

## TRANSCRIPT

# "TALKING ABOUT RACE—CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE TRUMP ERA: LESSONS FROM HISTORY"

*A conversation with Taylor Branch and Diana Morris  
Recorded March 22, 2017*

## **ANNOUNCER:**

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## **DIANA MORRIS:**

Wanna thank you all for coming. My name is Diana Morris and I have the pleasure of being the director of the Open Society Institutes office here in Baltimore. And I wanna welcome you to this talking about race event. This is actually our eighth year of having the talking about race series and, of course, we're really pleased to be able to do this with the University of-- Baltimore. So thank you to Mayor Schموke and thank you to Dean Wright. And I also wanna give a big thanks to Vernon Reed who is one of the people who is supporting the work of Open Society Institute and in particular-- this series.

Many of you, I recognize and know that you're familiar with Open Society Institute but for those who are not-- we're a foundation here that is focusing on problems that are particularly important to Baltimore but actually to many urban centers around the country and to particularly focus on areas where both poverty and race intersect.

And we've chosen with the guidance of many people in the community to focus on-- criminal and juggle-- juvenile justice, particularly the overreach of the criminal and juvenile justice systems and the mass incarceration that has resulted and the destruction that has happened as a result to many families and communities.

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And closely related, we're also focusing on-- addiction and making-- the-- our best effort t-- s-- s-- so that treatment is readily accessible and is high quality. And as part of that, of course, the Affordable Care Act could not be more important because it's made an addiction treatment and a mental health treatment-- on the same parity as other kinds of benefits and as one of the benefits that must be included in all types of insurance.

The third area that we work on is education and in that area, we're really particularly focused not so much on curriculum but really the kinds of things that keep kids engaged in school. And we in particular wanna stop those practices that basically push kids out of school.

So we've worked a lot on suspension and expulsion-- and try to encourage-- good attendance and really develop schools that are engaging, that feel welcoming and safe. And finally, many of you may know about our community fellows program. We've just gotten hundreds of applications for the next round. And we have about 180 of them.

Most of these people are just still living in Baltimore. Way beyond the 18 month fellowship that we give them, they continue their wonderful work. So-- you'll probably bump into one of them and-- they are just a tremendous network of people of all different ages, all different backgrounds, who are really focused on revitalizing Baltimore.

I know that many of you too are really interested in advocacy and in really changing the conditions here and also in the United States. And I know that many of you are very worried about what's happening at the national level. I do believe that there's so much that we can do here locally.

And that we should just do everything we can to make Baltimore and the state a model for what inclusive democracy really looks like. Carl Sagan has said that, "You have to know the past to understand the present." And I think people from all different backgrounds and disciplines and I just was looking up Carl Sagan.

He describes himself as being part of about 17 different disciplines. But in any case-- tonight, we're going to hear from a wonderful historian-- who also will allow us to really learn from the past in order to understand the great potential in the present.

And I think when it comes to looking at powerful movements that we've ex-- that we've c-- have in the United States that have really created change, there's really no one better than Taylor Branch-- to help us understand them and to really interpret what they might mean for the present.

Taylor began his career in 1970 as a staff journalist for *The Washington Month-- Monthly*. He's probably best known for his civil rights trilogy-- which-- covers America in the King years. It included *Parting the Waters*, *Pillars of Fire* and *At Canaan's Edge*.

And he, in fact, won the Pulitzer Prize-- for *Parting the Waters* in 1989. His other books include *The Clinton Tapes*-- which was-- a project that he did without taking

any notes while he sat with President Clinton over and over again. And it's a wonderful oral history.

And *The Cartel* which-- is an e-book that expanded on an article he wrote for *The Atlantic* about college sports and basketball in particular, right? His latest book is *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement*. And this is a really wonderful book because if you're not-- if your friends aren't quite ready to read that entire trilogy, you-- you-- you can read this book which references different parts of the trilogy and you can go into more depth-- with it. In addition to writing-- Taylor has spoken before a broad range of audiences on a range of topics-- including doctrines of non-violence with prisoners at San Quentin and also activists here in Baltimore-- and also wil-- military officers at the National War College.

In 2008, he addressed the-- made an address at the National Cathedral which marked the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's last Sunday's-- sermon from that particular pulpit. And I must say that he's very, very cherished-- in my heart because he's also a member of the Open Society Institute board.

So we're really thankful that-- Taylor has agreed to speak to us-- tonight. Before I turn over the podium to Taylor, I do wanna remind you all that we h-- the next talking about race event will be here on April 17th and we're going to-- be co-sponsoring an evening with the University of Baltimore law school. We're going to have Yale legal scholar, James Foreman, here. And he'll talk about his new book-- which is called *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*.

So-- we're looking forward to that. We're going to have both d-- Dean Weich and another member of the Open Society board, Judge Andre Davis-- be part of that discussion. So I hope you will join us. Thanks very much again for being here. Taylor? (APPLAUSE)

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Thank you, Diana. Thank you for coming tonight. Thank you for having me on the board. It is a very daunting but rewarding-- task to sit in that board and listen to all that Diana knows and all that Diana's involved with and the whole society, the foundation, is here in Baltimore.

I'm happy to do it and I'm happy to be here with you. I think we're at-- most of us have a sense of some sort of crisis turning point in our history. I'm here to argue that-- it may be good. It may be bad. And it's certainly involved with race.

I wanna make you, I hope to make you not just comfortable talking about race but entranced with the wonder of its power-- throughout American history because I-- I argue that there is no subject remotely comparable, no topic, no subject remotely comparable to the impact of race on our history and on our politics since colonial days.

That race consistently has the power to-- to turn us upside down, to send us to war

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and in flight and then to involve us in a concerted effort to repress, ignore, distort and forget the history that we just went through. This is a remarkable force. I was writing today, just today. I'm-- I'm tryin' to do a new book-- about some of these larger topics.

And I was writing about President Johnson, not Lyndon Johnson, Andrew Johnson. (LAUGHTER) In February of 1866 when he received Frederick Douglass in the White House along with nine other men from a colored convention that had-- come together after the Civil War in Washington.

And they got the president to agree to receive them because they were somewhat in shock that Andrew Jackson who had gotten on the ticket with Lincoln because he had been so vociferously anti-slavery, from Tennessee-- had been the military governor there, constantly under threat of getting killed, denounced slavery in virulent terms.

S-- said that he was against, "the damnable aristocracy of the South," and would not rest until he could put an end to what he called, "you concubinage of black women and daughters that was worse than anything the polygamy of antiquity ever dreamed of." This is somebody going right to the heart of what slavery is about. He was put on the ticket because in 1864 when the Republicans-- were forming their ticket, Lincoln was very vulnerable.

Everybody thought he was gonna lose t-- a war-weary election. They wanted to have a s-- a Democrat and a Southerner who was vociferously for seeing the Civil War through. And they put Andrew Johnson on the ticket and he did shore up the war-weary, pro-Lincoln, pro-union, "Let's finish the job," vote.

For the rest of 1865, Congress was out of session; it was adjourned. So we had presidential government and, of course, Andrew Johnson comes into office after-- Lincoln's assassination. By the end of the year, he had pardoned most of the Confederates and threatened to hang, vowed to hang an extended recognition to the government such that when Congress reconvened in December of ni-- 1865, basically the Confederate hierarchy was recycled. From meeting in Richmond, they presented themselves to take seats in the House and the Senate.

But it adjourned in March right after Lincoln's second inaugural address in the mid-- with the war still raging. And they come back and they're facing Alexander Stephens, the vice president of the confederacy who was-- see-- asked to be seated as a senator from Georgia with full credentials along with six generals under Robert E. Lee, six members of Jefferson's-- Davis cabinet.

And by my count, 58 members of the Confederate legislature, all recognized by Andrew Johnson and people couldn't understand how Andy Johnson, the-- went from the damnable aristocracy to this fellow. So Frederick Douglass shows up to the White House to find out. And they're shown in and they shake hands-- which itself is big news then and very controversial. Everybody did note that Andrew Johnson agreed to have a colloquy with him but not seated in the White House. They all stood around which was kind of awkward to begin with. But-- they allowed this fellow and it was not Frederick Douglass; he was such a huge, luminous figure as the premiere ab--

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abolitionist that another fellow who-- who actually-- owned a hotel in Newport, Rhode Island, was the principal speaker.

Saying that all they were there for was to-- to congratulate him as a friend of a friend for his service during the war and hope that he could help secure the civil rights-- for the newly freed slaves because he said, "Our fundamental"-- "The organic law recognizes neither color nor race and therefore we hope to establish citizenship to protect ourselves."

Well, this was wishful thinking-- but Andrew Johnson said that he would love to do that. He said there was just one problem which was that there was a fixed enmity-- enmity between poor people, poor whites, and black people and that if they were allowed to contend at the ballot box, war would inevitably break out that would exterminate one race or the other.

Frederick Douglass couldn't stand it anymore so he had to speak up and say he didn't think that that would happen. But in any case, the whole idea of having the ballot was to preserve the hope to transcend that kind of race, to manage it and to overcome it, if possible.

And-- and that he didn't think poor whites and poor blacks w-- w-- were forever at odds-- as a class. Andrew Johnson th-- then asked him, "Have you ever been on a plantation?" He didn't know much about Frederick Douglass, did not know that he had been a plantation slave and-- and Douglass said he had.

And he said, "Well, tell me, Mr. Douglass, when you were on a plantation, did you ever look across the field and see a white farmer with no slaves and a big family struggling to exist and say, 'I look down on this white farmer because my master is a far bigger person than he?'"

And Douglass started to say, "No, I never did think that." And Johnson insisted that most black slaves took their status from their owner and looked down on poor white people and that if he allowed black people to vote in the South, they would make an alliance with the former slave owner-- owners-- conspire to forever suppress ordinary white folk like Andrew Johnson, the tailor who became president.

Things got very ugly then-- and he c-- and Johnson finally-- advised them to-- to emigrate-- to leave the country. And when they left, it was pretty clear that-- that-- that-- that Reconstruction was on a collision course between the Congress and-- we-- we don't have time to go into all that but the f-- the 14th Amendment was born about th-- three weeks later-- out of the realization that the president was not gonna secure any citizenship rights and-- and that the only way to do that-- hopefully was to establish the citizenship rights-- of black people by constitutional amendment.

It goes to show you that-- that race and class and myth have always been present. Now, of course, they were there in the Constitution. There-- there're at least six clauses and there's still some debate about several others that refer to slavery as part of the-- as parta the Constitution itself.

But the word is never mentioned because of the suppressive, euphemistic--

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tendencies that were present even in the Revolution when it was largely a slave society, certainly-- the principle people-- d-- defining the Constitution, if you look in the records of the Federalist Convention, th-- there was a particular day when James Madison stood up and said, "Listen, we have been at loggerheads 'cause we're pretending that the fundamental differences are between large states and small states but the real differences are between Southern states with slave interest and Northern" sla-- "states without the slave interest. And that's what we have to work on if we have any hope of forming a government"-- "that can stand and forming"-- "forming a new basis."

And-- he said that the slave states have fundamentally different interests. They're against free labor. They're against homesteading. They're against things that will benefit white labor because it's in competition-- with-- with the-- with the whole plantation economy.

And furthermore, they're against-- industry. They're against development. They're against roads. They're against anything that would detract from their self-contained world above the slaves. And Hamilton, who became Madison's foe on the agrarian versus the commercial model-- agreed himself and said that if they hadn't-- if they hadn't agreed to count the slaves as 3/5ths of a person-- by euphemism without all free-- all s-- other persons-- is the way they did that.

And that and in the fugitive slave-- and in the-- and in the ban on the slave trade, in all of those clauses, they did cut-- they turned back flips to figure out a language that would clearly mean slaves but not use the term. And Hamilton said, "If we hadn't allowed the Southerners to count 3/5ths of the people that they called, 'property,' as people for purposes of representation in the Congress so that they could get free votes and augment their own white population by 40%, there never woulda been a Constitution."

Most of that's kind of forgotten and the euphemism helps-- helps it happen. Now when Lincoln comes along in 1863 or 1865-- let's-- let's take his second inaugural address. He's already in g-- at Gettysburg defined the purpose of the war as a new birth of freedom.

And th-- through an emancipation made it a war aim-- the end of slavery a war aim. Now he's coming at the end of the war and Congress has just adjourned. The armies are still fighting in March and not-- Congress won't be back until December.

And he goes through what we've been-- what the war was about, trying to achieve some sort of sense of unity, to speak for all people at the end of the war, saying everybody knew-- this was-- this was awful. We prayed-- the-- the appeal to the same God and he invoked his aide. The prayers of both could not be answered. He said that all knew that somehow the peculiar, powerful interest of-- of this property, of-- of slaves was the cause of the war. And-- and he s-- and he said, "We hope that it will speedily pass away. But if God wills that every lash"-- "endured by the bondmen over 250 years shall be repaid with another lash by the sword as it was said 3000 years ago; so it must be. But the judgments of the Lord are righteous altogether."

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Basically-- and he said that somehow this slavery, American slavery, he called it, "the slavery of North and South," was an offense for the ages that we were paying for. And that this was-- happened somehow. The, "somehow," is the key word.

Because even when he's trying to be confessional and say, "This is what we must face to understand that this war, nobody expected results in this war to be so profound and astounding to what we've gone through." And it was because of the of-- the offense of the ages in slavery.

He quoted the *Bible* five times in 700 words. No other president-- and the only other president who had ever quoted the *Bible* even once was John Quincy Adams, not a very likely one-- but John Quincy Adams. None of the other presidents did but he was reaching for some way to explain how what we had allowed to develop in slavery h-- was the cause of this catastrophe.

That even having done so, he said, "Somehow," and-- and he-- and used several other, what I call, "escape phrases," that allowed people to begin forgetting what slavery did during the war. If you look at the next 50 years, they are remarkable for the transformation in the interpretation in the United States of the Civil War in prevailing public opinion.

Historians to this day and-- j-- I'll-- just one example: historians to this day, including the historians who are trying to revise the history of Reconstruction, refer to the phase by which the white South eliminated black voters after the Civil War and over through Reconstruction to the Ku Klux Klan, through terrorism on a large scale, I mean, military-- military terrorism, exorcised largely through what were known as, "the slave patrols"-- that had been used to control the slaves during-- during the war.

The-- the process by which white supremacy was restored and all-- well, two of the three Civil War constitutional amendments, the 14th and the 15th, the right to vote, were totally-- expunged from our mind. We forgot about it and arguably, the 13th against slavery too because there was an awful lot of involuntary slavery going on.

The process by which this happened to this day is called, "redemption," in history books. Think of what that means. To put a sacred term as a historical label on a terrorist movement that restored white supremacy is a measure of the level of certainty that was established in white culture, trying to develop and interpret what the Civil War meant. And we sit here. Johns Hopkins was formed in 1876 but professors largely drawn from Germany who were at that time developing th-- the very origins of the social sciences.

Them, this is the birth of hi-- in many respects, the birth of modern higher social science and academics in the United States. Think Yale gave 20 PhDs in 1865. There weren't very many. The social sciences departments throughout American higher education in the last 1/2 of the 19th century were established largely around the notion of a hierarchy in Western civilization-- that was built on race, that justified the-- the colonists-- that justified-- the-- the science of eugenics which was at the head of many-- progressive, liberal movements right up until Hitler embarrassed it.

People from the United States were getting honorary degrees in Germany. This was a

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very, very powerful movement, intellectually, essentially to neutralize the Civil War into a contest of regional heroism and valor, to-- to-- to prepare textbooks for me when I was growing up in Georgia that said the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery.

And that the slaves were better off here as slaves than they had been as cannibals in Africa. And that the slaves were largely the cause of their own misfortune-- and that they were still our pr-- our burden and our-- and our problem. In 1913, to give you an example of-- of how thorough going this was, Woodrow Wilson went to Gettysburg on the 50th anniversary of Lincoln's address at Gettysburg.

There were no black soldiers allowed, no black veterans. The only black people there, even though there had been-- almost 300,000 black soldiers-- during the war-- they were servants. Woodrow Wilson said it was-- it-- it would be impertinent for an American president to discuss any meaning or any political lesson from what had happened at Gettysburg 50 years before. So much for the new birth of freedom. He said, "It is rather for us to salute these veterans who look at each other in the eye as brothers."

Now this war-- Wilson basically de-natured the Civil War. Nobody thought any m-- anything of it. And just a couple years later, he welcomed *Birth of the Nation* at the White House-- wasn't just at the White House, by the way. The night after that, the film was shown to the Supreme Court.

All the justices watched this movie and it was a lightning strike of white culture saying, "We can feel together" no-- "good, North and South because" w-- "we survived this onslaught of"-- "of"-- "of black bestiality after the war." There's no way of getting around how thorough going this was.

I mean, one way that I look at it is the effort and the persistence to remember in a particular way in part is illustrated by a prolonged movement that began in the 1875-- in the South to interpret the motives of the Southern soldiers by placing monuments on the courthouse lawns of every courthouse in every county in the South.

And, of course, it spread. I was just in Oregon giving a talk two years ago in Oregon. The Oregon legislature two years ago approved two more Confederate memorials. So it was not just in the South and it's not just a long time ago but it keeps going.

But what this happened, it started by the military, the veterans associations, and that was understandable. But then it was taken up by the Confederate Women's Association to put these monuments up on the courthouse lawns. This is 1/2 of what I wanna-- draw your attention to.

Put these monuments up on the courthouse lawns and-- and they had prolonged meetings to decide what to put up there. And Sir Walter Scott could have written most of the things about how romantic and wonderful these people were, things like, "for our faithful slaves," and, "They"-- "They know why they fought and such purity is only met in Heaven."

All of these things on all these lawns. Now at the same time and on-- often on the



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same courthouse lawns, lynchings were going on in this same period. And so far as I know, nobody ever noted the coincidence that the place where the romanticization and the memorialization of the Confederate memorials was going on over a protracted period of four years, was the same method-- place where a different public square message was sent to the black populations about the reality of politics in the South.

Now that's through World War I. A 50 year period-- of totally distorting, inverting, forgetting Lincoln's message in the second inaugural. Now let's jump forward another 50 years. In the civil rights era in the 1960s, the civil rights people made progress by a studied devotion to the essential tenets of democratic idealism that were professed above and beyond all of these ugly tendencies that had happened in politics.

That's why Betty Robinson who's sitting here stayed up all night a lotta times in civil rights meeting, arguing about what principles they could appeal to and what tactics they could use to draw people's attention to the contradiction between racial segregation and American ideals.

It was profoundly abs-- abstract in one sense: Dr. King said that in studying all this-- he came to a conclusion that psychologically speaking, the democratic experien-- experiment to try to bring forth a democracy when it was a laughing stock in all the monarchies of the world, was based in Madis-- I mean, if Madison's Federalist Papers on two psychological principles and one, that people can be self-governing and two, that they can build public trust.

He said, "All our political experiments rest on the capacity of mankind for self-government and no form of government can secure liberty unless we build virtue in the people, public trust." (SIREN) And that this is just the opposite of what most politics is which is to trust yourself and knock the hell outta the other guy to discipline them. You-- you-- you don't have any faith in them.

In all these arguments during the civil rights era, the civil rights people took this as the model: "We have to show individual and collective self-governance and that we can build public trust even in the people that wanna segregate us and wanna hate us."

And no better example of that, a freedom rider is riding-- riding through the South in the disciplined self-government that when the Klansman comes on the bus to beat them just because they're sitting next to somebody from a different race, that you look them in the eye and you do not fight.

You say, "I'm willing to submit to this because" w-- "if not us, then our children will have some sort"-- "make some sort of contact, some sort of bond, outta the sacrifice that we're making here today." So it's kind of quintessentially-- American sacrifice.

In many respects-- they did that in Freedom Summer. In many respects, I think the-- the backbone-- 'cause Dr. King would say, "Words alone are not enough because people can convince themselves of almost any abstraction if it's not personal. You have to amplify it with sacrifice."

And that's what the movement was doing. And-- and the culmination of it, in my

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view, was in-- in Birmingham in 1963 when s-- small children, mostly girls as young as six years old, marched into the dogs and fire hoses and those photographs went around the world and broke the emotional resistance of most people to say, "Well, somebody should do somethin' about it."

All of a sudden, people said, "I should do something about it." And out of that-- were spawned a thousand demonstrations that forced President Kennedy to introduce what became the Civil Rights Act. And-- out of that came the march on whether and other things.

But this breakthrough shows that the civil rights era was marked by two things: a devotion, a studied devotion, to the American experiment as the only f-- sound basis to try to appeal to people, to-- t-- to what they profess to believe. Plus, a-- s-- a sense of personal sacrifice to take risks across the boundaries that divide us, to expose themselves. I mean, to think about it, there are people in Baltimore today who won't drive one block off their route c-- to come in-- into the city.

And here are six year old girls marching into-- marching into dogs and fire hoses singing freedom songs. So per-- personal exposure-- is a test of commitment to democratic values. Now what I wanna tell you is that the-- the reprocessing, the political-- the impact of-- of that movement that broke open the resistance empirically went one way.

But the p-- the pol-- the-- the political reaction went the other way. And it was equivalent in the next 50 years, the-- the past 50 years, to what happened to Lincoln's second inaugural by the time Woodrow Wilson got ahold of it.

Over the 50 years, we've had a profound paralyzation of our politics in reaction to what happened in the civil rights era just as we had one in reaction to the Civil War, a hundred years apart. Dr. King said-- at the end of 1963, he was-- he-- he was-- he was pretty wise.

He said that George Wallace has already revamped his stump speech into a minor classic. He expunged-- he, Wallace-- this is '63. This is the same year but it's the year after the march on Washington. But-- he began that year, saying, "Segregation forever."

By the end of the year when he decided he wanted to run for president, he-- he brought out a new stump speech that number one, never mentions segregation, never mentioned the race issue except to say that it was favoritism to discuss it; therefore he wasn't gonna discuss it.

Said that he had never made a comment to denigrate anybody on the basis of sn-- skin color and that his only purpose was to restore local government-- in the face of threats from pointy-headed bureaucrats, tyrannical judges and tax and spend liberals.

In one speech, he invented the vocabulary of modern politics and he transmuted the latent hostility across the races into a hostility toward the national government that-- that was promoting reconciliation and the just claims of black people.

That same year on NBC's special, *The Race Revolution* that ran for three hours on

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network television with no commercials, Governor Barnett of Mississippi made a speech in his interview, saying, "The whole point about the race issue is that it is"-- "it has been emphasized far beyond its relative importance by conspiratorial news and biased new media that"-- "that is in league with Washington politicians to concentrate all power at the"-- "in the central government in Washington." So he chipped in. Then in th-- March, 1964 in New Hampshire, just so that the North could get in on it, William Loeb held a rally to oppose the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

He put in an enormous amount of money against it-- lobbying. His guest speaker was Ronald Reagan who was still just an actor then but-- and Loeb introduced him and they had a big rally. And Reagan said two things that were really important.

He said number one, "Don't be fooled by the Civil Rights Act because democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government because if the people themselves have the"-- v"-- "have the power to vote, they will vote themselves privileges that will swamp the government and bring in tyranny and"-- it's-- "always happens."

And the way to prevent that is to strangle the government and not have-- have taxes. New Hampshire had no income tax then, still doesn't. But their measure, because they needed to build some roads, was the instead of the income tax bill, they wanted to oppose the civil rights bill and preserve no taxes by enacting the first state lottery in New Hampshire.

There were no lotteries in the United States in 1964 until Loeb and Reagan held all these rallies in New Hampshire to oppose the civil rights bill and to establish the first state lottery as a way of fleecing the people through the voice of state government to avoid the common burdens of taxation.

The very next year, Danny Moynihan came out with his report in the middle of the civil rights movement that's still controversial over whether the things that he said about black families w-- w-- w-- were accurate or not, whether they were exaggerated. But the s-- true significance of what Moynihan did in saying that the chief problem in civil rights w-- was-- was the pathological matriarchy in black society.

It wasn't the-- and he said, "The essence of the male animal is to strut and if he can't strut, then the society's not gonna be right and black men can't strut and therefore women are running the families. And therefore all"-- "all kind of terrible things are happening in the black family."

And that was like a huge smoke bomb right into the move-- but the important thing was, Moynihan was saying, "We are the doctors and they are the patients." In the same year that Selma and the civil rights movement had shown United States th-- that white obfuscation and white oppression had had been a t-- tremendous problem. And that a civil rights movement was operating as modern founding fathers to set an example for how you-- we could tackle our most intractable problems. That they were the solution that should be studied and that they had been the doctors. And Moynihan is insisting, "No, we're still the doctors and they are the sick patients with matriarchy."

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That began-- began the-- the political absorption and distortion of the true value of-- of the 1960s. And-- and-- this happened ever since. It developed into a notion that, "big government," which was Wallace's phrase, they all became mantras detached from facts.

Nobody who denounces big government or says Washington bureaucrats, pointy-headed bureaucrats, Wallace's great phrase, "pointy-headed bureaucrats telling you what to do." Nobody ever says how big the government is, how much the taxes are, what the needs are. It-- it-- it is a mantra just for-- hostility to a government that is serving presumably the interests of a minority. It-- it's a way of appealing to tribal feelings. And so our guns and-- and other things that have developed over the last 50 years and they've developed in a way that they-- they are largely empty.

You don't really have to have any proposals. You don't have to have any diagnosis of what-- w-- where you wanna go. You don't have to have any facts. You don't have to think. You just have to say, "Big government is bad. Pointy-headed bureaucrats shouldn't do it. Send the money back to the people. Get rid of the government. Strangle it," so on and so forth.

And that started in 1964. It started with-- it started with the civil rights movement. It had-- the measure of its partisan power in politics is that there was not a single Republican representative between the Atlantic Ocean and Texas in 1964.

And as soon as Barry Goldwater from the party of Lincoln said that he was voting against the civil rights bill, people sprang up, switched parties. Yellow dog democrats' grandparents died and turned in the grave 'cause for a hundred years, the Democrats had been the party of white supremacy.

And all of a sudden, when Goldwater switches and Johnson signs the bill, a Democrat-- partisan politics turn on a dime, both parties. No other force in American politics can do that. So we shouldn't be surprised when race bubbles up-- and it has been-- you know, all through these 50 years.

And sadly, I think that it has been not just the people who are still enthralled to racial fears who say-- and-- and Trump is-- and Trump is now making this-- I think he's bringing everything that has been going on in a subterranean way to the surface.

In overt racial attacks and overtly saying, blaming the government for things that should be in the same world, the subject for informed debate among citizens. To say that it's the government sending your jobs overseas as an explanation for the displacements of technology and really free enterprise-- you know, you can have a lovely debate.

And so I'm-- my-- my-- my dad was-- a dry cleaner so I'm a capitalist. I understand the benefits of capitalism. But I also understand that it's destructive, creative destruction. And-- and Trump is trying to blame all of that on the government that serves black people and immigrants.

That they are taking your jobs and shipping them overseas as a political act which makes about as much sense as saying that it was the government that took all the

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farmers off the farms and send them into the city or that took all the two million female telephone operators and put 'em out of work. No, it wasn't the government that did that.

The question is whether we can have a constructive government to deal with and adjust to the dislocations of-- of the market in a way that we can have the-- the-- the advantages of the market and the advantages of globalization-- w-- w-- without disrupting our whole social fabric.

We haven't had that debate because we were stuck between people who have been anti-government for so long that they don't even have an idea of a constructive government. Their only idea, of course, is the Tea Party idea which was a revolt against a foreign government to destroy something and begs the whole question of what came afterwards when Madison and Hamilton in a slave society faced, "How do we construct a government that can actually handle some of these difficult crises?" So what I wanna leave you with is that I think that Trump does-- maybe the end of a 50 year cycle, a very dangerous end of a 50 year cycle, 'cause he's going very, very far.

When you say that a government that is too sympathetic to minorities and immigrants is shipping your jobs overseas and causing you all this hardship and it's not just working class people; there is economic anxiety and dislocation right in this law school-- you know?

It-- it-- it's everywhere and if we don't have an intelligent debate about what is causing it and how we, as a people, can-- can come together to manage those dislocations, then we're in grave danger. So for somebody to say it's because the government's sympathy for minorities, that all this is happened, is a profound crisis. But it-- it is the end of just government is bad is a purely political tactic.

He's now saying the government needs to address these problems. That's new. And what I wanna say about our side, that is, the people who feel heirs to civil rights, is two things: that we are far too cautious, in my view, and this is advocacy at the end.

In my view, to talk about the good things that happen w-- when we come together across the lines that divide us and deal with issues of race. The movement should take credit for setting in motion things that are still benefitting people. Dr. King said the movement was-- was setting free the widest liberation in human history, not just for black people but for women, for senior citizens, for the disabled, for the environment.

The word, "gay," wasn't even in popular usage then. And the notion of-- even civil union was beyond imagination. And here in the midst of all this political reaction, you have all those things going and you don't have people saying, "This happened because patriots in the civil rights movement drew our attention to what equal citizenship really means."

You know, when-- when I went to the University of North Carolina, there were no females there by state law. People forget. And there-- women could not serve on juries by state law. To a *White v. Crook*, Pauli Murray, one of Pauli Murray's lawsuits, she says, "The principle announced by the court is so obvious today that it is hard to

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believe what a radical step it was for women to serve on juries."

There were no women at Harvard, let alone at West Point. All of these things have happened-- and in a way, they're the result but th-- the people who support these things tend to segment them. They don't wanna say that the root cause and the most difficult cause was facing the race issue and-- and-- and taking steps forward in the race issue, partly because it-- it's a political liability. Democrats are nervous about it. Look at the difference. Conservatives for 50 years have retreated everywhere from integrated water fountains and Ivy League coeds-- they were against that.

All the way down to same sex marriage and yet they can't say they're conservatives often enough as a mantra of principled, upright success. Liberals who set in motion the liberation that oughta be the model with how we should approach our intractable problems today, don't even call themselves liberals.

A progressive is a liberal that doesn't wanna talk about race. (LAUGHTER, CLAPPING) And turn on your TV, you won't hear-- liberal and conservative are balance-- balancing terms. And we need-- I value conservative if they're-- if they're principled conservatives who-- who are willing to talk about race.

But what we have now is a theological mantra on one side that is divorced, that is now so divorced from reality, that all these Trump proposals are gonna come crashing down. And on the other side, we have people that are still nervous, too skittish, to claim the birthright that makes the civil rights movement-- modern founders, pe-- people fulfilling that same function that the revolutionaries did in the-- in the-- in the war, confronting systems of subjugation and hierarchy and converting them and pushing them toward equal citizenship.

That's what they did. That's what the civil rights movement did. I-- I'm afraid that our racial divide is still far too strong for people to say, "Yes, the black-led civil rights" m-- "movement is my model for American patriotism, along with Lincoln and Jefferson and Hamilton and the people"-- "and the founding fathers."

Cause that's what they were. And-- and-- and in that sense, it is not enough in the modern era for those of us who care about these issues, to say that we are anti-racist. That is one reason that all our conversations about race are stunted.

They last only as long as somebody can figure out a way to get out of 'em. (LAUGHTER) It's-- it's very much like our conversations about violence. Non-violence was, in my view, the most powerful doctrine to come out of the civil rights era but it was the first one to become passé because people didn't wanna talk about it.

They wanted to find some justification. Munich, you know, somethin-- some justification for violence to put an end to conversations about the relative utility of violence and non-violence. As a general practice, non-violence advances democracy.

Violence can defend it but it doesn't-- advance it because non-violence is a vote. And democracy is settling things by (LAUGH) votes. That's all it is. But we want-- we wanna make non-violence some obscure vegetarian, Gandhian, weird doctrine

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(LAUGH) that's over there.

Totally oblivious to the fact that every time you cast a ballot or tell somebody to vote rather than being violent, you-- you are embracing non-violence. And we-- we don't do that and we don't wanna talk about race very much. We're anti-racists.

But anti-racist kills every conversation 'cause all it is is, "Are you a racist or are you not?" Nobody wants to be a racist and the people on the other side know that. George Wallace proved it. He said, "I'm not a racist." And even though he was-- plainly he was the most notorious racist there was, people wanted to believe him 'cause they didn't wanna be racists either.

And then Reagan would come along and say, "I" th-- "Yes, I did oppose the '64 civil rights bill and the '65 voting rights act but I don't have a prejudiced bone in my body." (LAUGHTER) And he would walk out of meetings and everybody would say, "Well, okay."

Because nobody wanted the discussion. So if you make racism or some sort of devilry the predicate of racial discussions, rather than the wonder of what race has done in our history, positively and negatively, and that we can make it-- we can make it positive-- then you-- we have lost from the beginning.

And I-- and I-- I-- I-- and I do blame our side-- for that a lot. I will deny it if-- if-- if you quote me but (LAUGHTER)-- but I think that-- I-- I-- I just wanna give you an indication of how bad our distortion is. We have only the word, "racist," that people bandy about.

It kills conversations. The other thing that kills conversations-- of course, in the old days, what would kill a conversation with race is somebody on either side saying-- "Some of my best friends are white," or, "Some of my best friends are black," right? (LAUGHTER)

Now that would kill a conversation because it was manifestly s-- a fraudulent excuse from somebody who didn't wanna be accused of not being perfectly good on race, okay? Now in retrospect, it would have been good to say instead of-- that ended every conversation.

It would have been much better to say, "Okay. Tell me about your friends. How did you meet them?" (LAUGHTER) Find out about that because if all the people who ended conversations by claiming that they had friends from the other race, really did have friends from the other race, we'd be in a different world. (LAUGHTER)

But when you think about the word, "racist," as an accusation, it-- it derives its-- where does its meaning come from, the meaning of the word? It comes from whatever association we have with race itself. What's the meaning of the word, "artist?"

What's the meaning of the word, "scientist?" "Pianist, balloonist?" It comes from the word, "terrorist." The meaning comes from, "terror," because terror is inherently a negative term. And all I'm saying is we don't really have racists in the sense that we had 19th century racists who built a whole world overtly around talk and eagerness of

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white supremacy as a racial system.

W-- we-- we have closet bigots who speak the language of anti-government-- and-- and bridle if you call them racists because that's essentially calling them, "evil." If we understood the wonder of race and I'm talkin' black and white because that's our primary ind-- index here. I've just been writing about people f-- in the 1840s, by the way. Abolitionists argued that Irish people were f-- such-- from such a primitive stock that they could never become citizens nor trusted with the vote.

And slave owners, I have documents of slave owners in South Carolina in the 1840s who said that dredging canals in the mosquito swamps was work beneath their slaves because they were too valuable and they were gonna hire Irish workers, freshly landed from the famine. (LAUGHTER)

And so-- and so there was terrible prejudice there as with everybody else including, y-- you know, prejudice in Baltimore against Jews-- 50 years ago. But those have faded out. Race is-- black and white is the most indelible and if-- if-- if we really understood that it is the life stream of our-- of our understanding of-- of a shrinking globe and that it's-- and that it's posi-- it's-- it's like the blood vessels. You can't see 'em but there's a life force there and you can see it if the surgical or a hostile cut slices open, you can see it and becomes very vivid.

Race is very important and it produces wonder. It's an-- interesting without limit. And in some world way out somewhere, a racist is gonna be somebody who's devoted to the subject of race, not somebody who is hostile, who is devoted to it and can talk about it comfortably and may be right and may be wrong but always learning and always willing to risk something, to meet somebody across that divide.

Because that's what a racist does to understand the full potential of race in human interactions as the world gets smaller. And that a racist will be an artist and then we will have a positive measure for how people deal with one another rather than you're either a racist or you're somethin' else that I don't wanna talk about. S-- c-- our-- our-- our discourse is stunted and it's partly our fault. And it's too important now with Trump out there, doing all of the stuff he's doing to harvest 50 years of distortion of the enormous potential-- from the civil rights era. So let me stop there. I probably used up all my time for-- for-- for questions but-- thank you for listening. I've been trying to present some (APPLAUSE OVER WORDS) ideas.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## MALE VOICE:

We can talk more about Trump if you want or anything else. (LAUGHTER) I-- I-- I-- I really wants to try and to be provocative and wide-ranging.



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**MALE VOICE:**

Can I just yell out a question?

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Here?

**MALE VOICE:**

Yes, sir.

**MALE VOICE:**

Is that legal? (LAUGHTER)

**MALE VOICE:**

Actually he's the boss.

**TAYLOR BRANCH:**

He go first, then you go.

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Just said-- (LAUGHTER) thank you.

**MALE VOICE:**

(UNINTEL PHRASE) this question, can I just--  
(OVERTALK)

**FEMALE VOICE:**

I-- I'm so glad you raised this. This is-- to me, it's a critical issue in our time.  
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## FEMALE VOICE:

But what would you say-- it's my understanding that race is a construct of the 18th century. That before the 18th century, we had groups of people and we had tribes. But the whole construct of Mongoloid, Caucasoid, Negroid appeared in-- in the-- encyclopedias of the-- 18th century.

And so even before that, for example, in the *Bible*, you don't see race. You don't see races mentioned; you see tribes and groups. So to say someone is racism, it's a difficult word because it uses-- it uses-- d-- it defines itself using a term that was a racist development in the 18th century. So--

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Well, see-- (CLEARS THROAT)

## FEMALE VOICE:

It-- it's sort of a circular way and I think we get trapped in the whole idea of you-- calling someone, "racist," because that depends on a construct that is only belatedly developed.

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Well-- (CLEARS THROAT) yes and no. If-- if you're using word in a cons-- in the-- in the conventional-- you know, I've-- I've tried to give you a totally-- r-- Plutonian-- view of the word, "racist." But the standard view, r-- "racist," meaning, "hostile."

People know what they mean when they mean, "racist." They mean somebody who don't-- doesn't like somebody of a different color. Race-- race is just a way-- it d-- evolved just as a way of dividing up people in a society full of wars. So it's like-- it's like your uniform that you're wearing. It's just that your uniform happened to be your skin.

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Absolutely. That's-- but what I mean is the whole idea of race that put Caucasoid at the top with Negroid at the bottom in the encyclopedias in the 18th century started a whole construct where the Caucasoid race was a superior race. And-- and it was an artificial-- artificially created construct.

And so the whole thing of-- our whole manifest destiny and the whole idea of the United States being manifestly destined to-- to conquer the oppreh-- to conquer the-- savages in the United States and elsewhere is all based on that whole idea. I mean, it

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all came from the false idea in the four-- late 1400s that-- the Catholics were supposed to come to the United States.

I forget what the decree was called. Oh, the-- but it was all based on that whole thing of they should come to the United States and throughout the world and destroy the savages. And so the whole idea of the Caucasoid being the su-- supreme race was only a belated construct in the 1800s.

## **TAYLOR BRANCH:**

I under-- I mean, we agree about that. I mean, I talked about how American higher education was largely dev-- built, developing that construct of the hierarchy of racism psychology, sociology, anthropology-- on and on. The founders of all of those disciplines were pioneers in racial hierarchy, okay? But to say that that is an artificial construct logically means just stop talking about it. And that is not what-- well-- how else are you gonna discuss the divisions between people who look differently?

## **FEMALE VOICE:**

Because at-- w-- I think one of the greatest things that's happened is this whole thing with *National Geographic* tracing everybody's roots to Africa. I mean, if we all come out of a common ancestor, that alone should show that we are all-- all united as one people. That we are-- human beings and it is a human race. It is not a divisional race.

## **TAYLOR BRANCH:**

Yeah. But--

## **FEMALE VOICE:**

But-- so that we should love each other as another human being and another co-- a person who benefits from the creation and should benefit as-- as that co-human race.

## **TAYLOR BRANCH:**

I-- I agree with you certainly on your aspirations and your values. All I'm saying is-- that to say that race is an artificial construct-- most people are gonna say, "If you don't do that, the"-- that, "the solution is never to discuss race and pretend that those divisions don't exist."

You have to have some way of talking about the fact that-- how do you explain the neighborhoods in Baltimore-- without reference to some way that we artificially divide ourselves? Look. The term, "Caucasian," was used by the Supreme Court in

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1922 to define-- white people because by law, naturalized citizens had to be white. But nobody knew what a white person was so they were arguing about it and they said it had to be a Caucasian because these scientists had come up with it. But it turned out in testimony that the entire construct, the word, "Caucasian," came from one skull shipped to Johan von Blumenbach in Germany, the founder, one of the founders of sociology.

And he said it looked a lot like his German skulls and it came from the Caucasus. (LAUGHTER) That's it. That's the whole basis. (LAUGHTER) And yet-- and-- and the court, when scientists came and said, "Well, some of these Caucasians are from the Hamites and the"-- "and certain islands and they're Caucasians too," the court said, "The hell with that. We don't want any," you know?

"we know white when we see it," so they threw out all the scientists and every-- (LAUGHTER) but-- but the point is that people today think they're saying something scientific when they say, "Caucasian," you know? It doesn't mean-- I agree with you about all that artificiality but that doesn't mean that race does not have force in our society.

## **FEMALE VOICE:**

Oh, yeah.

## **TAYLOR BRANCH:**

In our society that we need to deal with.

## **FEMALE VOICE:**

I know and I love what you said. It's absolutely critical to-- to-- the success of our country. If we don't-- we can't ignore this issue.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## **MALE VOICE:**

You wanna check that out, Rick?

## **RICK:**

Yeah. So-- this is a little bit general and vague but I think you're the person to answer it and I think I'm not alone in this room. How-- how, with your knowledge of history and your awareness and your intellect and your intelligence, do you get through the

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day right now (LAUGHTER) with the daily-- with the daily news of our leadership and his sort of self-destructive, problematic, whatever word you wanna throw at it, I wanna know I and the big picture, can you help us (LAUGHTER)--  
(OVERTALK)

## MALE VOICE:

Please help us. (LAUGHTER)

## RICK:

--with optimism using history or if you want, race, as a way of telling us then we're gonna get through this (LAUGHTER)-- without some kind of-- nuclear Armageddon or--

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Well-- (CLEARS THROAT) part of it literally is that I do retreat to Frederick Douglass and Andrew Johnson in the White House in 1866 when equally terrible things were happening and 600 people-- 600,000 people had just been killed in a small country in a war.

So we have had cataclysm, race-based cataclysms, before. That's not to say that I am totally sanguine that we're gonna come out of this. Well, I just think that it-- it is coming to a crisis; that we're either gonna-- the-- that the old way that you could get elected by racial signals about guns and taxes and all that stuff that was to benefit black people without having to address any of the problems, just say, "I'm gonna go get elected and try to tamp down the federal government. That's all I have to do." Because of the dislocations of the economy-- and things that were happening, that road is at a dead end. And-- and Trump-- h-- is exposing that. They're gonna have to come up with somethin' else.

But it may be demagogic, you know? He-- he's not likely to say, "I made a mistake and I screwed all" m-- (LAUGHTER) "all of the people that voted for me." He-- he's not likely to say that. He's gonna blame somebody else and-- that's very dangerous because that's what all of the same tyrants are doing in Europe and the guy in Turkey and elsewhere.

So-- I keep my sanity by saying-- there are a lotta people mobilizing the way we should have mobilized all along. Maybe people will talk more forthrightly about the benefits of dealing with race which, to me, has been one of our huge handicaps.

That we don't take credit for the things that people really value. If-- if your-- if you've got a daughter who-- who goes even to the University of Virginia, she's standing on the shoulders of Fannie Lou Hamer. And-- and-- and people don't recognize that--

that-- that it-- it-- that it has opened doors.

And there-- there's controversy about it. There-- black activists, some black activists say, "We don't wanna talk about the collateral benefits to the movement because it detracts from the black agenda. We still have a lot of problems. We only wanna focus on what we're doing for ourselves."

But to me, to say that a movement about what equal citizenship mean-- meant s-- lose things that benefitted senior citizens and the disabled and st-- and-- and immigrants, you know, Johnson's passage of the 1965 Immigration Act is an untold, heroic civil rights story.

I mean, within one month, he broke two filibusters by almost identical votes, one to pass the c-- the Voting Rights Act and the second one to pass the Immigration Act, repealing quotas that-- that had kept-- that kept out all of Asia-- Africa, even most of southern Europe, for God's sake.

And he said, "Never again will this quota system"-- "shadow the gate to freedom with the twin barriers of prejudice and privilege." And we take it for granted. I mean, one thing that is true, even Trump voters have lived through eight years of Obama, their worst nightmare, and-- and the world did not vanish.

A lot of 'em are ter-- but-- but they lived through it. We are more comfortable-- in-- in a multi-cultural world than we realize. We have communities all through here that never existed before then. We were pretty much of-- of a Protestant, white-- culture.

That's all you saw and if you turn on the TV, that's all you saw. Now we have communities from every nation in the world and many of us have friends from that. And w-- we're more comfortable than we're aware but we're still nervous about the barriers that remain. And-- all I'm sayin' is that we have to be more explicit that-- that this is the way out. This is the-- to invoke this is the way out and that-- and that Trump's way is a dead end and a very dangerous one. Yes, ma'am?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## **FEMALE VOICE:**

(UNINTEL PHRASE) have developed a good-- s-- with the-- compared to black rights, it seems to me that black rights are still way behind in those two categories.

## **TAYLOR BRANCH:**

Yeah. So I would say (CLEARS THROAT), you know, if you g--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

She-- she asked to compare the speed historically with which various movements-- made progress in history-- black rights compared with women's rights and-- and-- and gay rights, LGBT rights. And-- you know, I-- I-- I-- if you go back into the 19th century, some of the most tragic-- splits were between the suffrage movement and the-- and-- and the-- and the-- and the Abolitionists-- after the c-- after the Civil War over, you know, the-- the 14th Amendment put black citizenship into the Constitution.

But it also put the word, "male," into the Constitution (LAUGH) and the 15th Amendment didn't-- give the vote to women. And there were big arguments and principles, wonderful arguments-- abou-- about whether that was justified or not.

And it took another-- took another 50 years to have-- to-- to have the female vote in 1920. Relative to those two movements which were old-- and the history of Abolitionists still not widely known by most people-- but then again, a lot of this is not widely known. I mean, most (LAUGHTER)-- most-- most students just know, you know, Rosa sat down and Martin had a dream.

And-- and-- and (LAUGHTER) and now we don't have to worry about race relations anymore. So-- so things are pretty superficial but these two very, very complex, I think, model-- social movements about what equal citizenship-- means, both grounded in equal citizenship. And we, the people-- you know, they-- they-- they took a long time.

And they were positive. If you remember-- I think every political debate should start m-- by requiring the candidates to recite the Preamble to the Constitution, beginning, "We, the people," because it is unbelievably daunting and unbelievably optimistic and difficult.

And if you do that and then start sneering about the government-- then you expose yourself before you even get started very far. But the el-- the-- the gay rights movement happened at lightning speed compared to these-- to the-- to these other ones.

I mean, there are people in the civil right (UNINTEL PHRASE) and there're a whole buncha people really in the c-- civil rights movement who whether gay and-- and-- even they're getting distorted in history because people s-- because gay rights are now acceptable, people assume that Bayard Rustin was openly gay.

But he wasn't; I knew Bayard Rustin. He was semi-closeted up until the day he died because he had lived his whole life in mortal terror-- of being outta the closet. And-- and it-- and it shows the power-- if you don't recognize tha-- h-- how powerful that was that there was an official of the National Council of Churches who was murdered in 1966 and his family-- he was head of-- the National Council of Churches Commission on Religion and Race. His family hired private investigators to find out what happened.

He was speaking at Ohio State. And the private I's came back and said, "We can solve

this crime but you may not like it because it looks like it was some sort of heter"-- "homosexual" tw-- "trist gone wrong." And the family said, "Shut down the investigation. We'd rather not know who killed him than for the possibility of it to come out that he was killed in a homosexual encounter."

That's-- that's how-- y-- people would rather he be dead-- and-- and not know about it than this come out. So-- the gay rights movement started from fear-- and-- and-- and subjugation as-- as vigilant and as fearful-- as anything in-- in race or gender.

And-- and in the course of 50 years-- by invoking, by improvising of tactics but to some degree inevitably on the momentum of these earlier movements that started with the black rights movement has worked wonders. And people oughta be more aware of that and put it in context with the others and-- and lay claim to it. "Yes, we did this and yes, it's good." And no conservative who says that everything is a disaster wants to introduce a bill to overturn it. The-- they-- because they know it's too strong. Yes, sir?

## MALE VOICE:

Apparently the microphone's not working so I'll try to speak up. Like so far, I participated and I had a conversation that happens over at North Avenue at the Impact Hub. That was monthly. It's called, "Circle of Voices." If you-- wanna look it up on Facebook, I think you have to look up-- called-- title just called, "An End to Ignorance: Circle of Voices."

## MALE VOICE:

Talkin' about JC Foxx (PH) (UNINTEL PHRASE)

## MALE VOICE:

JC Foxx?

## MALE VOICE:

(UNINTEL PHRASE) is one of the (UNINTEL PHRASE) communities (UNINTEL PHRASE) and-- I call it, "Black people talking to white people." (LAUGHTER) You know?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## MALE VOICE:

The name of the group is-- the name of the m-- conversation is, "Circle of Voices." If



you wanna look it up on Facebook, I think you have to look up the whole title which is, "An End to Ignorance: Circle of Voices." It's a monthly conversation that happens at the Impact-- Impact hub.

And they have a topic every month. One topic that I went to was housing in Baltimore. The last topic was-- Muslims in America. Next month's topic is-- rape culture. Anyways and I call this group, "Black people talking to white people." And it's run by two black people who really know what they're doing; they're professionals at this.

And-- it's a very inspiring and challenging experience and it's about black people talking to white people and vica versa. So my question is do you think that's the kinda thing that you're talkin' about that you would like to see happen more?

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Oh, abso-- absolutely. Absolutely. All-- all I'm saying is that-- (SNIFFS) most conversations between w-- black people and white people have a subtext that, "I'm gonna talk to the person of the other race only as long as necessary to prove that I'm not"-- "permanently averse to it." (LAUGHTER)

In other words, to get it over with and-- and-- and all I'm sayin' is that until we're as comfortable talking about race as we are talking about sports-- we're-- we're not-- w-- w-- we're not gonna be-- where-- where we oughta be because it's-- it-- it's as inherently interesting.

It's as inherently important. It's more important. And there is a sense of discovery-- on-- on the other side of it. That's why when I teach civil rights-- I try to get my students not just to learn things and everything. Because I think in the abstract, almost anything, if you can turn what happened after the civil rights movement into redemption, upside down, an abstract idea, you can do anything-- with race.

You can turn it upside down. The Civil War didn't have anything to do with race. But you can't do that with personal experience if you encounter people which is why stories and personal tales are the most powerful vehicle for learning. So that when I teach-- civil rights, the movement-- like what Betty did-- I-- I try to get my students to go out and do something that makes-- that involves discovery that makes 'em a little nervous. I'm not askin' 'em to go to jail or-- or march into police dogs.

But I'm askin' 'em to go to a church of a different color or faith or go into a synagogue or talk to a homeless person or do something and then come back and tell the class. Until you're willin' to talk about experiences like that, you are short-selling your capacity for bonding-- and growth.

I had one (LAUGH) girl last time I taught that she was a young g-- she (LAUGH)-- she went to Penn Station. This was her field project. She held up a sign and all it said-- was a big, tall sign and-- and it said, "I will listen." And she stood in Penn Station and she came to class afterwards. And I said, "That was a very novel one."

Nobody'd ever done it but I approved it. (LAUGHTER) And she came and she said, "For the first hour, nobody would get near me." And she said, (LAUGHTER) "People would walk way away from me." (LAUGHTER) Here's this person standing there with a sign that says, "I will listen." That's all it said.

So people didn't know what to make of her and-- and they avoided her and she blurted out in class, she said, "I think I felt what it was like to be black because people were avoiding me and not looking at me right and I was very conscious of who I was," and every.

And so the black kids in the class started teasing her about whether that was what-- what it was really like to be black and-- and what would hap-- what did she think would happen if they held up that sign (LAUGHTER) and various other thing?

And then she said-- she said, "After a time, people started comin' up to talk to me and I thought they were weird." (LAUGHTER) You know, w-- "Why would they come up and talk to me?" And they're asking, "Well, what would you talk to me about? I have some things I'd really like to tell some people." (LAUGHTER)

So (LAUGHTER)-- so these experiences inevitably and even when they're trivial and that one was largely trivial except that she felt that sense of isolation and being outside of normal which is the principal grounding of cross-racial experience when you're not comfortable, when it's not somebody that you know. And the-- and that's how you-- you-- you build your sense of-- your sense of discomfort outside of your comfort-- if that makes sense. Yes, ma'am? Come up.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## FEMALE VOICE:

Do you think there's an equivalent of a six year old marching in Kelly Ingram Park in today's world? And if so, what would it be?

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

Well, I do think that there are demonstrators. First of all, it was a demonstration. It was a demonstration to make witness for values. We're seeing lots of demonstrations now. I mean-- it-- it's not the same thing but the thousands of people who flocked to the airports the night of the immigration ban-- that made me think of the movement, you know?

I think of this as a percolation time like maybe the late '50s-- and-- and-- and crisis like that. The difference with the-- with the girls-- and there weren't-- it wah-- wasn't just girls but it was a majority of girls. And a lot of 'em were high school students but the youngest ones were really, really tiny.

I have a picture of a six year old in *Parting the Waters*. Is that by the time they did that, they had been marching for so long, that they had captured the concentrated

inter-- and it was a huge surprise because it was mostly adults. It was mostly adults. And then when they ran out of adults, they had to decide whether to get-- surrender or take a bigger risk by allowing small children.

See and what's-- what's not really known, the subtext of that, was that there was a hemorrhage within black Birmingham-- when the black parents found out that there was a possibility that their kids may go there and they came to Martin Luther King and said, "You are insane. You are a criminal. You promised us you were gonna end segregation and now you're about to leave town and you wanna leave our kids with criminal records. Do you know what chance they have to survive as black people if they got a criminal record?"

And the people around Martin Luther King jumped right up into their faces and said, "Yes, parents. Your children are gonna march 'cause you didn't do what you shoulda done 30 years ago so they"-- "they wouldn't have to. So they're gonna save you."

Now that took a lotta nerve. (LAUGHTER) And it was a tremendous risk-- tremendous risk. And what's amazing to me if-- if I'm even a quarter right or a tenth right, that this was the emotional turning point of the civil rights-- King was afraid that the civil rights movement was gonna sink w-- if you didn't take bigger risks.

Because it had been eight years-- nine years since the Brown decision and nothing had really happened except a lot of turmoil and the white-- and the-- and segregationists were mobilizing and-- he-- he wanted to take a huge risk. If I'm right that this broke the emotional resistance and led to at least those peak acts and the-- and then stimulated these other movements, it's an incredibly significant event. But you-- I-- I defy you to find a-- a dissertation about the turning point of the American political structure because it-- it-- it-- it not only turned and did all of this stuff but it flipped Republican to Democrat and Democrat to Republican.

The whole partisan structure of the United States shifted overnight, incredibly significant event. And the reason to me that I don't think you're gonna find that analyzed in dissertations where you'll find dissertations about some minor-- communications strategy that changed the-- shifted the Senate seat or something.

The-- that's what politics are about. But here, this one goes begging because I think it's embarrassing that the partisan structure and the racial structure of the United States turned on the witness of school children, you know? So nobody's gonna-- and-- and our pundits and commentators who were on TV interpreting this, they didn't know where this came from and they didn't know what to make of it. And-- and their job is to know what to make of everything 'cause they analyze it forever. But they didn't know about the dynamics, what went on in that church or what it meant.

So they didn't talk about it and they pretended it didn't happen. But they did p-- pay attention to this when it spawned a thousand demonstrations within the next six weeks all over the country and President Kennedy, you can hear him-- on the tapes if you're ever interested in this.

He was so mystified because sit ins broke out and demonstrations broke out at-- at air force bases in Manitoba, you know, and all around the world. He said, "What the

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hell is going on," you know? And he-- he said, "I've gotta do something to lance this boil," but it was a consequence of that. So-- Betty?

## **BETTY:**

Yeah. I'm glad you touched on that letter. All right. (UNINTEL PHRASE) oh, just little-- little comment. So I love Taylor Branch's history, right, but I came because I'm the Betty that he mentioned a couple times so-- I came because he th-- I thought he was gonna talk about the actual on the ground organizing that people did in the black communities across the South and-- and across the country.

And, of course, he then described for us, which was fabulous, the words of the people who were in power, the people who were the-- the-- what do I wanna say? The narrative creators for the nation which I think we can take a lesson from that. But-- but anyway so my question is but I wanna make a comment before I ask my question.

My question is would you do a little more description of the-- of the-- the power of the grass roots organizing? But-- I wanted to just say that I am very hopeful, having been somebody who was in the South for two years and has seen people coming out, taking risks, people learning for the first time who their legislator is or that they have a congressional representative or that they have a state legislative district.

So there's all kinds of young people especially which is fabulous, stepping up to-- to do the work and unf-- and talking-- I belong to an organization called, "Showing up for Racial Justice." So this is calling white people in to work with other white people to have these conversations, these tough conversations, with white folks in your friends and family network or your co-workers.

So that's-- that's a challenge I'm-- I'm gonna l-- put out to all the white folks in the room. But anyway I'm gonna let Taylor respond to the other kinds of the-- the-- what it-- what was the-- what was the sacrifice and the energy that it took for people to do those hundred demonstrations that Kennedy scratched his head about or that w-- or that led up to Selma or the-- all the demonstrations for the-- for (UNINTEL PHRASE) across the South? So--

## **TAYLOR BRANCH:**

Well, the grass roots-- the grass roots demonstrations developed and Betty knows more about it than I do but I've studied it a lot. All I'm gonna say and-- and I've-- and I've been on some myself since then. I did register voters. I was so mesmerized by this movement as a Southerner that I was determined to do a little bit of it.

So I did register voters for-- for a summer. And that's when I-- I learned what it's like to force yourself to go where you're afraid to go and to talk to people and-- and l-- t-- try to explain what you're doing. The people in the movement, the young people, because the sit ins-- remember, the first sit ins were dismissed as party raids.

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Because the assumption was so broad and so secure that young people couldn't be doing anything serious. That was just part of the culture. But it wasn't true because people on college campuses had been percolating about, "What are we gonna do about ridiculous segregation?"

And those students were in many respects, many of 'em were the first-- many of the black students were the first ones in their entire family who had ever gone to college. And they're-- and they were the-- emblem of their family hopes to become somebody, to get out of being sharecroppers like John Lewis' parents.

And to go on a demonstration where you're likely to be arrested and maybe get kicked outta school is risking not only your own safety and your own future but your family's dreams and your esteem within the family. S-- so the fact that these sit ins spread and that people studied and they studied the *Bible* and they studied the Constitution and they argued about it-- they took it-- so seriously. And that when the demon-- the sit ins started spontaneously on February 1st, again like those demonstrations three years later that spread from Birmingham, the sit ins spread so rapidly that only ten weeks later, kid-- students rode buses from all over the South to have a meeting about how to coordinate and what did it mean?

And that's how SNCC was formed, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee only ten weeks later because the networks spread so much. And the idea that-- that this enormous risk of getting kicked outta college w-- that stepping through that terrifying, fearful door of-- of-- of making witness for your-- for your beliefs-- was not suicide but it was exhilarating in a way.

E-- even if you got kicked outta school because you had discovered something better. So even-- that's what makes a movement grow, you know? Movements, all movements, start with some sort of small inspiration and they grow because you discover the same kind of feeling-- in other people-- put to new tests.

So grass roots organizing, I mean, the best thing about Dr. King in many respects was that he was the only adult leader who recognized that the sit ins by the students was a breakthrough because he'd been tryin' to preach America outta segregation for all these years and he couldn't do it.

And he said, "There're some things in human nature that are so stubborn that words aren't enough." And these students have found a way with personal witness to amplify their voices. And that grass roots organizing-- grew-- all the way through the movement. I mean, it was a-- it was a SNCC student, Diane Nash, a pioneer not only of the-- of the sit ins but of the-- of the freedom riots who was part of persuading Martin Luther King to use young people in Birmingham. And then when they got bombed-- in that same church out of which the kids marched in September of '63, Diane went to Martin Luther King with a plan to answer that heinous crime with-- a campaign to mobilize Alabama until it-- gave black people the right to vote.

It was the-- the blueprint for Selma came out-- came from a grass roots-- SNCC activist. So-- yes. We focus on the-- we-- we focus on the great-- on the narrative givers-- like King and like the other people. And they are important. The great genius

of King to me is that he put one foot in the Constitution and one foot in the scriptures consistently and gave people their choice and said, "Either way, your own professed values are"-- "are challenged by what we're doing here. How do you answer?"

And he was so skillful at not subjecting one to the other that-- he never got accused of mixing church and state which is really remarkable since that's what he did in every speech. (LAUGH) But he did it in a way that he's not tryin' to s-- s-- subject one or the other.

But he himself recognized that all those words and all that oratorical genius was empty-- if you didn't have the foot soldiers organizing-- so that-- and he-- he got payback a little bit. I mean-- and I don't-- I don't mean this in any way that he would care about; I'm just talking about as far as historical emphasis.

Mississippi freedom summer where Betty was totally overshadowed in the news in the summer of 1964. What King was doing in the most violent-- at the same time in the most violent movement he was ever in, in St. Augustine, Florida and-- not many people even know there was a St. Augustine movement but it was-- it was pretty incredible. But the Mississippi-- because the three civil rights workers were killed on the first night of freedom summer, it-- it-- it d-- dominated the publicity that summer. And-- actually King went there-- to make witness with it but his main focus then was-- was in St. Augustine-- which is really ironic because-- the Klan in St. Augustine, since they were all Catholics-- the Klan would not-- recognize a-- a Klan chapter.

Since they were Catholics and the Klan was anti-Catholic so the white people in St. Augustine formed the ancient city, Hunting and Gun Club. (LAUGHTER) It was an all Catholic group of largely of Minorcans-- but they were fierce and violent-- that summer.

So King got overshadowed that summer by the-- and the or-- the story behind the organizing, the grass roots organizing, and the arguments and the ethical arguments, the political arguments, the movement arguments, the racial arguments, the gender argument that went on behind the scenes in Mississippi-- among these kids-- in their early 20s. Many of them had been getting arrested for a number of years and were going through PSD-- PTSD just like soldiers. And a lot of 'em never recovered but they were doing that-- in-- in this movement that really did change history. We have any more questions? I-- I need to be shorter and (UNINTEL PHRASE) and (UNINTEL PHRASE) at the end.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## FEMALE VOICE:

Mr. Branch, I was just really curious about your idea that you mentioned regarding the 50 year cycle that we seem to be in-- and I completely agree that we seem to be in a present moment of mobilization. But I'm curious how we can use that moment of

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mobilization to not only move through our present-- moment but perhaps prevent-- a repetitious cycle in the future. (LAUGHTER)

## MALE VOICE:

Okay. A white pastor that both you and I know very well-- was recalling how as a young man, he went to-- some kind of-- social justice organization or maybe just a church outreach-- and he was asked by a black man, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "Well, I wanna be part of the cause." Maybe-- the man responded, "Well, go back to your people and tell them to stop"-- "oppressing mine."

Now I have become-- very strong feeling in the past few years that whites need to police our own. And I'm-- I don't know if there's a good answer for-- handling day to day interactions. I'm essentially a native of Baltimore. My whole life has been essentially propped up with a racist undercurrent.

I've come to identify it and confront people with it. Unfortunately through-- mainly through t-- social media but I've been met with a lot of resistance that I'm overreacting. Patience is at a premium in this country now. And I-- I guess my question is how do I-- tell my people to stop oppressing?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## FEMALE VOICE:

I was just-- I was struck during your talk when you t-- when you mentioned-- the textbooks, when you were-- like the-- the history that you grew up, you-- the version of the Civil War that you grew up. And that al-- and juxtaposed with, I think, two or three times, you said with-- with-- with emphasis of that, "We need to expand on the wonder of race."

And I've never thought about it in that way so I'm just wondering how-- you know, all of us, the textbooks we all-- probably most of us grew up with were very Western civilization and right-centered. And so how can we-- change that? Like how can we go about and change civic-- you know, the young children grow up with not their-- you know, how can we-- how can we put that in and-- and this idea of the wonder of race, you know, how can that be done?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## MALE VOICE:

Yeah. So when I look through this room and, you know, you and I, we're sis-- white males. We're talkin' about race. But we're the majority demographic-- with a demographic that has privilege in this country. And when I look through this room in a country-- or in a city that's not really majority white, (LAUGH) I see majority white

people. And so it makes me wonder how can we effectively and sincerely make change in race and make racial progress, make LGBTQ progress, make-- gender progress as the privileged demographic? Yeah.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## FEMALE VOICE:

I just wanna say I'd-- I appreciated your talk and also-- I've become a recent student in all this history to educate myself. And so I've read the book by Leon Litwack who won the Pulitzer Prize in '75-- *Been In the Storm So Long* which is a 500 page chron-- chronicle of what happened in 1960-- in 1864.

And the few years right after the Emancipation Proclamation and it's a wonderful book. And the last one I just read was *Warmth of Other Sons*-- by Isabel Wilkerson who talks about the period that-- I guess what you were asking about which is-- the mig-- the black migration from 1915 when they got out however they could to get up north into different cities.

And then what they f-- what people faced there and it w-- I-- I mean, they risked their lives to be killed and arrested just because they wouldn't get off of the-- the Jim Crow laws. You couldn't get off of the sidewalk. You had to move to let the white person go through.

And these things persisted in the north and it just hasn't been easy. And then we have this movement that was so catastrophic and I lived through that. I was nine years old and I remember what was goin' on in Baltimore. And I remember what was goin' on in my neighborhood in Hamilton.

And people were sayin', "The blacks are gonna come up the"-- "up the street." And people were moving and in my church bulletin, it kept sayin' week after week, "This family moved to Tass (PH)." And, "This family moved to Tass." And, "That family"-- I went, "I used to take the Number 19 bus at nine years old and go down to Peabody Institute and take dance lessons by myself. I was never afraid. So I'm happy to be enlightened by these books and by the whole department of African literature in-- the Ian Opera library and I suggest everybody come visit. Thank you.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

## TAYLOR BRANCH:

There is a lot of good scholarship going on now, trying to revise and correct history but it doesn't-- it d-- it-- it has two (UNINTEL PHRASE) books by Eric Fulner (PH)-- Nicholas Lemon, on and on, Isabel-- dear-- is a dear friend, wonderful-- lady. There is a lot of really good scholarship going on to correct-- the mythology of the post-Civil War period. But I wanna say two points about it: number one, it hasn't reached the level of textbooks yet, long way. And if we wanna affect textbooks, we're gonna have



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to organize like right wingers did in Texas to control textbooks and make them accurate.

They organize locally and-- and I-- I see signs that people are doing that now. Secondly, even somebody as wonderful as Sevan Woodward (PH) and-- I was fortunate enough to get to know him. The first chapter of his book, *The Origins of the New South* which is correcting the mythology of white terror, the first chapter is called what?

*The Redeemers*. So the-- the people-- even the people-- it's penetrated the vocabulary so the-- the people who are correcting and tryin' to overturn it don't have any other language to use. Nick Lemon's book is called *Redemption* about what happened in Mississippi when-- when it was really the turning point in Reconstruction when-- the North forced Grant to pull-- you know, to pull out-- rather than answer a great massacre.

By the way, that massacre-- well, the one in Colfax, Louisiana, I mentioned of monuments, Confederate monuments, and lynching going on at the same time, Colfax, Louisiana has the only monument on lynching that-- that existed. And I kid you not; it is a monument to two white lynchers who were killed assaulting a hundred and killing 165 black people holed up in a church.

And the monument they built (LAUGH) was-- was to the two lynchers who was killed. That's the only-- lynching monument. Now-- now there's a movement, Bryan Stevenson, some of you may know-- but it's just in an infant stage. Now other questions that were asked? (UNINTEL) If we are at a turning point and movements are starting and we're percolating, it-- it's up to everybody just like it was for those kids, like Betty and every-- to-- to keep movements going, to take risks, to-- to ask somebody else if they feel the same way you do-- to push and to organize.

Look, I-- I don't particularly care. There're arguments all the time about tactical, whether white people should deal with white and black people deal with black. As long as they're talkin' about it and arguing about it, I don't really care.

I think some people get caught up in the things about th-- whether it's class or race and this sort of thing. And my-- my usual rule of thumb is that if somebody's objecting-- that they need to do the other one, they're just trying to-- that you need to switch to the other one, they're just trying to avoid the subject (LAUGH) of-- of-- of what to do forward on a new agenda. They're both involved and-- and-- usually-- underneath it, it's race.

How do we know about the next movement, the next turn in the cycle? We haven't even gotten through this one yet (LAUGH) and who knows how long it's gonna take? So I don't really have any-- any-- any clue about that. I just hope we survive this with all the civility and imagination and citizen activism that we can muster.

Because I think that we're gonna need it. I just think that we need to recognize that-- that in a world that is inevitably shrinking and where people from the whole world are coming here, we need to recognize that we have a huge start because we are a multi-ethnic, aspiring democracy with people from the whole world.

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And we don't have a language-based, territorial-based or even culture-based notion of citizenship; we have a constitutional base of citizenship. And-- and that ought to be a wonderful advantage to us and inspiration to the world to get us through-- this movement. So I-- I hope we can all take strength in that and-- and also do whatever Diana tells us to do to help (LAUGHTER) the Open Society Institute and thanks very much to the University of Baltimore. (APPLAUSE)

## **DIANA MORRIS:**

Thank you so much, Taylor. It's just a wonderful example of-- the value of real commitment to scholarship and to activism and to respect for every single human being. So at the Open Society, we're really trying to remove the kind of barriers that are keeping people sort of immobilized in concentrated poverty here that has at its roots-- a lot of racist structures. And I hope that you'll join us in this work-- but I think as Taylor said, it all starts with each one of us individually but we'll be a lot more powerful when we work together. So thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)

\* \* \*END OF TRANSCRIPT\* \* \*