? It's a handful of individuals. It's Dr. King, it's Rosa Parks, right? It's Harriet Tubman. It's Frederick Douglass, we don't remember all the names of the forgotten, right, the martyred, the people whose stories we don't know.

But here's the thing right now. It's a very interesting contrast in Washington DC. On the one hand, you have the White House, currently lived in by Donald Trump and no more than, I don't know, 1,000 yards away, maybe not even that, not even that, 500 yards away, is the new Museum of African American History and Culture. And if you ever have a chance to go to it, please do. You need to as soon as you possibly can, if you haven't done it yet, because there you see a very different, a very different message about leadership and about social change. And it stands in marked contrast to the one that resides at the White House. You go in, and I'm not going to spoil it or give it away, but it's an incredibly powerful thing, right? You go down 10 stories. And you start with the system of enslavement. And over the course of history, you come up those 10 stories representing change, representing the collective uplift of a people whose collective uplift has gone hand in hand with the uplift of America and everything that makes America worth fighting for. Right? At some point, you walk into a room, there's this really powerful thing, right? You walk in, there's a, there's a statue, life size statue of Thomas Jefferson. And it's sort of dark, shadowed, on the back, behind it right on the wall are the words of the Declaration of Independence that he wrote, right that "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights among these life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and so you have these words contrasted with the reality right? And that's powerful enough, but then you look and there's these shapes behind Jefferson, it looks like boxes or something, looks sort of like shoe boxes. You don't know what they are at first, what they are, they may very well be made of shoe boxes. But what they're made to look like is bricks, you get up close, you see hundreds of them, hundreds of them, hundreds of them, get up close, you see their names on them. Get up real close. So you ask a docent, you read the description of what you're looking at, you begin to see that these are the names of his property, his human property, the people that he owned. And you begin to see not only the contrast between the promise and the actual reality of America, but also you're reminded of the struggle against that system of tyranny. And how in spite of not being completed, yet how much has been accomplished to defeat that system of tyranny not by one man or by two men or a handful of individuals, but by a collective, right, you begin to see the difference between the idea of change coming from individuals and change coming from the people. You keep moving through and there's Nat Turner's Bible and there's Emmett Till's casket, right? And you begin to see all throughout this museum, the stories, the histories, of peoples of color, in this case, in the African American community and their non-Black allies, working in solidarity to forge a, quote unquote, more perfect union and you begin to see at the end of the day, Black folks and I would contend this is true for people of color, generally, Black folks have overcome a lot bigger and a lot badder than Donald Trump. And if you don't think, if you don't think that people of color can outlast this man, you don't know anything about folks of color.

If Bull Connor could not stop, folks, Donald Trump will not stop Black folks and brown folks, if Sheriff Jim Clark on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma could not stop Black and brown folks, Donald Trump will not, if Lester Maddox in Georgia whose ax handle that used to chase Black folks out of his restaurant with, if he could not stop people of color, then Donald Trump cannot stop people. People of color, overcoming a lot bigger and a lot badder. So at the end of the day, we have to remember that we make the difference and we make the change in this country it has always been, so, it's about what we do. It's not about what the quote unquote great leader does. It's about how we respond to the not so great leadership of those who find themselves in high places, and if we're doing what we need to be doing and if we are standing strong in solidarity with one another and demanding that Black Lives Matter and demanding that trans lives matter and demanding that the lives of our Muslim brothers and sisters matter and demanding that all those marginalized by systems of oppression have a place in this country and demanding that it is we who actually care about this place. That's the irony, isn't it? Those of us who consider ourselves left and progressive and radical, we're the ones who get tagged as hating America. We're the ones who

are told love it or leave it but what is more hateful? To believe that this country can actually do better than a 15 to one wealth gap or to assume that's the best we can do. To assume that maybe we can do better than a three to one poverty gap or to just throw your hands up in the air and go, oh, well, we tried, I guess that's the best we can do. Which of those arguments is more hateful? Which of those arguments is more pessimistic? Which of them is more cynical? You cannot get more cynical than somebody who believes that the country's best days are behind, and that we have to make America great again, that is a vision of looking toward the past.

And aside from how incredibly cynical it is, vis-a-vis the lives of those for whom the country was never great, let me suggest to you it is a defeatist vision for everyone in this room, including those of us who have not been marginalized by those systems of oppression. So we have to reclaim this country in the name of the kinds of forward progress that so many people like those chronicled in that museum of thought and so many of them died for if we do that. That our children and grandchildren if we're lucky enough to one day have them will be able to praise the work, join the work, continue to struggle, if we fail them, they will curse our memory. They will curse our names and they will live in a country that is far less worth defending thanthe one up to now has been. Thank you all so very much for being here.

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Q&A SESSION

Tim Wise: So we'll start over here and then we'll come over here. And we'll just end, by the way, if you are unable to physically get to one of the mics and don't have a computer that would allow you to send it in under this really nifty system that he's talking about, just let us know, raise your hand, we'll be sure to get a mic to you. I don't want to presume that everybody can get to the mic physically. So we'll start over there and we'll come over here.

Participant 1: Really great presentation. I use your materials in my classes. I appreciate you. May I give you a gift? This is a calendar of my own making.

Tim Wise: If you didn't hear, this is a calendar, a Black Lives Matter calendar which chronicles the lives and deaths of people killed by police, I suspect in just the last several years? Or is this? The last three years. Okay, thank you for this. I appreciate you putting this together.

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Participant 2: Hi, my name is Mariama. And this is really like a hot mic. First and foremost, wanted to say thank you for coming out. And thank you for engaging in this type of work because as a white man, you don't have to. And I guess my, I have many questions, but I will, anyway, so, my first question is, can you share a little bit about how you got engaged with this work and how you continue to collaborate with people of color to make sure that the narrative you're sharing is the narrative that people of color want shared?

Tim Wise: Yeah. So I, I first got engaged in this work, really when I was in college in New Orleans, and, you know, was fortunate enough to have some really amazing mentors at the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond in New Orleans. Folks of color who founded and led that organization, but also the white folks in the, in the organization who were trainers and amazing activists and educators in their own right, acting in solidarity with Black and brown folks. So I began doing work in the community there. And did that work for off and on for five years, with different organizations trying to figure out, you know, sort of, for me, what was it going to mean, as a white activist or writer or educator or lecturer or whatever? What was my role? And what was not my role? What could I be helpful in doing and what would I not be helpful in doing, right?

And that's a lot of trial and error. I mean, you know, you sort of learn over time, sort of what your role is, and you try to refine it, and then how can I do it in as accountable a way as possible? Because I don't think there's ever such a thing as perfect accountability, but one can get better at it as one goes, making sure that one is following the lead of people of color, working in collaboration with them, taking direction from them, leaders and individuals and groups of color. And so for me, over the years, you know, that sort of, for me as a writer, and as a speaker, and educator, you know, there's a group of cadre of people with whom I check in on a regular basis, and it changes over time, new people become part of that larger circle. And it is disproportionately of color. It's also got, obviously some white allies involved in that, who sort of keep me or try to keep me on point and honest and reflective about my own privilege, which I've written about and talked about many, many times. And also to make sure that I am aware of and promoting the work of people of color who do the same stuff.

So, so it's not only why I try to make the point of referencing people of color and their work in my, in my scholarship and in my writing, and also my speeches, but it's why I try to make sure that when I send stuff out on social media, for everything I send out that I've written some essays or something or video of mine, I tried to make sure that I'm sending out at least three if not five, if not 10 links, articles, essays, poems, videos, book recommendations that are about work done by people of color to make sure that my readership and the people that follow me, don't sort of come to the conclusion that wow, that white guy's really smart and it's amazing that he thought of all this, right, because clearly, I mean, you know, I can put some shit together, like, you know, I can give a good talk. And you know, and I can write some stuff and I have some original thoughts from time to time, but the, but the basis, the basis of that wisdom is black and brown, it's important to always make that point.

The other way for me, the other the other thing that's really important for me, you know, for the last 24 years, I've had a professional relationship with the, with a nonprofit organization that represents my speeches and books, my speeches, but it is an agency that is, you know, 75% speakers and educators and artists of color. And the goal of that organization is not to function like, as a traditional speaker's bureau but really, as a nonprofit educator and artists collaborative, that you know, there are a handful of us in the, in the bureau no doubt who, because of our name recognition get a disproportionate amount of work. But the one good thing about that is the money that has been generated for the organization which does leadership development, curriculum development, goes into communities and works with leaders of color and youth of color in particular, who otherwise might not have access to some of those resources, one of the good things is it allows then, those other speakers many of whom are amazing young activists who work with, you know, groups like Black Youth Project 100, or Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, or others whose names maybe you're not as well known, but who have amazing, incredible important things to say, to get out there who otherwise wouldn't be able to get out there, because now they might charge a little bit less money, and a school might be able to afford them and because it's a nonprofit agency, they don't have to make a lot of money off of that individual so they can get out there and be heard. And so it helps to facilitate the work and the voice of and hearing the words of people of color.

And so I've been really deliberate about trying to work in that kind of capacity. That's just because as a speaker, that's one way that I can try to hold myself accountable to a certain extent, everybody has different ways of accountability though. If you're a teacher in a classroom, you're going to have one line of accountability. If you're a business owner, you're going to have some different lines of accountability. If you're a cop, it's going to be a little different. If you're an attorney it's going to be a little different, I think all of us have to ask ourselves in our line of work, what are the ways that we could structure in some, not only deliberative thinking about how to use our privilege responsibly, but ways to open up whatever that is that we do to other voices, other narratives, other people coming into those jobs, into those profession,s into that work and being heard? And so it's an ongoing conversation that I engage with a lot of people in my particular circle of associates, but we all have to do that as well. Thank you. You bet.

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(1:21:00) Dean Eaton: So yeah, let me read one from the web. What advice do you have for people of color who are trying to explain white privilege to white people?

Tim Wise: Well, I guess folks of color first have to always ask themselves the question of how much, how much work do you want to do today? On, on that, on that, I mean really like, you know, I mean, right some days you're willing to put in that work and other days you just are done and, and I would imagine the same is true when it comes to you know, women trying to explain misogyny and rape culture to men, and you know, LGBTQ folk trying to explain transphobia, straight supremacy, all of that cisgendered supremacy to straight and cisgender people, I mean, at some point, right, it's exhausting. And maybe Wednesday, you just are not about that. But, but I think that to the extent you want to engage in it and see I don't think it's, I don't think it's people of color's job to hold white people's hand and teach us, I think it's, I don't think it's your job to teach us. If you do try to, that's a gift and it's a gift that sadly we don't thank you for nearly enough, but, but what I would say is, if you are attempting to engage, and I'll give you an example, particularly for some people who don't have the choice but to, I've talked to a lot of faculty of color around the country who teach at universities much like this one, and especially women of color, who are dealing with both the the sexism and the embedded misogyny that often they face in the classroom, as well as racism, and a lot of times these women of color, and it's happened with men of color I've talked to as well, but particularly acute in conversations that I've had with women of color, scholars of color who are women, they say, look, you know, I'm teaching a class, it might be a sociology class, it might

be whatever, and we're engaging these issues of privilege and race. And you know, I'm worried because I know that my student evaluations at the end of the grading period or the end of the year, right are going to be used in tenure decisions in most schools and so they're always trying to figure out how do I do this in a way that number one gets through and number two doesn't get me off track professionally when folks backlash against what I'm saying? And that's a real serious conundrum that they face. Right?

So what they tell me they do, because I'll just, I'll just pass along their advice and what they say works for them, rather than me trying to tell you as a white man what to do, because that's weird. Is they're, what they say is, look, the one thing that has worked for them best, it doesn't always work and it doesn't work perfectly, but the one thing they say works for them best is that if they're going to stand up there and talk about, let's say, white privilege, for instance, or male privilege, or anything like that, or white male privilege as a combination, they start out by acknowledging, which is something I think we all should do, regardless of our racial identity, acknowledging the privilege systems within which they stand, right, the privilege they embody.

Now, as Black women, let's say, they certainly don't embody male privilege. They don't embody white privilege, but as scholars and faculty and people with advanced degrees, there's a certain privilege that comes with that, a certain socio-economic privilege that comes with that, educational privilege, if they are straight or cisgendered, there's privileged there, if they are able-bodied there is privilege there. If they are hearing, there is privilege there, they don't deal with audism the way that folks who are deaf do.

Speaking of which privilege, you know, it's such a privilege, right, to be in the hearing community, that and an advantage to be in the hearing community that we don't even know the word audism. And we don't have to even think about what it means if a lecture is going to have sign language interpreters or not, we do this evening, and have at almost every one, if not all of my speeches over the years, which is great, but a lot of places, we don't think about that. And that's privilege, right? So if I'm trying to get you to think about white privilege, and I might not have white privilege, but I got four or five others or two others or maybe just one other, if I start there, and I say look, we all have as my friend and colleague Jackie Wade says, we all have a couple nickels in the quarter, right? We all have a couple of nickels in the quarter and my nickels might not be your nickels. And I may only have two nickels and you might have two dimes. But we all have a part of this. And if I do that what these women have said is, look, when I talk about those ways that I have advantage, and I have privilege that isn't strictly earned, it opens up the conversation, it allows me to then focus in on white privilege in a way that they can hear, or at least in a way that they can hear better than when I've just come at it. And at first, you know, I was skeptical because my old school training was like, I know that white folks use those other things to get out of the discussion of white privilege. And I'm always worried about it being a deflection, you know, like, well, I'm not white because I'm Jewish. Well, I'm Jewish, but you know, that doesn't take away my whiteness in terms of the way I'm treated in society. I know the Nazis think it takes away my genetic whiteness, but I ain't playing in that field.

That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about whiteness as a social construct, right? It doesn't change the way that I'm viewed. So I just want us to think about using those examples right and what are the, what are the areas where you get to be the oblivious one. What are the areas that you don't have to worry and think about things the same way that others might? And I think if we do that, we can open up that conversation to people who otherwise might be defensive, right? Yes.

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(1:26:10) Participant 3: Hi, thank you, Tim, for coming. My name is Kelsey. I work in the Graduate School and you as well as the work of Peggy McIntosh who's coming this spring were really instrumental in me helping me understand my white privilege as an undergrad. So thank you. I overheard a young man, a young white man the other night at a bus stop arguing or having a very impassioned conversation with a young woman of color. And saying, you know, along the lines of don't tell me I have privilege because I worked really hard to get here. So exactly that intersection of race and class that you were discussing. Do you have any advice on how to kind of break like, start that conversation, especially with white folks who do have that class consciousness and are really struggling and feel very personally attacked, when they're called out?

Tim Wise: Well, I mean, look in a competitive market economy, in order not to drown entirely, you generally have to work pretty hard. So, when someone says I'm not privileged because I have to work hard to get here, there's this odd assumption that those two things are incompatible. My great-grandfather, the Russian Jewish quarter of my family, when he came to this country, he worked 18 hours a day, he was the proverbial hard working immigrant with, who came with, you know, 18 cents

and a ball of lint in his pocket or whatever story we like to tell. And that's true. That's part of his story. He worked really hard. But what is also true is that he came into this country at a time when non-European immigration had been virtually shut down. And it is also true that he was able to get jobs in New York City immediately off the boat that had been off limits to black folks for about two and a half to three decades by the time he arrived. Now, the fact that he had that privilege, that head start doesn't take away his hard work. But the hard work doesn't take away the head start either. Right? You can have a three lap head start in a five lap race, and still keep running the last two laps, but the point is, if you then proceed to cross the finish line first, don't act like it's because you're the fastest damn runner.

Participant 3: So how would you say that?

Tim Wise: What's that? What's that? Wait, I missed it. I missed that. I'm sure it was hilarious, but I missed that.

Participant 3: How would you say that to this person that you're trying to?

Tim Wise: Well, I think what you would do if you didn't feel like saying it like I just did is to start with yourself. Like for instance, we all right, have struggled to get whatever we have. Most of us, most of us haven't been handed and most of us didn't inherit a 230-million-dollar real estate empire. Most of us didn't get a million dollar loan from our daddy, whatever, like, you know, so, most of us, whatever we do have, you know, I grew up in an 850 square foot apartment, never had any, we didn't have vacation money, you know, we I mean, you know, we didn't have any money, money, I worked hard, I guess, I don't know.

But the point is that if we tell our own story, if we talk about all the ways that where we ended up wasn't really about our effort, you know, it might have had something to do with it. But like me, I mean, just to give you the real quick example, and I know we're tight on time, but I, you know, this is, this is, I'm trying to model what I think you need. So here's it, is what I try to do. Like with me, I tell people, sure, you know, I've worked hard to hone my craft as a speaker and as a writer and all that stuff and as an educator and develop pedagogical techniques that are effective, and that requires a certain amount of insight and trial and error and intelligence and whatever the hell we think it requires.

But here's the thing: the reason I'm here is not just about white and male privilege, though that's a big part of it. There's another big part. I got my very first job doing anti-racism work as soon as I graduated from college, I graduated from Tulane in 1990. And at that particular time, David Duke, lifelong white supremacist, former Klan leader, neo-nazi was running for the United States Senate. In '91, he would run for governor. I got a job as the associate director of the main organization that was created to defeat him. The only reason I got that job was because I knew the two guys that started the organization. One of them was a professor at Tulane and a friend of mine, the other was a grad student at Tulane, and a friend of mine, and they offered me the gig. If I don't know them, because I didn't go to Tulane, or because I was a year older or a year younger or three years older or two years younger, right, then the reality is, I'm not going to get that job. And if I don't get that job, I'm not going to start out on a trajectory that a few years later would allow me to get out on the lecture circuit and do all of this stuff.

But why was I at Tulane? That's not to take away my hard work once I got that job, but I would never have had it. Why was I at Tulane, real simple, I went to Tulane in New Orleans, because when I graduated high school, I was chasing a girl who was going to LSU. And this is a young woman who I met at, this sounds incredibly geeky but cute now, debate camp. I was at debate camp, as she was, at American University in Washington, the summer between our junior and senior year. We met, she was from Lafayette, Louisiana. She said, *Tim, I wasn't going to go to Tulane. I never even thought of Tulane. I was going to go to Emory in Atlanta, I was going to debate for them. That was my plan.* She said, T*im, you can't go to, you can't go to Emory. We'll never see each other,* and I said, *you're right. Oh my god,* and in the manner, in the manner of a very foolish 16 almost 17-year-old who thought he was in love, said *I will change my entire life for you.*

I'm not bitter about this because shit worked out in the end but, so I go to Tulane, and it's only because I know her but how did I know her? I only knew her because I went to debate camp at American, could have gone to other camps, ended up choosing that one, if I don't choose that one, I don't meet her. I don't go to Tulane. I don't meet those men. They don't give me that job. I don't fight David Duke and I'm not here right now. But the only reason I was a debater, see it gets crazier. It gets crazier. The only reason I was a debater was because in spite of the fact that my original talents as a young child had not been running my mouth, you may find that hard to believe. I originally, I was a really good athlete, I was a very good baseball player. So good that I'd actually like always, I was the best baseball player, I wasn't the best baseball player, but I was a good baseball player. I had college recruiters that came to my

games when I was 11. And I was convinced that that was going to be my path. I was going to go to college on a ball scholarship, and I was going to play ball, but I didn't know, that was my thing. But something happened. And when I tried out my freshman year of high school, in spite of having had all of this talent as a baseball player, I had an inexplicably horrible tryout. It's like I never played the game before. I couldn't catch. I couldn't throw, I couldn't hit, I couldn't feel. It's like I'd had a stroke, I was completely unable to play this game. And so I got cut. If I don't get, and only because I got cut from the team, just think about it. If I make the team, I'm not going to be at debate camp in the summer, I'm going to be playing more ball in the summer. So really, what I'm trying to tell you is that in spite of all my hard work and my effort, and whatever talent I may actually have in this work, the only reason I'm really here is because of that asshole that cut me from the baseball team, to whom I owe everything. And here's the thing, we all have a story like that, we all have a story about somebody that came into our life and changed it, that we didn't earn their presence. We didn't earn the parents that we had. We didn't earn the friends that we had, the neighbors that we had, the professors that we had, I think if we tell our own story, and say, yeah, it's about effort, but it's also about all of these intangible serendipitous things over which we have no control, we can maybe begin to break through that. I'm going to take a few more and I promise I'll be quicker. Go ahead. Go ahead. Somebody.

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(1:33:50) Participant 4: Okay. And one of the things that you're known for talking about is affirmative action. And I'm wondering, under this new, like Donald Trump regime, what sort of, what the rhetoric is that you think you should sort of talk about affirmative action with? Or if you've been thinking it's a thing that should be talked about? Because there's nothing that's going to happen in four years when it comes to affirmative action?

Tim Wise: Well I mean, we talk about affirmative action in such an a-historic way. I mean, the whole history of this country is the history of affirmative action for white men, the whole history of this country is the history of racial preferential treatment for the dominant group. So we can sit and talk about whether or not the thing we call affirmative action is really transformative. And I think one can make a good argument that it hasn't been truly transformative. But you can't begin the conversation about racial preference in 1970. You can't begin the conversation about racial preference with civil rights laws or Equal Opportunity laws, because we had hundreds of years before that. So again, it's the five-lap head start in the eight lap race or the three lap head start in the five lap race. Affirmative Action is intended to demonstrate the people who started out one lap, two laps, three laps behind, if they end up, let's say I started out three laps behind, and at the end of the race, I'm two laps behind, who's the fastest runner me? Right? I caught up, I closed the gap. The problem is, when we talk about a resume for a job, all we see is the finish line. We don't see what went into the process that brought me to the finish line or maybe brought you there first, or brought you there first, or brought you there first. Same thing with an SAT score. Right, the SAT score is the finish line of the race. But if I had the three lap head start, I want to have the higher SAT score. Affirmative Action says as a college, we're going to be looking at a panoply of factors, a broader range of factors that determine merit, because that's how you actually get the folks who are the most qualified to be in that institution. Affirmative Action is about creating not only equal opportunity, but actually promoting excellence in a broader, more meaningful sense than what the traditional system of so-called meritocracy has done. I think if we talk about it that way, it shifts the debate fundamentally, as opposed to this idea that well, yeah, we're lowering standards. But it's for a good cause. We're not lowering standards, right? The standards that put those white boys in charge of the banks on Wall Street, were not about affirmative action. That shit was about so-called meritocracy, and it damn near destroyed the global economy. So we could do a lot better than whatever standards are getting those white guys all those jobs, and affirmative action is one way of doing it. Yes, real quick.

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(1:36:15) Participant 5: Thank you for your work and for coming here and speaking with us. I come from a family that is deeply divided in ways we see in the nation. And when I've tried to listen very deeply as I think we need to, what I hear is what you talked about, the fear. So I see the fear and I empathize with the fear. But what I find is that we can't have a fact-based conversation because the fear shuts that down. I'm wondering if you can speak to how, you know, I can't even get to facts with them because of that fear. And so I'm wondering, how do you connect with that, bridge it, move past it?

Tim Wise: Well, one is you ratify that, that fear and anxiety at profound social change is understandable. Look, if a person has been used to a certain way of having things happen and, and, and a certain look of America and a certain look of the culture and a certain sort of provincial view of what America is, then

they've been trained from day one to flip out whenever there's any substantial change, so I get it. Now, I don't want to over indulge that because to me, there's also an absurdity to it. But I do want to acknowledge that yeah, it must be tough, right? When you've been able to assume that your race, your religion, your cultural heritage, your sexuality, all of that was the norm. And now you're being told actually, there's no necessary norm. There's just a lot of different norms, and we've got to actually figure out ways to all be part of a larger whole. If I've never had to share, asking me to share is tough, right. It's like I was an only child, if I'd all of a sudden had a brother like after 15 years of that, and you're like, play with that kid, I'd be like, nah, man. I'm used to this, you know. And so it's more extreme version of that. But it's, so I get it. So number one is, is not to talk down to that fear, or to suggest that that fear is irrational. But to begin asking questions about what is it we're really afraid of? What is it that we're really, like? Because it seems to me that the thing that's made us afraid, is not the change. It's the expectation that change would never happen. I feel the thing that's really making us afraid, is the narrative that said we would never have to adapt. The thing that's making us afraid is the idea that we would never face this level of insecurity that some people are now facing.

Participant 5: But people, what I hear is, I'm in danger. So it puts them into that crocodile brain, right? So they're not, I mean, and I'm saying this with all great respect, but when you're in you feel like the tiger's coming at you. How do you talk to someone who's locked into that absolute fear?

Tim Wise: Well, other than ask, again, I think it's about asking them, who is the tiger? Like, we're, you know, it's like, yes, okay, you're afraid. And you might have a good reason to be afraid of the world and there are, you know, dangers out there. And there are things, you know, but what is the real source of that? And, you know, can we work through that? Can we begin to see that some of the things that you're afraid of might not be the things that are the biggest fears. We are usually as a culture, we tend to be, if we all think we're going to, you know, die in a plane crash, we all think we're, you know, we get in the plane, we're like, oh, my God, but we're far less likely to die that way than we are driving our cars to work. We're far less, you know, we're afraid of all kinds of things that are not necessarily rational. But that doesn't mean that they're not understandable or predictable. So I think if we engage people with, with a process of questions, asking them why they're afraid of this, and maybe not this, why they're afraid of this group, but maybe not this group, right? It's not that they're necessarily going to all of the sudden go, oh, you're right. I'm a fool. Right? But what does happen when you ask questions, two things happen. Number one, you signal compassion, because you're signaling that you care enough to actually find out what the answer is, right? And the second thing you do is you cause that person to have to actually articulate the why, not just the what. And what the research, brain science research says is if I have to explain why, and I don't really have a good reason, which is the premise that you and I are both operating on, if I have to explain the why and I can't really do it, I start to realize as I'm offering you my shitty ass explanation, that I don't know what I'm talking about. And so then you don't have to do it. Like it's, you know, you basically lead that person to see the gaps in their own argument, just by forcing them to explain it openly and out loud rather than letting it just bounce around in their head.

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(1:40:40) Participant 6: I was about to ask a very similar question, but I come from a conservative family and my brother also, first, I went to Tulane too and I saw you speak twice there. But anyways, I also come from a conservative family and like my brother keeps posting things like, there's liberal privilege, and there's no such thing as white privilege. And just, and then we try to engage and it just blows up all the time constantly. And so just I guess very similar, but like, how do we find a middle ground? And how do we engage with the other side in a way that doesn't create family explosions?

Tim Wise: Well, I definitely think if you're in a family situation, where you have that kind of contentious dynamic, the only way to approach it is by sharing of yourself, where you're coming from, if it's someone who loves you and cares for you, that will usually work better, right, than the look at this study that I just found. You're an idiot. You know, as tempting as that is, believe me, usually the storytelling, the personal sharing piece of why you see it the way you see it, and then asking that person to explain why they see it the way they see it is, is more constructive. But I also want to say to you, you know, and this is the, this is the hard part, because I think there is an extent to which we can't win every fight. And there are some conversion moments that just ain't going to happen. And I think sometimes the problem with those of us on the left, whether it is just sort of liberals or people further to the left, right, we, we tend to have this unhealthy faith in pure reason. Right. It's an unhealthy faith. It's an unhealthy faith, because psych research says that we don't actually make decisions, including us. We're no better at this than people on the right by the way, we all engage in confirmation bias to a degree. We all engage in what's called

epistemic closure to a degree, we find what we find that suits our worldview, and then we close off our mind to anything that might intrude upon it, we all do it. And so one of the ways to talk to someone who's doing that from the other side, is to maybe demonstrate the humility, to acknowledge, listen, you know, I've, I will admit that I have a certain bias. I see the world a certain way. And here's some reasons maybe why I see it this way. So I could be missing something, I don't think I am. But I'm willing to acknowledge that I am, willing to be humble enough in spite of being a smartass, that I could be wrong about something. Now, I need you to demonstrate to me why, it isn't enough to just say that I'm wrong. It isn't enough to just insist that I'm wrong. It isn't enough to say there's no white privilege and not actually explain why. But I'm willing to say you know what, I have a certain worldview. It was inculcated by my family, by people with whom I came in contact, by some of the educators that I met along the way.

And that's why I'm coming from this perspective, maybe asked that family member, tell me, where did you get your ideas because none of us came to, it's not like your brother or you or anyone out there and your cousin or uncle because that's the usually the example is the uncle who comes at Thanksgiving. I don't know why everybody's got a messed-up uncle, but apparently, because that's the thing. Of course, if somebody's got that uncle, that guy is also somebody's father. So I know some of y'all have got a dad like that, too. But we just talked about it like it's the uncle at the dinner. But maybe you talk to that person by saying, look, you haven't sat down and looked at all the evidence, and I haven't either. So let's just have a conversation about why we see the world the way that we see it, and maybe try to figure out whether our perceptions could be a little off because of our experiences, if our lenses are maybe a little distorted.

And you know, for me, the argument is very simple. privilege is, is to me first and foremost, the ability to not know some stuff and pay no penalty for your ignorance. And the reality is, if you're a member of a dominant group, whatever that group is, you have the luxury of not knowing what others who aren't members of that group have to know. This isn't a radical. This isn't about politics. This isn't about right and left. This is just basic logic, right? If I as a man, I don't have to know what women experience, as somebody who's white, I don't have to know what people of color experience and so for me to say there's no white privilege, you know, when people said that, like how would you know? Like if you say there's no racism, how would you know? By what possible logic can you say that someone else's experience of the world isn't real? Right? And if I'm going to explain my own examples of privilege, and you can do that as well and talk about your own areas where you had certain unearned advantages, perhaps that people of color would not, that may begin to break through or it may not, we have this unhealthy assumption that we can convert all the humans and we cannot. Nor should we spend our time on it. I think we have two possible strategies, right? One is converting all those folks over there who feel differently. And, you know, hey, if you can get some folks to join the fight, who are on that side, God bless and good luck and that's great. But the other strategy, I think, is more important.

Rather than spending our time trying to convert folks who were on the other side, dispositionally opposed to what we're talking about, we got to be mobilizing the folks who are ready for the fight, we have to be mobilizing the folks. And, and if we are mobilizing our folk who are extensively ready for the fight, then some people might come along when they see that struggle growing, but we can't continue to beat our heads against the wall thinking that's the main strategy. So give it a shot. Be as humble as possible, being caring and compassionate as possible. But also be prepared to know that you know, it may not work with certain people, right? Real quick.

Dave Eaton: I've got pages.

Tim Wise: One more here and one more there and then I swear I'll let you get out of here.

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(1:46:45) Dave Eaton: And I will say I've looked through a lot of these, you've really done a great job of addressing a lot of these. What advice would you give to public school educators to combat white privilege and racial inequality in schools?

Tim Wise: Public school educators, what can they do to combat white privilege and racial inequality? Well, you know, they can do what teachers at Garfield here did in Seattle a couple years ago, right, which is stand up to the state system of testing, and refuse to go along with a system of standardized testing, which they realized and realize to this day, is destructive of critical thought and real education and real learning. So I think we need more teachers to do that, right? Because if only a handful of teachers do it, they can start reassigning them, they can punish them, as was attempted, you know, here in the city. And in Texas, there have been some teachers who tried it and they were punished as well, but there was an attempt, but I think we need more teachers to be willing to stand up and say, we're not going to play these absurd games that you want us to play that

have nothing to do with learning, nothing to do with teaching. Education has to be, as bell hooks says, you have to teach to transgress, and you have to be prepared to transgress yourself against the system that destroys children every single day. So, public school educators have to decide that more than, more than content specialists, they are revolutionaries, that education is a revolutionary act. And when you decide that education is a revolutionary act, everything about how you teach from the pedagogical approach and style to the curriculum to the way that you interact with children is going to be different.

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(1:48:25) Participant 7: Yes. Just really quickly, thank you for all of this. When at the end, you were saying that, well, you didn't have any answers, that you had a lot of good questions. And I wanted to know what some of the questions are that you have for those of us who want to mobilize or what your questions are period.

Tim Wise: Say that last part again.

Participant 7: What your questions are, to mobilize people.

Tim Wise: Well, the questions that I want us to ask are these questions about how we, how we have both radical honesty, that is to say, call bullshit on bullshit, when it's what it is, but at the same time radical empathy for people who are truly in pain. How do we do that? How do we hold both of those things at once? Right? Because it's hard. It's hard. And there's no, I haven't figured out the perfect way of doing it. But I think that's the task. How do I say to someone, I see your pain, and I know it's real. But you're misdiagnosing it, and I want to offer you a different analysis. And I want us to talk about it and struggle through it. Some people will be open to hearing it, others won't. But I feel like that's the first question. How do we do both of those things at the same time? And I think a second question is how do we go beyond, let's say, I didn't mention this in the talk, but it comes to mind now as I'm thinking it through.

How do we move beyond sort of the epic protest phase of movement building, right, because protests are fine. Epic protests are fine. But let's be real honest. We have a blinkered understanding of history. And it's, I think we feel this way for a good reason. We don't want to say this because we want, we feel as though saying what I'm about to say, takes away from the greatness of the movement, let's say the civil rights movement in particular. But it doesn't make it any less true.

And I don't mean for it to take away from the greatness of the courage and bravery of it, because it certainly doesn't, in my estimation, take away from that at all. But the reason much of the protest activity of that movement worked, as opposed to a lot of the other stuff going on behind the scenes that wasn't about epic protest. The protest activity worked principally not just because you got hundreds of thousands of people in the street and all of a sudden segregationists fold up like a cheap tent and go oh my god, hundreds of thousands of people, we lose now, that's not what happened. The reason those protests worked was precisely because the state overreacted and attacked people. Let me tell you, if Birmingham, let's be real honest, let's not let's not play games.

If Bull Connor was smarter, and didn't turn dogs and water cannons on children in the middle of downtown Birmingham and just let them march around and do whatever and if there's no bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, or if Jim Clark decides to just let folks march over that bridge, the first damn time in Selma on the way to Montgomery and doesn't weighed in with cops and horses and billy clubs, right, if they just wait them out, and don't brutalize them, we aren't talking about Selma today. And we're not talking about the Birmingham campaign today. So the problem is, the state has generally gotten smarter. The forces of reaction usually do not show their hand that way. Now in Ferguson, they did, in Baltimore, they did, there's some places where they have, but by and large, the state has learned to not do that. And so you can have three and a half million people across the country last week marching, you got 750,000 in LA, and whatever the numbers were in DC, right around that as well or whatever, but, and then, you know, and the state didn't overreact that time now. They did the day before. And they've charged a number of activists with felony riot, which carries 10-year possible penalties. But for the most part, the state has learned to not overplay their hand. And that means we're going to have to be really creative, because frankly, it's only when they do brutalize that suddenly, the public turns off, in some cases, the upside of this, and this is a weird thing to call an upside with this presidency, it is entirely possible that we will be back to brutalization.

And that means both real dangers for those of us who were out there in the streets, but dangers that we have to be prepared to confront for the sake of this country, in the sake of justice. But it also means that when, it also means that when they overreact, that may give us the opportunity to once again point out the fundamental contradictions of the notion of American democracy and representation. And so we'll see what happens but I think we just, we're going to have to have some strategies

and we need to be asking those questions. Now, what do we do other than the marching, other than the demonstrating, what if they don't overreact and give us that clear image of brutality that ends up often helping movements? What if they do get smart enough not to do that? What do we do, then? We're going to have to be very creative. I think one of the things we're going to have to, you know, I said this the other night, and I'm very serious about this. I think we need to be encouraging folks all around the globe to boycott, divest and sanction this country, right. Boycott, divest from, and sanction this country.

And, and, you know, we did that with South Africa. We've done that in other situations as well, we should have and I think it's time for other folks, we're not spending a dime in your country. We're not coming as tourists. We're not doing anything in your country until you figure out a way to remove this unconstitutional leader who already is in violation of at least one section of the Constitution, if not several, and I believe we ought to encourage that and make the economy of this country scream the way South Africa screamed until that particular form of tyranny and this particular form of tyranny is vanquished and if we're not willing to do that, all our marching around, all our talking all our, you know, isn't going to mean anything. Thank you very much.

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