THE SQUARE ONE PROJECT

ROUNDTABLE ON THE FUTURE OF JUSTICE POLICY

THE VALUES OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM:
IMPLICATIONS FOR JUSTICE POLICY AND PRACTICE

KEYNOTE EVENING GATHERING

Zoom meeting
5:00 p.m. EDT

Thursday,
April 22, 2021
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MR. TRAVIS: So I'm just going to get started. People may join us. As Katharine said, this is a more informal part of this meeting of the roundtable; this is not being recorded. We'll start recording with our keynote at 6:00 Eastern time.

But we wanted to just take this time before we get started in that more formal way to, first of all, welcome everybody back to the Square One Roundtable, to provide some opportunity for reflection on our last meeting.

And I think it's only appropriate that we expand that lens to provide an opportunity for reflection on what's happened recently in our world with the Chauvin verdict and the reactions and the continued visibility and public discussion in Congress, as we speak, on issues of police accountability and the additional -- there are names being added to a long list of young Black and Brown men and women who have been killed by law enforcement.

So I think Square One is a way for us to be together in communion and to talk to each other about things that are important. So I just want to explicitly put that on the table as we also talk about the last time that we were together.

I looked at some of my notes from last session
last week and was very struck by -- if you were to do a word search through this transcript from last week, I think the word that would show up most frequently and perhaps most unexpectedly, but certainly most frequently, would be "healing."

It was such a theme from our last discussion, as a value, as an aspiration, as something that's important as an activity that we embrace, and I was really struck by the constancy of that word and the concept as it moved through our discussion.

But we also had other goals in mind, and we had the large ambition of discussing values. That is the theme of this last roundtable for the Square One Project, the role of values, the value of values, which values and how are they embraced at an individual level, at a system level, at an organizational.

So the values discussion that we kicked off last time, with a just dazzling panel that Katharine facilitated with Leah Wright-Rigueur and Monica Bell. Also, as Bruce later characterized, it became a discussion of values on the one hand and politics on the other.

So even though our discussion was about values and that's what we wanted to foreground, that we're here to talk about the role of values, the importance of values, and what values would we aspire to, as we imagine
justice, the tagline of Square One, we very quickly ran into issues of politics and how do we think about strategy? How do we think about coalition-building? How do we think about the really fascinating discussion at the end where Nicole, who can't be with us tonight, but she really helped us think about the question of working with stakeholders, you know, and who sits at what table?

What is the role of system actors in the reimagination process? And how do we hold people to ethical standards? How do we hold ourselves to ethical standards? And you will remember the wonderful metaphor that Pastor Mike brought into our discussion of leaving the porch light on -- was actually from Cornel West, but he brought it into our discussion.

How do we think about the process of moving forward? And this has been a theme throughout Square One: incrementalism versus fundamental reimagination and reform.

We'll take this on directly tomorrow when we take on the question of abolition versus -- and we put them in tension intentionally -- some irreducible minimum. Is there something that we need a system for as we're thinking about what gets abolished, what gets torn down before we build something up?

So this values question is very much part of a
strategic question. How do we talk about where we want to be? How do we talk about what's important? How do we use that as a way to name the harms that have been done in the name of justice and the ways in which the system continues to do those harms? So I just wanted to remind us a little bit of the journey that we traveled last time.

We'll -- just if you look at our agenda today, we're going to go into about 5:55 Eastern time, at which time Katharine will take over the facilitating mic and facilitate the keynote discussion between Marlon and Daryl.

Our keynote is going to be a highlight of the day, and that's when we will go public again. And their topic will be reckoning, reckoning with the justice system. But let me just ask for -- just to throw the floor open, for anybody who's been thinking about our last discussion, who wants to bring some of their later thoughts into the room today, before we get started?

One of the benefits of taking the roundtable over through three sessions, even though it's one roundtable, is that we have a chance to reflect and a chance to think about the sessions in between times. So who would like to get started with anything that struck them as important, something they wanted to continue to discuss, something that they wanted to bring into the
current moment, and including an invitation to talk about
the moment in our country's history and how this affects
our thinking about values and reimagining justice?

Kris?

MR. STEELE: Thank you. I couldn't find my
hand button. I just want to kind of share with the group
that in Oklahoma -- I want to be honest, but I don't
like -- I still am holding out hope that eventually
everybody in Square One is going to come visit Oklahoma
and it's going to be the greatest event in our state's
history when that happens. And I'm hesitant, because I
want to deter that from happening.

But one of the things that has been
particularly hard -- and I just want to try to give an
example of our struggle locally. On the day that the
Chauvin case -- the verdict came out and there was reason
to celebrate and reason to be hopeful, and I talked to a
number of people who said that they had given up, all but
given up on the justice system, and then to see the
verdict come out the way that it did, decisively and
relatively quickly, matched with the same day our governor
signed into law an immunity that says that if anyone
physically runs over a person during a protest because
they feel threatened, it's okay.

Like you can run over somebody that -- like if
you drive into a protest that feels like a riot -- and
that's completely subjective -- and if you feel threatened
or whatever, you can just run over the person in front
of -- physically like with your vehicle, and you won't be
held liable.

And it was such a contrast to say, you know, on
one hand, we're on the verge of a legitimate racial
reckoning, or at least an awareness -- I don't want to
overstate it -- and then to see in my state that we're
still holding on to -- we can't accept that there would be
reasons for people to be inconvenienced during a protest,
and that we're just going to say, run over them if they
get in your way here in Oklahoma.

I think it's such a contradictory of values and
to kind of see that all happen in the same 24 hours was
really hard, hard for me personally. And then in addition
to that, I just -- marry that experience with the
discussion that we had last time on how we apply our
values consistently, both to those who are oppressed by a
broken system and to those who are causing or creating
laws that says that you can physically run over somebody
if they get in your way?

I mean -- and so I've been struggling with that
since our last discussion, and then particularly, even
more so this week, in just the events that are taking
place, both nationally and locally. I don't have an answer.

MR. TRAVIS: Well, we don't always have to have answers here. Sometimes stating what's on your mind and in your heart is enough to advance the conversation. So if people would use the blue raise-your-hand, just to make it a little bit easier, so we can see if we have a queue lining up.

But thanks, Kris, for that observation. That is a harsh reality that you just described.

Nneka?

DR. TAPIA: Yeah, Kris, I echo a lot of your sentiment, and I spent Tuesday in silence and much of Wednesday in silence because it was difficult, I think, to see a reason to celebrate, with the Chauvin verdict. And I think it was difficult to see a reason to celebrate for -- like something that you mentioned with the signing of this law, but also to then hear about the murder of another young Black baby on the same day, who by at least the last report I saw, had called the police herself.

And it made me reflect on two comments that were made in our discussion last week, and that was, one, that -- I wrote them down -- compromise has failed, so there has to be a radical re-creation. And for me, I think what happened on Tuesday was a representation of how
compromise has failed, and even in the face of the Chauvin
verdict, how we can't afford to celebrate that, even
though a part of me, which is that we could, but there's
so much more that needs to be done, that we have to
continue to push, or at least I believe we have to
continue to push for that radical re-creation of this
system.

And then the second part was that empathy has
been absent so long, and it's a difficult concept for
people to grasp, when we're talking about the carceral
state. And what showed up for me was that it's not just a
difficult concept for us to grasp when we're talking about
the carceral state, but to put it bluntly, it's a
difficult concept for us to grasp when we're talking about
Black and Brown bodies.

And I put empathy on the same lines as another
concept we talked a lot about last week, and that was
human dignity. And so for me, I'm still in this what I
call a season of mourning, because we're constantly
challenged by a world that thinks that these small gains
are sometimes enough, and so many of us understand that
it's not.

MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Nneka. We'll wait a
second for others to offer their observations. Two very
powerful starting points from Kris and Nneka, which I
appreciate.

Bruce, your muted button is off, so does that mean that you're leaning in?

MR. WESTERN: I wasn't going to.

MR. TRAVIS: Oh, okay.

MR. WESTERN: I was going to step back, as --

MR. TRAVIS: That's fine. That's fine.

DR. SIMON: Let me jump in, just to -- because I get paid to not allow awkward silences to depressed students in a difficult year. But no. Let me yield to Vivian and get in line right behind her.

MR. TRAVIS: The floor is yours, Vivian.

Thanks.

MS. NIXON: Thank you.

MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Jon.

MS. NIXON: Yeah. Nneka just kind of reminded me of exactly what my struggle has been since the verdict, and Jeremy, by reminding us that healing was a word that was used multiple times the last time we met, and I'm stuck somewhere in the middle of not celebration but a moment of respite to just say, okay, at least this is one moment that is not going to add to the tremendous burden that we are carrying and have carried for centuries.

On the other hand, there's so much more work to do, and there are so many reasons to still be vigilant,
that celebration doesn't seem like the word, but you know, I want to find a space somewhere in between the constant anxiety-provoking rage and celebration that I can live in for a minute, just for a short period of time, and maybe think clearly and come up with innovations and ideas in that space, because I think that if you're constantly in that heightened state of anxiety and fear and worry, it's hard to be creative and think about the future in a different way.

So that's where I have been since the verdict.

MR. TRAVIS: Jon?

DR. SIMON: Yeah. Well, one of the things that I wanted to raise last time but didn't quite know how to frame it, and maybe it ties in here, is sort of different generational experiences, and I know some of us are part of the long boomer generation, and others aren't.

I don't know if there's anyone from the silent generation on this call. It would be great. But for me, you know, I have memories of so many leaders, especially in Black-led racial justice movements, you know, gunned down in the '60s and early '70s.

I was growing up in Chicago, and a year after the events that Jeremy will remember, the police riot in front of the Democratic National Convention which, as you can see, involved a lot of white reporters and delegates
as well as -- and probably less Black people than normally
were getting beaten up in Chicago that particular night.

But a year later, they killed Fred Hampton in
his bed, and now depicted in the movie *Judas and the Black
Messiah*. I guess I'm not -- I'm reaching for a way of
saying, there is an archive that feels to me like it's --
progress is the wrong word, but there's been struggle
nonstop in all of these places.

Like, Chicago, to me, is one of the places
today leading the way in terms of abolition thinking and
practice, even though it has some of the worst criminal
justice institutions, you know, in the country. And
that's a result of work that's been going on sort of since
Hampton was murdered that probably has never stopped.

So I -- you know, I'm kind of holding space for
that. In terms of the verdict, I mean, I teach criminal
law, so for me, it was a surprise and a surprise how
cynical I was about our culture, that I thought this would
be another Rodney King beating trial again. And I
actually was surprised that the defense lawyer didn't try
to game the video more and make some of those moves.

And maybe in retrospect, people will say that
he should have, but I don't know that it would have
worked. I mean, I think he calculated that it wouldn't
work this time. And again, that's not justice, but it may
be a kind of cultural progress that will allow more political momentum to gain.

MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Jon.

Yes, Marcia, your thoughts?


I wanted to start off by just reading two different quotes that struck with me in doing some work Tuesday that kind of sandwiched the verdict coming out, and these quotes stuck with me.

So they're both from John Trudell, part of the American Indian Movement. The first one reads: "No matter what they ever do to us, we must always act for the love of our people and the Earth."

And the second quote is: "It's like there is this predator energy on this planet, and this predator energy feeds on the essence of the spirit."

The first event that happened on Tuesday, little did we know that the verdict was going to happen that same day, and this -- the organization where I am the executive director, Alianza for Youth Justice, we had been working for six months building our base to be able to do this event, a screen convening, and we had more than 67 organizations represented, and literally, from the beginning to the end was -- you know, we hovered with healing.
And it was a feeling. We made space with the feeling that needed to be just a particular feeling, to really hold us in sacred space so that we could talk about what it's going to take to end incarceration for Brown youth, and the diversity of our Brown youth, everything from two-spirit Afro-Latinos to Indigenous and everything in between.

And I have to say that it was such an intergenerational group of individuals that we learned so much just from listening to formerly system impacted young people. And then later, after the verdict, I'd been teaching a class called Ollin Youth.

Ollin stands for movement in Nahuatl. And in that class, it's DJJ -- formerly DJJ young people who are learning to become policy advocates so that in their own counties, they can -- as DJJ closes by July 1 and no more kids are sent to DJJ, that these young people can advocate strongly that money and power be shifted to the community.

And so sitting there with these young individuals, you know, we checked in with conocimiento, and one by one, you know, commenting on the verdict, and there was this, like -- this sense of -- this is no big deal in regards to the verdict.

Yes, in some ways, you can see it as a huge victory for the family and maybe even for the Black
community, but one by one, they started saying, first of all, he's probably only going to do this -- you know, you remove this.

You remove that. He's not going to do 40, 50 years of time. He'll do maybe four. He's not going to be -- you know, he'll be treated well. You know, and they're saying he's not going to be treated the way I got treated, the way that I was put in.

And as I listened, it -- there was almost like a wave of water thrown at me, to really listen to the experiences of young people who have been in the system and the way in which their reality gets informed by what happened to them.

And so it was a real strong reality check for me to mark that, yes, it was a victory, but there's -- as many of you have all said, there's so much more that still needs to get done. And the healing is so critical, because at least we walk around always wounded.

There needs to be that well of strength to be able to still get up in the morning and keep at it. So that's what I wanted to say. Thank you.

MR. TRAVIS: Thank you, Marcia, so much for bringing those voices into our -- into this discussion. And you know, as you said, very, very thought-provoking and sobering in a way, but very real. And we thank you.
Thank you for that.

So welcome to Dona. Nice to see you hear as well. Hi. We're -- it's an open floor, Dona, for people to talk about whatever is on their minds. We have explicitly invited reflections on our time together last time and reflections on the Chauvin verdict and what it means for the pursuit of justice in this country.

Yes, Courtney?

MS. ROBINSON: I've been struggling, I think, to put it all into words, and so it's really been great to be in this space with you all to talk about it. There was a sigh of relief, but that was really it; it was just a sigh of relief.

And then I had a meeting with the Austin Police Department, because I've been asked to do training. The amount of pressure I think I feel around training is interesting, because what they've asked me to do is history of policing and race in a four-hour period.

I asked for more time. I was granted more time. We are going to spread it out over a few months. But I feel this sort of overwhelming responsibility, because I know that we need more than training. Like I know that part.

But what is expected is that officers will leave more aware, hopefully, and engage differently in the
community. Now, Austin as a city, we're doing some really
great things. Sukyi is actually leading a group that's
looking at police policies.

And so like it's this, we're doing good work. Why don't I feel elated? Like because I -- because
they're so much to do. Someone said -- and I don't
remember; maybe it was Jon who talked about the work has
literally been going on for decades and decades, and so
I've just been trying to sit with -- is my little small
piece enough?

And how do I encourage someone else to do a
little small piece? So I'm -- I just have a lot of
thoughts, in thinking about -- am I taking good care of
myself all of this? Because I do think that, when you do
this kind of like work, there's a piece -- there are
pieces of skin that you sort of leave behind in the game.

And so it is -- it's difficult, I think, to
process this kind of loss over and over and over again but
still try and stay engaged in doing the work in effective
ways. And so I'm wondering how we do that better, I
guess, maybe how I do it better, the healing and the work
happening at the same time.

I started watching some videos with Angela
Davis as she talked about radical self-care, and Alicia
Garza, and I'm starting to think about how does that
really look in everyday life for me? And how do I continue to do this work around race and policing, and around race and schooling, and around race and incarceration for young people, and not dive so deep that I'm sad and miserable all the time?

So I just think that these couple days have sort of brought a lot of different kinds of feelings, because so many different kinds of things are happening, like exciting that our police department is trying to do something different, exciting that our juvenile probation office is doing something different.

Like we are doing some different things, and that part is exciting. But it still feels like we're so far away from Black and Brown bodies being treated in the exact same way that white bodies are treated, and I think that that's the part that's hard to reconcile.

MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Courtney. You are getting some support in the chat from some of your Square One colleagues, which I encourage you to check out. But --

MS. ROBINSON: Thank you.

MR. TRAVIS: -- Jon Simon said your training is not -- it's too narrow a word to talk about what you're doing, which is you're representing, you're talking about history, you're standing up for what you just said you find important, as a value to represent.
And then -- and that -- and we talked about this also in Oakland, I remember, about the need for -- maybe this is a Square One Project, actually, for -- to keep connectivity so that people can find sources of support and self-healing and encouragement and mentoring. It's a big challenge that you just articulated, Courtney, and I just want to say, I commend you for, on the same day, being -- standing in front of the Austin police officers talking about, for four hours, the history of race and policing. God bless you. And that's really, really quite spectacular, and --

MS. ROBINSON: So I haven't done the training yet. We are just talking about doing it, and so --

MR. TRAVIS: Okay. Well, you're there.

MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

MR. TRAVIS: And whatever it is --

MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

MR. TRAVIS: -- you didn't back out. You're leaning in. You're taking it on.

MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

MR. TRAVIS: And just, you know, brava. That's great.

MS. ROBINSON: Thank you all. I appreciate it.

MR. TRAVIS: And if any of us can help you on
that, we're happy to be your support system. I see that
Keith has his blue hand up. So you are recognized, Mr.
Wattley.

MR. WATTLEY: Hello, everybody. I had to turn
my light off. I'm Zoomed out, and I'm getting a headache
from it all. You know, a reason that I like this group so
much is because it's kind of okay to show up without
solutions, whereas I feel like a lot of time the people at
my work are looking for me to have the answer of what we
should do about this or that.

And -- but you know, something that Vivian said
really resonated with me, and just sort of, you know, gave
words to what I've been feeling. It's like there's no
letup, like there's always another thing, and it's always
the same kind of thing.

I mean -- and I've -- since Rodney King was
beaten back in '91, I've never watched any of the videos
that go viral, never seen any of them. I never needed to
see more than one viral video or Black man, Black woman,
police beat. You know, that's all I need to see.

And it has the same effect as what I saw with
the Rodney King beating. And it's kind of like, you
know -- we talk about a type of, you know, post-traumatic
stress, but if you never get post the trauma, then it's
like it's just always here.
And you know, it's one -- even this Chauvin, I mean, I didn't -- I don't even think I got a sigh. I didn't -- this is -- it's kind of what I thought would happen, and I have no reason to believe that it represents anything positive from this system, and then, turn around, there is, you know, Ma'Khia Bryant.

It's just another thing. There will always be -- it feels like there will always be something else, and it is hard to -- it's hard to keep going sometimes. It's hard to keep doing what we do. So I think some kind of support for the supporters -- count me in.

MR. TRAVIS: Some of the -- yeah, go ahead, Dona. Yeah.

DR. MURPHEY: No. I was just going to say that the reason I was running late is that we had actually planned a meeting for a group of faith leaders and community advocates to plan a series of conversations around what has been happening with respect to violence in the Asian-American community and some of what has come up now in terms of like Black-Asian solidarity, and also like historic, like, cultural misunderstandings, racism within our community. Yeah. And so a lot of complex issues that I think still have not been discussed and grappled with.

And so we wanted to start this series of conversations. And something that I thought was really
brilliant is the woman who is facilitating this whole series was very intentional about making sure that we get together and have fun.

She's like part of what we do in building community is that we can be together with one another and not talk about all of the heavy things all of the time. And I think that's really important. It is really important, because then we get to be fully human with one another, and part of being human is joy. Right? That's a very, very important part of being human.

And then she's like -- I know that people still might be nervous about getting together in person, but I'm thinking, if we're vaccinated, maybe we can get together at a restaurant in like a few weeks.

And you know, the people are comfortable here, and I think it's important. I mean, she is correct. Like we can't just keep having conversations that are really, really weighty conversations and keep dealing with some of the same issues that are going to be issues because they have solutions that are going to be long-arc solutions, you know.

And that's just what it is. I mean, the system was built over hundreds, if not thousands of years. Right? The argument can be made that some of these systems have been around in some form for thousands of
years, so it's not going to change overnight. And we can't always be in it such that it like is impacting our mental health. Yeah. So anyway, I just wanted to share that.

MR. TRAVIS: I'm reminded -- one of my early heroes is the former DA in Austin, actually, Courtney, Ronnie Earle, a progressive prosecutor before there was such a term, and he ran on a platform of community justice, which was an interesting prosecutorial platform, and he was often asked to define community.

And he said, community is a group of people in common purpose who share joy and pain. And if you can share both of them, anyone with common purpose -- it's not geographic, it's not through affiliations, it's just if you're in common purpose and you share joy and being in pain both, you have created community.

And I really resonate with what your facilitator has said. I think that's really important for groups that are doing hard work particularly, is to have fun together and be light together, be human together, and then they're stronger together. Who else? We have another couple minutes before we're joined by Marlon and Daryl.

I just want to open it up for any other comments. Bruce?
MR. WESTERN: Dona's comments were very resonant for me, and I -- all the comments were. And I think it's interesting, the -- I've -- you know, it's very close to the surface right now, and we sort of know it, but we're more or less aware of it at different times, but the work we do is very proximate to violence.

It's very, very close to violence, and the Chauvin case, you know, just brings that to the surface. And I think that it's very difficult to do that. It's very difficult to be so close to violence all the time, and I think our natural human tendency is to recoil from violence and be distant from violence, but for all sorts of reasons, we've all chosen work in a way that's very, very close to violence.

And to make progress, we need a lot of human connection, and we need people around this room, brilliant organizers and brilliant communicators. And a lot of the antidote to violence is different kinds of connection, whether it's political or cultural or intellectual.

And so that's a really hard project, to be proximate to violence and yet to try and find a lot of connection. And there's a lot of stress on our social solidarity as a community right now. Something I've been thinking about a lot over the last year is the intergenerational rift that is threatening in our politics
and our work.

I feel like I'm often -- young people who share our interests and mission are somehow in a different place from where I am, and I'm trying to work this out and trying hard to be open to what they're telling me, even though I'm not always finding myself immediately in agreement, and I'm trying to work that through.

So that's a stress on our solidarity. And I think that, you know, we've had a really good discussion about sort of allies and coalitions and the status of system actors and so on in our project of solidarity in our first meeting.

And all of these things are under a lot of stress. COVID is just a massive obstacle to being in solidarity with people and being in fellowship with people, and I think we're going through that at the moment.

But they're sort of reflections I have. Our work is really proximate to violence, and we try and make progress through different kinds of connection, but that's just under tremendous stress right now.

MR. TRAVIS: Thanks. Thank you, Bruce. Very, very sobering observations, but the proximity to violence which is -- does define our world and our work and our -- what's front-of-mind for us, and as Keith said, even if
people don't watch the TV, it's still front of mind, 
because we have seen this movie before. 

So in the spirit of healing and self-help, 
before we break, and to end with a little bit more of a 
positive note, and taking Dona's colleague's exhortation 
to think positively, let me just ask people on the screen, 
what are you doing for yourself? 

How are you -- you know, Nneka talked about 
just being silent for two days. Vivian talked about a 
respite, although it was short, and you know, it would be 
better if that respite lasted longer. 

Courtney has been talking about how she is 
reminding herself of the importance of her work, even 
though it feels small, just a way of sort of taking care 
of yourself. 

So it's just like -- who is doing things that 
they think are worthy of sharing with our colleagues here? 
Because we are in common purpose, doing different things, 
each of us, but making contributions. And if it's hard, 
it's hard. 

And who has a suggestion before we wrap it up? 

MS. STAMP: I'll jump in before I need -- 

MR. TRAVIS: Yeah. 

MS. STAMP: -- to sign off. 

MR. TRAVIS: Yeah.
MS. STAMP: I just want to really thank Vivian and Courtney for your comments, both in the chat and as we discussed. And you know, I'm involved in this work from such an incredible place of privilege, being able to sit in my own house, in my own little office, you know, just staring at the screen all day.

And yet I think my stress comes from being overwhelmed by institutions, and not really sure, you know, kind of picking at the edges, you know. Yeah, that's important. Keep picking, but when do we see the institutions really start to metamorphosize?

And so I've been trying to take advantage of COVID and get the hell out of Portland. And my husband and I were able to leave children with other people and spent five days on the really frigid and windy Oregon coast, and worked from there. No vacation days, but just being able to work a bunch of hours, and then I was on the beach when I learned about the verdict.

And just to sit in front of the ocean and just be in nature, it was just a good thing to do. So be in nature.

MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Abbey. I know that you have to leave us for another appointment. So thanks for being with us today. Other suggestions or thoughts, stories?
(No response.)

MR. TRAVIS: So what I would like to do, and I'll look at Katharine to see if this makes sense, is just to really sort of shut down this part of our discussion, let people take three to five minutes just to breathe, walk around a bit, you know, maybe go get something to eat or drink, before we welcome -- oh, there's Carol.

Because we've had a pretty rich, sometimes intense and very wonderfully personal, intimate conversation. So let's just put a bookend to it.

Katharine, I'm looking to you for a yes. Okay.

Come back in --

MS. HUFFMAN: Yeah.

MR. TRAVIS: -- a few minutes, and put our energies into listening to Marlon and Daryl. Make sense?

MS. HUFFMAN: That sounds great. Yes. And I will just quickly, before folks step away, let you all know that we're going to do -- hi, Marlon and Daryl. Welcome, welcome. What we're going to do during this session is ask everyone except for Marlon and Daryl to please turn off your video.

What I'm doing here is I'm about to give you more than just a couple of minutes to not have to be on screen --

MALE VOICE: Great. Thanks.
MS. HUFFMAN: -- but we'll ask everyone who is here to go off video so that when we go live, our observers will see me for just a minute, welcoming and introducing Marlon and Daryl, and then we'll all -- I'll go off video as well, and we'll all get to listen in on their conversation together.

And then right at a minute or two before 7:00, I'll come back on and we'll ask all of you all to turn your videos back on so that again we'll be populated as a group, have a chance for discussion among us, and also we'll take some questions from our livestream audience at that point.

So if that works for everybody? Again, please stay connected. Just turn off your video and then you won't be showing up on the screen. And of course, everyone will be muted as well. And then we'll be able to rejoin the conversation after we listen in to Daryl and Marlon for a while, if that works for everybody?

Sukyi, pipe in if I missed anything there on -- with logistical instructions.

MS. McMAHON: No, it's 100 percent.

MS. HUFFMAN: Great.

MR. TRAVIS: Perfect.

MS. HUFFMAN: Excellent.

MR. TRAVIS: See y'all soon.
MS. HUFFMAN: Beautiful. Sounds good.

MR. WESTERN: What time are we back? Six o'clock?

MS. HUFFMAN: Video back on at 7:00. Yes. Marlon and Daryl will start at 6:00. Sorry. Is that what you're asking? Yes.

MR. WESTERN: Yes, that's what I was asking.

MS. HUFFMAN: Livestream starts at 6:00. Right. Yes.

MR. WESTERN: Thank you.

MS. HUFFMAN: That's great. Sure. Of course, if anyone wants to stay now and chat with Marlon and Daryl, you're welcome to as well.

(Whereupon, a short recess was taken.)

MS. HUFFMAN: Good afternoon, everyone -- good evening. My name is Katharine Huffman, and I'm the Executive Director of the Square One Project of the Columbia Justice Lab. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this keynote event of our fifth and final roundtable on the Future of Justice Policy.

Over the course of this roundtable, which began last week and continues into next week, we're grappling with the values of justice. And tonight I'm thrilled to welcome our keynote speakers, Marlon Peterson and Daryl Atkinson.
Daryl is the founder and co-director of Forward Justice, based in Durham, North Carolina, and Marlon is the host of the Decarcerated Podcast and the founder and Chief Re-imaginator of The Precedential Group, based in New York City.

We're really thrilled to have Daryl and Marlon with us tonight. Both of them have been with us from the beginning of the Square One Project's work. Both took part in the inaugural roundtable convening in Durham, North Carolina, in the fall 2018, which focused on our history of racial and economic inequity and its implications for the future of justice.

At that roundtable, Daryl and Forward Justice, the organization where -- that he leads, was our community partner. He generously invited us to his home to put the spotlight on the successes and challenges for reimagining justice there in Durham, and he designed and led the Justice in Durham session that we've used as a model for our special local sessions ever since in our roundtables.

Daryl has also been a member of the Square One Executive Session, which has directly influenced the trajectory of these roundtables, and as an Executive Session member, he's coauthored a forthcoming paper on the power of parsimony -- the value of parsimony, with Jeremy Travis.
The list of contributions that Marlon has made and continues to make to Square One is lengthy. In Durham, he was a participant in our roundtable and also provided a really breathtaking on-stage interview with Melissa Harris-Perry, and at our Oakland roundtable, he again joined us as a participant around the table and then took to the stage to interview Black Lives Matter co-founder, Alicia Garza.

He's allowed us to turn the tables on him and become the interviewee in a recent Square One panel on reimagining safety, policing abolition, and the future of democracy. And The Precedential Group is currently working with Square One on a project to foster discussions about reckoning at the international level.

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention that Marlon also has a book that just come out, which I hope will be mentioned in the course of this conversation and is just an incredible addition to the learning and to the conversation about justice in our country.

So with all of that, it feels wonderful, just right, to welcome Daryl and Marlon to this virtual space tonight and dialogue with each other and with all of us about where we've been and where we're headed in this ongoing conversation.

Daryl, Marlon, I'm going to hand things over to
you both and ask you to consider the question that's front and center in this roundtable: What are the values that should guide efforts to create safety and reduce harm? And can a focus on values contribute to creative paths for, guide us towards a reckoning with the justice system?

So with that, I will go off screen and look forward to this discussion, and then we'll be joining back in a little bit later for more conversation and questions.

But, Daryl and Marlon, thank you all so much, and over to you.

MR. PETERSON: Well, first of all, thank you for that, Katharine. Thank you for that wonderful introduction for both of us. Yeah. We've been -- Daryl, we've been kind of hanging out for a minute now, huh?

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah. They asked for a three-year blood oath at the very beginning, and they held to their word.

MR. PETERSON: And they held to it. I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I was -- as I come out of North Carolina. I was like, okay. And here we are three years -- I don't know how long -- two, three years later.

A lot of good conversations are obviously had. I got to meet you. Right? You know, I'd heard about you but never got to meet you, so I got to meet you and
obviously other people, so there's definitely some good
that came out of this.

No, I'm playing. There's definitely a lot good
that came out of this, a lot of people, a lot of
partnerships and conversations. But how are you doing?

MR. ATKINSON: I am well. I mean, personally,
I feel really good. You know, I'm about to come off a
brief sabbatical, and it was good to be able to unplug on
work, and you know, really it was timely, because my
family, we needed to focus in on some things, particularly
with the young one doing remote schooling.

I can't imagine if I would have been working
full-time when that was really, really intensive until we
figured some other stuff out. So yeah, I mean, you --
maybe I went a little bit too personal there, but --

MR. PETERSON: No, no.

MR. ATKINSON: -- that's kind of where my head
has been, and ready to, you know, dive back into the work.

MR. PETERSON: You know, I'm happy -- I think
the personal is where we've got to go. Right? I mean,
not necessarily like, you know, everyone's personal
situation. I don't have to discuss everything, but I
think the personal ultimately -- you know, the question
that they posed for that is posed, where the values that
should lead the discussions on safety and harm, these are
personal -- this is a personal interrogation, this is a personal sort of deliberation that's required, I think.

And obviously we are on stage in terms of the current events. I mean, I don't think there's ever a time when safety and harm is not a current event, but particularly now, obviously, with what's happening between the police -- you know, with Derek Chauvin and the other police killings, and the mass shootings, and this, you know -- obviously, the continual, sad, you know, intra-community violence that we saw or experienced it as a seven-year-old girl, I believe, that was shot the other -- a couple of days ago at a drive-through.

So I mean, this is personal. There's no way these conversations can be -- I mean, probably part of the problem in the past was that in the past, for the most part, these conversations weren't personal enough, you know, I think, or at least not personal -- or to the people who were directly impacted to it, like the -- you know, the persons and the personalities and the ways it impacts people like us.

It's probably -- not probably. You know, it wasn't part of the conversation, and we're still struggling to get up in there as we stand. So -- but I mean, how do we address this then? I mean, like thinking about what are the values of the discussion on safety and
harm?

So how do I -- I was literally -- so I was literally on a conversation right before this with someone, and they asked me -- you know, reading my book and they are, you know -- in the media space, but this was a, you know, one-on-one conversation; it wasn't a media conversation.

And they asked, well, how do you deal with somebody like a Chauvin, then? Right? How do you reckon with that? Safety and harm. Is he -- is there redemption for him? And you know -- and I was, like -- well, it's a critical question.

Right? I'm not here to -- I don't think we should be here discussing Chauvin necessarily, but I think that the conversations around safety and harm includes everybody.

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah, for sure, and --

MR. PETERSON: Including people you don't like.

MR. ATKINSON: -- I guess the word that I underline when the question was reiterated was what values should animate our system -- right? -- in facilitating, you know, safety and reduced harm? And the operative word is "should."

You know, we know what values are currently reflected, you know. You know, I mean, equity, obviously,
and not equality, but equity, where we're really looking at institutions and judging them by the outcomes that they produce.

We've talked a lot through our time together with the Square One Project about human dignity, that irrespective of the color of your skin or your zip code or your gender or sexual orientation or how you present, any number of identity factors, that that shouldn't be a predictor of how you're going to get treated and what kind of outcomes that you receive from coming in contact with this institution.

One that I've thought about a lot, and you know, Jeremy and I have a forthcoming paper, is parsimony. And that's I think irrespective of even after the reimagining -- right? -- let's say, we completely wipe the slate clean, abolish, and we come up with some kind of ideal utopian state -- right? -- because I believe that there would still be a function for the state.

I mean, we've talked about it in our roundtable context, as though the left and right hand of the state, the beneficial, you know, virtuous-cycle hand of the state, the left hand, and then the right hand, which can be the punitive of the state.

And I think the state can serve a positive role in people's lives. Take, for example, our most recent,
pressing example of vaccine dissemination. Right? The state is playing an integral role and to make sure that people get access to this lifesaving vaccine.

So I believe that the state is going to have a role in people's lives. Parsimony for -- at least what we propose, is that it sets the barometer, the restraint, on any kind of state intrusion into people's lives and into their liberty interest, so even after we reimagine, I think that value is going to be critical.

So those are -- you know, I'll stop there, man. Those are a few that I've been thinking about, and -- but you know, it's just funny. I'm on this Courts Commission, North Carolina Courts Commission.

The Supreme Court established North Carolina Courts Commission on Fairness and Racial Equity, or whatever. And the gulf between these conversations -- right? -- that me and you have, and the conversations that everyday practitioners who are in the thick of it, who are interfacing with folk every day, is wide and deep.

So you know, those are a few reflections that I have on that question.

MR. PETERSON: You know, listening to you, Daryl, you know, and to -- you know, I kind of want to give some of the things I think that, you know -- the values as well, and I think a good part of it that divides
us, that you sort of just, you know, shared are some of the values that I have.

Right? I don't think we have to have different values. I think the goal is here to try to have as many of the -- that's the purpose. Right? We have as many values in unison as possible. And equity and human dignity are definitely two of the ones that I have.

And the other two I have is love, and the other one is forgiveness. Right? And I think the one with forgiveness is that, while to me trying to speak on it a little bit is that when we think about safety and harm, like how do we plug in forgiveness into that, into a value, to address safety and harm?

That -- because that can sometimes sound like opposites. Right? You can't -- you know, how could you think about a value to address safety and harm -- how could forgiveness be a part of it? And the reason I'm putting it in there, because I think about values, and as you said so dope was like you said, I think that we should.

You put that :should," like you emphasized should -- is that like the idea of forgiveness is something that we should just imagine a community where, no matter what happened, our value that we had at the core of how to address this thing in our community was
forgiveness. Right? And we could have forgiveness along
with other things. Right?

And just sort of thinking about how the
approach might be different, and I don't know what that is
like. I'm just saying that I just -- I think that it
would be interesting if that is a core value when we think
about safety and harm, because, you know, through the work
of a lot of people who participated in this -- in the
Square One Project over the last couple of years, you also
know that like, you know, this sort of dichotomy between
the person who got hurt and a person who did the hurting,
you know, particularly when you think about, you know, in
our communities, there are always these fine lines.
Right?

The person who did the hurting probably had
something happen to them, or what have you. And that kind
of for me is -- I just -- you just imagine what that would
look like to address a thing, like we led with that.

Like right now we do, just in terms of a
state -- or the state leads with police. That's what we
lead with. We lead with, you know, a hammer. And I'm
just staying that -- let's say the hammer exists. Let's
say the hammer -- as you said, there's some utility for
the state -- let's say that utility existed, continues to
exist.
Imagine if it was led differently, with a different sort of core value, with love or dignity, with equity, with forgiveness? You know what I mean? We're parsimony -- or parsimony?

MR. ATKINSON: Parsimony.

MR. PETERSON: Parsimony. And the other one is not -- I don't know if it's a value, because it's not, but I have wrote down -- one thing I wrote down was roots, R-O-O-T. And I think that might align with everything else there, but when you think about safety and harm, what if also like one of the approaches that we could or should have to lead us was -- but what led to this?

Like we fully go, you did that, or that happened. Well, what led to this? Right? And what led to that -- I don't mean necessarily like what happened five minutes before. Right? Like, you know, the conversation that happened before the fight or whatever.

Like what led to this sort of -- these people, these entities, this person to be in a position where they would be in a place in this type of situation? Right? Like into the root of it. Because, you know, our justice system is not created that way, instead of like let's get to the root of what happened.

We're not getting to the root of anything. We just want to figure why you did that crime and how do we
prove it and how we punish you for it. There's nothing about what -- like how did that -- like what got this person to that place?

There's not enough time. The bureaucracy wouldn't allow for it. Right? You know, the way it works. So I think about this thing that can lead us. But the other part of it is like when you say "should," I'm curious.

And like "should" also connotes a level of -- I don't know if it's reluctance, difficulty. Like what's the -- because I think "should" is what -- the proper word -- right -- because we're humans. But like what do you -- should -- like why did you particularly single that out?

MR. ATKINSON: I mean, I focused on it because it seemed -- I think you're hitting it right on the head, Marlon. It's conditional. Right? It is -- oh, we should do this, but if we don't meet this mark, we tried really, really hard. Right? I would rather -- I would submit, it should be a must. Our system must reflect these things --right -- to make them, you know, absolute requirements. And you know, you mentioned, you know, how do we deal with different concepts of restorative or therapeutic or transformative justice in the context of officer-involved killings.
Right? And it's funny, man. I've come up with this concept. Like they should be at the back of the line for that. It should be available, but they should be at the very back of the line, meaning that we should be trying -- because it always seems like when the innovation comes, and you know, we've seen some of this with law enforcement assistance diversion.

When the innovation comes for the lighter, kinder, gentler way, it ends up benefitting white folks. It ends up benefitting folks from majoritarian societies. Right? So let's not do that this time. You know what I mean?

Particularly if we're talking about offering different kind of restorative or therapeutic approaches to violence. But you know, it's I think something that you really hit on that I'm glad you introduced as a value is forgiveness, because I think what is in tandem with forgiveness is the idea of reconciliation.

You don't worry about forgiving folks who you ain't going to deal with no more. If you're going to banish them to Patmos, to exile, and lock them away and put them in tiny little boxes for 23 hours of the day where you don't have to deal with them anymore, you don't ever have to confront anything about forgiveness.

So restoration and reconciliation I think is
the flip side of that coin of forgiveness.

And what if we imagine a system that we knew, from the very beginning, no matter what nobody did, they weren't going to be banished; They were going to be held accountability, but they weren't going to be banished; they were going to be part of the community, which forces them to confront what they did and center the survivor and what their needs are, as far as any potential transgression.

But if we set our system, like okay, we're not throwing you away, you're going to have to deal with this, we're going to have to deal with this. And we as a community and society are going to hold you accountable while also setting up a pathway to reconciliation.

MR. PETERSON: First, I want to say you went deep in like the Bible or whatever when you said Patmos, like you went deep in there. I haven't heard anybody use Patmos in a regular conversation in a minute. So that was dope.

You know, the idea that -- let me think about what you -- the mere fact that like prison is a bad instrument. Right? That's what it is. Right? And that's how we deal with it.

And it is a way -- you know, it's out of sight, out of mind. We don't have to -- in a way, we don't have
to worry about -- not only do we have to worry about the person, necessarily, but we have this sort of idea that we also have to worry about the problem in the first place. We think we can incarcerate the problem.

Right? And the problem is more than just a person who did the thing or the people that did the thing or the crew or whatever it is. Right? But you know, I just kind of wonder, is -- kind of -- you know, I'm kind of going back to, you know, the mission of the state.

Do we even think the state is capable of understanding not only how its corporate culture, one -- you know, as any business, any institution, there's a corporate culture to it, that people fall in line with. Is it equipped to adjust its values to the ones that we are speaking about?

And as a B part of it is like should they be the entity -- should they be in the position to even adapt to these values, or should we asking them to adapt to these values? Like is there still utility in them if we had these values leading us in society?

Like if we had dignity, human dignity, equity, parsimony, love, you know, forgiveness -- if we have those things of values that lead a society, do we still need that entity?

MR. ATKINSON: And when you say that entity --
MR. PETERSON: So I think about the state, so
in this --

MR. ATKINSON: Are you talking about the
carceral arm of the state?

MR. PETERSON: The carceral arm of the state,
law enforcement. Do we need that then if our society is
led by these things?

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah. I mean --

MR. PETERSON: And we're dreaming a little bit.
Right?

MR. ATKINSON: But -- we are dreaming a little
bit, but I'm going to reflect it back to some of my
personal experiences -- right -- when I was incarcerated.
I was incarcerated at an institution, St. Clair
Correctional Facility.

Sixty percent of the population had life
without parole. It was a very kind of dark and hopeless
kind of environment. Right? And if you didn't have life
without parole, you had a lot of time, and so I got sent
there because my custody level got jammed up. I got into
a couple of scrapes inside.

And one thing I remember from that experience,
being around all of those men who had that much time, you
know, who we have banished -- right? -- there was a very,
very small percentage that I guess, if you -- for whatever
would be categorized as sociopaths; I mean, literally do not play with others in the sandbox.

Right? But then the rest of the folks were malleable in some sort of way. So let's say 95 percent of the folks are malleable. We can deal with them in all types of different manners of accountability to facilitate, you know, behavioral modification and productive, pro-social involvement in society.

Right? But then there is a sliver of the population that, Marlon, I understand the utopian dream of those things and then the outcomes that society would produce. And I agree with you. But during that bridge, I do believe we're going to have some folks that have been so damaged by the failures of our institutions that I would not want my mother or my wife in a dark alley with them, and that's just the straight-up truth. Right?

But that's a small -- that's a very, very small percentage. Now, do we need -- to your question, do we need a state entity to somehow oversee how we're going to deal with those folks, or are we talking about very communal kind of responses?

Each community comes up with its own kind of set of criteria on how they're going to hold folks accountable and things of that nature? I was reflecting -- I was telling -- reflecting on my time
reading *Things Fall Apart*, and just some of the practices that they put in -- you know, that were listed in that book with regards to harm.

It was, you know, interesting reflecting on that. Do all of those things -- can all of those things be on the menu of options? I think so. This is the part that we -- this is the part of the muscle of our movement that we've underutilized because we have focused so much on what we're against; it's so hard to even envision what we're for and how we want to set up that "for."

MR. PETERSON: You know, as you -- I was thinking about -- considering my time inside, you know, there was very few people who would be in that category, you know, a sociopath, and that's -- I mean, incarceration is the world. This is a world inside of a cage, in a concentrated cage. Right?

As you were talking about that -- those group of people who be like, you know, not malleable, who might be incorrigible even -- right? -- I think about -- the person I think about right now is -- you know, headline, I think about the DMX, and like I was just watching an interview that he did on YouTube.

I don't -- it was not long before he passed. I don't know; it was definitely maybe this year. And he was talking about -- you know, telling stories about -- almost
all war stories, you know, war stories when he was inside, when he was home, and you know, and even recent history.

And X is somebody who got a rap sheet longer than, you know, the Nile River. Right? Somebody who -- he spoke about it: robbery, burglaries. He was making jokes about, well, I prefer robberies over burglaries. Right?

He's not -- you know, he's kind of joking about it. Right? Like there's a risk factor. Like I'd rather do a robbery than a burglary, and he defined why he would.

The point I'm getting to with this is that the one mitigating factor for DMX from being that person who we would not want to have in a dark alley, potentially, is that fact that he got money, that he became -- he was -- he found his talent or he realized his talent.

He was committed to the talent. Obviously, he had a commitment to the talent and honing it, and the talent took him places that -- it took him out of the alley, that he would probably be waiting on, because he was probably somebody who was in the alley.

The point I'm getting to is that -- and things like -- I'm not saying money is -- in no way am I injecting that money is the mitigating factor necessarily. I think coming out of poverty is a mitigating factor. I don't think like an abundance of money is a mitigating
factor necessarily.

But what I am saying, though, is that like for somebody like him who, in an honest system, who in an honest system -- who likely, if he didn't find rap, would be doing -- continuing to do the things that he was doing since he was a child.

There was still a way out for him. Right? He still found a way out, and it was a different type of support. And we also know that -- we also probably even assume -- it might be a little bit presumptuous, but we can assume that incarceration was not helping it, because he had a lot of chances -- the prison system had a lot of opportunity to correct him -- right? -- correctional facility.

They had a lot of chances. They kept him from his childhood to his adult to just a couple years ago. They had opportunities and they failed. But somehow they had something else that got him to where he was.

Right? I'm just like -- for that small bucket in terms of what we want, there's a part of what -- I think even his life shows like what we wanted. We wanted somebody who could speak about their trauma -- right? -- who cannot act out the worst parts of their trauma anymore. Right?

And it seemed like his music was outlet.
Right? That was his art. His art was his outlet. This is a long point I'm making.

I'm just thinking that, one, even for the small bucket, not putting people who may have serious mental health issues in the case of, let's say, sociopathology. Right? But the other folks who may be even somewhat incorrigible.

Even that small bucket that's left, even in jail, those people don't -- they're not static; like they don't remain that way -- right -- for the -- you know, they come home, they get -- there are different things that happen. Right? They get parole. They join this program. They find religion. They get married in jail.

Like there's different things that change people -- right? -- that allow them to evolve. And I'm just saying that I think what we want -- there are models for what we want that are in existence; that's what I'm saying.

Like if we was to look at a case study like an X -- right? -- and people -- and I think that's a very good case study. I hope there's some PhD somewhere on this call right now probably, you know, working on that right now.

But like there is a model for how we can work with people who may seem incorrigible. X is somebody who
I can see would be incorrigible, even as a 50-year-old person -- right? -- but he had other things that helped save him.

You know what I mean? And I just think that we have models around us and people -- like we had a conversation around -- with -- like somebody like X, for instance, like a conversation talking about what were the pinpoint?

What are the things that prevented you from continuing to rob and steal or whatever, or to be committed to rap? Right? Because he had to be committed. There's something -- there's a part of him that had to be committed to that and not committed to robbing people anymore. Right? And that happened.

Like what was that thing? Because that thing exists. I think there are buckets -- there are examples in the people that we know that can teach us -- that lead us to what we want. And it's not easily evaluated. Right? It's not easily evaluated. That thing about all the research that's done by Nicole on -- who's listening right now. You know, you may not be able to evaluate it and put it in, you know, an evidence-based model. Right?

And I'm not taking away the value utility of those things, but I'm just saying that like we don't put enough value on the things we can't quantify. We don't
put enough things -- we don't put enough value in those things.

Because here's the thing. I'm going to end up here, Daryl, is that just about the nature of the prison that you were in. Right? You were in the -- you was in a max. Right? I did time in a max. The very idea of being in a maximum prison is that these people who are in a maximum prison are all the worst of the worst.

That's how society views all of us. You're in a max, a maxi max? Oh, then -- you know? And I'm just saying that like there were things that -- there are people that saw us as incorrigible, you know. That was a lot.

I know I spoke for like 10 minutes. My fault. I don't usually do that. I usually don't do that.

MR. ATKINSON: No, you're good. You want to -- I'm going to throw out a couple of these terms that Sukyi sent us and --

MR. PETERSON: Oh, yes.

MR. ATKINSON: -- get your reaction.

Reckoning.

MR. PETERSON: Yeah, reckoning. Reckoning is hard work. It is extremely hard work. And that's what comes to me. I think about -- I like to add a word in front of it. It's some alliterative, but like root
reckoning.

Right? Like, that's even -- and that's even harder work, because you're trying to get to the root of why it is things are happening, why you do things, why -- you know, why people are doing things this way, et cetera, or in the case of America right now, this -- we call this a racial reckoning.

That's what people have been calling it over the last year. I debate it. I question that. But that's what we call it, is a reckoning, a race reckoning here.

MR. ATKINSON: Well, say a little bit more about that, because we may have some similar threads on the race reckoning and you debating. What -- say more about that.

MR. PETERSON: Please stop killing Black folks. Right? That may somewhat be reductionist, but I mean, in a way -- in a very like tangible way, tactile way, you know, that's still happening. Like the reflexes of seeing Black people as danger, the reflexivity of it is still there.

Right? And I'll give you one example and I'll move on to the next point. Two days ago -- you know, I've got this new book out I'm very proud of. I walk into a Barnes & Noble in Manhattan, and I'm in there to sign. Right?
You know, I speak to the manager, signing books. She's placing it up in the front and all that sort of stuff, and I'm standing right next to the manager or employee. I'm assuming she's the manager. And while she's there with a -- like a Barnes & Noble name tag on, like an apron apparently they have them wear, and I'm their regular.

Actually, I might have had the same hoodie on, and my book is in her hand. A white lady walks up to me, taps me on my shoulder, and asks me -- with a -- has a sheet, a paper and -- with a list of books, and asked me to ask her where she can find the books.

She thought I worked there. She couldn't even assume that I might have been a customer, even. The reason why I'm bringing that in is the reflexivity. Me -- that was a reflex of hers. I'm not saying -- she might have been one of the good white women out there, white people that's out there fighting for us. I'm not denying that.

But there was a reflex in her -- right? -- that could not see me as the person whose whole-ass face is on this book. Right? Or you know, it would have interrupted part of her conditioning. And so when I say I question it, I don't if people -- we've gone to the reflexivity of the issue of race in this country, of racial oppression in
this country.

We're in a place where we speak about systemic stuff, but I don't know if we've gotten to the place of like how reflexive -- some people might want to call it implicit bias. We have all those nice terms. I get it, and I appreciate those terms and not knocking them, but that reflexivity is why somebody can say they mistook their taser for a gun.

There's a reflexivity in that this person is a huge danger. Anyway, so root reckoning or questioning.

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah. You know, you mention looking regular. Recently both me and my wife were able to get vaccines, and it afforded me the ability to do some things that I had not been doing, such as getting a haircut.

And -- but nevertheless, you know, when I -- when my hair was grown out and I would have to take my daughter to the doctor, I would get treated different. I noticed I was getting treated a little bit different. So when you mentioned looking regular, that struck a nerve.

The idea of this racial reckoning, I think it's both yes and no, and I'm going to agree with you largely on, you know, some of your critiques around some of the rhetoric around racial reckoning without a whole lot of demonstrative changes and actions, if you will.
And some things are starting to shift in the popular culture, and I use my -- I was -- you know, we -- because we got vaccinated, my mother got vaccinated, and were able to, you know, let her see her granddaughter for the first time in about a year and some change, and you know, I was talking to my mom, and I use her kind of as my informal focus group of, you know, just -- look, run-of-the-mill Black folk.

Right? So anyway, I'm talking to her about concepts around defund, and this, that and the other, and we happened to be watching Gray's Anatomy, and you know, that particular show, that episode, the folks in the hospital -- it's a hospital show, for people who may not watch it.

Folks in the hospital were responding to people who were hurt at a protest. Phylicia Rashad was one of the characters, in fact. For folks who don't know, that was -- she was the wife on The Cosby Show, and Clair Huxtable.

And she had gotten shot with a -- one of those munitions, and it had got lodged in the shoulder. And all of the discussion around the police response to the people who were coming into the hospital day was negative. Right?

It was not Law and Order, what you going to do?
What you going to do when they come for you? And I can remember when the Law and Order and the Cops, and that whole kind of perspective of law enforcement was the predominant and the only perspective that you would get in popular culture about the role that law enforcement played in people's lives.

So I highlight that Gray's Anatomy example to talk about -- there is some shift in popular culture around certain aspects of whether it's policing and our prison system that are not the same as they were 20 and 25 years ago.

And I think we have to acknowledge that. The racial reckoning, we are hearing more conversation about institutional racism, systemic racism, white privilege, things of that nature, but what's absent is a critique around capitalism. And if you know anything about the history of this country, those two things have been inextricably bound since the very beginning of this country.

Slavery, African-American chattel, African chattel slavery, was an economic decision.

MR. ATKINSON: Racialized capital.

MR. PETERSON: Yeah. Racialized capitalism.

So I don't hear as much of a critique, even in, you know, some of our most progressive, you know, circles --
right? -- around capitalism with as much vehemence, with as much targeted kind of interventions as I do around anti-racist efforts, particularly the manifestation of racial violence that police forces impose on Black folk.

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. PETERSON: I mean, I think the part where racialized capitalism is that -- I mean, we are complicit in it in various ways. That's one -- right -- in terms of it. Right? We're all complicit. I think, you know, not everyone accepts that, acknowledges that, understands what that means.

That's one thing. And the other part of it is like because we are somewhat complicit in it, it's kind of like what holds our society together in a sense. Like when you think about racialized capitalism, like the things that we benefit from don't necessarily -- the tangible things that we benefit from don't necessarily benefit us really, but, you know, we get things out of it, like just -- even in a system of racialized capitalism, we get things out of it.

It allows -- everybody can have measures of benefit from it in a way, but there's definitely some groups of people who are harmed by it the most. But I also think kind of going back to the -- you know, kind of back to the values thing, like are those values that we
spoke about, the equity -- I'm going to keep saying it for people -- you know, the equity, the human dignity, the parsimony, the love, the forgiveness, you know, getting to the root, can those things exist in a racial -- in a society where we have -- you know, in a racially capitalist society? Like can those things exist?

MR. ATKINSON: No.

MR. PETERSON: I like that. I like that.

MR. ATKINSON: I don't need to add no more words.

MR. PETERSON: No. That's how we do it. No, no. I'm feeling that. I'm feeling that no. You want to like -- what's the elaboration on that?

MR. ATKINSON: And that's the part that's -- you know, that's also really, really hard as well, seeing -- in addition to seeing our way out of structural racism and envisioning a new world and how the criminal/legal system could interface with, you know, BIPOC communities, we've got to see our way out of capitalism too.

I mean, there's no other way. I mean, it is -- show me where it's worked for Black and Brown communities. Just show me. Give me the evidence and, you know, maybe I'll be persuaded. And I think of it, Marlon, because I'm certainly not a purist.
I'm benefitting as well, but you know, just like I try to reduce my carbon footprint, I try to reduce my capitalist footprint as well. You know, I mean, I'm not, you know, trying to acquire as much as some. So I just think it's, once again, an underdeveloped muscle, that in addition to these alternative systems that we're considering, we've got to think of alternative economies as well, because they're linked together.

MR. PETERS: You know, it's interesting. I'm just kind of like tallying in my head, seeing the chronology of this conversation that we have and how it started off with like actual physical harm. Right? We're thinking about, you know, what happens in a community.

Someone one does thing, you know. And now we're at the place where we're speaking about racialized capitalism, and in this very moment, like we're modeling getting to the root. We're modeling how to approach that. Right?

Because we -- you know, for folks who are, you know, listening to us talk, is that the crime that we see in our neighborhoods and our community, it's so much deeper than the crime that we see in our community. It's so much deeper than what they did up the block or in that city or in that town; it's so much deeper than that.

In so many ways, like the atmosphere that we're
in is going to continue creating that thing in various ways. Right? It's going to -- that's a byproduct of racialized capitalism. You know, also it's a collateral consequence.

You want to benefit from it? Also know that when you benefit from it, you're going to have this type of society as well. And it sort of makes sense that, in this society, where it's like the center of, you know, the idea of racialized capitalism has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Right? Incarcerates so many of its citizens.

And in order for America to work, we have to have people in jails or in plantations, once upon a time. That's what makes America work. You know what I mean? And that's the reckoning.

MR. ATKINSON: So you just wrote a book on abolition. I want -- man, I want to ask you some questions, because it's one of the areas that -- I'm doing this stuff with The National Academy of Sciences on reducing racial disparities, and it's one of the areas, public testimony, that we heard a lot of energy about.

And I'm curious. I want you to talk about maybe three things on how we confront these things with that goal in mind. Right? Violence. 2020 was the most violent year in the past two decades, and 2021 is looking
bad as well.

I think, coupled with that is unfettered access to firearms. Right? So I can envision a community safety cadre of folks, of social workers, going and responding to the incident where, you know, someone's having a mental health episode. But who responds when they got those choppas? Who's going to that call? -- because we got so many firearms in this country.

And then political education. One of the things that I've been really, really struck by in my work is -- and I'm working with impacted communities, and I'm talking about communities who are at the center of crime and violence.

We had a fellowship program when we elected our newly-elected DA in '18, with directly impacted folks from, you know, our public housing authorities, folks who were tenant leaders, community leaders. It was predominantly Black women, and we were crafting with them what the policy agenda for the first 100 days for the newly-elected DA would be.

Not everything that they proposed was restorative and rehabilitative; some of it was retributive. And I highlight that, that we've all been swimming in the dirty pond of not only white supremacy but of excess punitiveness and just thereby creating another
institution to give community control over a certain aspect of order maintenance doesn't necessarily mean that that control would be any less punitive than what some of our institutions and systems are producing, unless we have targeted interventions to disrupt that and make so.

So I'm just curious on your thoughts around those kind of three undercurrents, and how we address in the current abolitionist movement?

MR. PETERSON: What's the third point again?

MR. ATKINSON: The political education for directly impacted communities, so we actually -- so these responders would actually produce something different. You know, we act like the social work cadre going to be less racist. You know what I'm saying?

You know, we automatically assume that they're going to be less racist than the police. Maybe they would be less lethal because they wouldn't have guns, but would they be any less racist?

MR. PETERSON: Well, I always -- you know, abolition -- you know, I'm by no means the leading expert on abolition. I always kind of admit that. Right? I'm in the legacy of a lot of people, and I know the names of people.

Yeah. We have nine to ten minutes; I see we have a few minutes ago. Let me finish my point. But what
I would say is this. Right? One is that I'm like thinking about Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who speaks about this very well and always talks about getting to the root. That's why I spoke about that. Right? And abolition is about getting to the root. It's also about what we can create in place of, sort of what you spoke about earlier, like what we need, what we want. That's also what abolition is. Right?

But to kind of get to the three points that you asked about, you know, violence, unfettered access to firearms, of political education, particularly for those folks like -- right? -- and you know, similar to us or adjacent to us even, getting to the root -- and abolitionist politics is like always getting to the root.

And when you're thinking about violence -- taking the first two points, violence and unfettered access to weapons, the issue of unfettered access to weapons is not a Brooklyn problem. It's not like a Durham problem. It's not a -- you know, it's not an Englewood problem. It's not a Jackson problem. Right?

I always think like, one, there's more guns than there are people in this country. America is the number-one exporter of firearms in the world and has been so for years, and they increased over the quarantine, over the pandemic. Right? Or we increased over the pandemic.
And the reason why I bring those two things into the conversation around the issue of violence and unfettered access to firearms is that, to deal with this, it's not something that -- this is not a -- that's not a local issue.

Locally, I mean, we do an advocacy. I'm part of a board of an organization that, you know, does work, writes legislation when it comes to reducing access to weapons, guns and weapons.

But that can't -- that won't stop like this system that depends on it, that depends on violence. If you're exporting guns across the world, you're also depending that there's violence across the world. Right?

There isn't this huge -- there isn't like the Olympics of gaming, shooting.

You know, like shooting isn't a part of the Olympics. Even though it's a sporting event, it's not like an Olympic event, necessarily, or maybe it is; I don't know. The point I'm getting to is that like there is a need.

There is a need. Right? There's -- you know, basic economics, you know, in terms of supply and demand. So I'm just getting to that first. Part of what we're saying is that -- and why we're thinking about abolition and getting to the root of it is also saying that the root
of the problems of particularly violence, when you're thinking about violence as a whole and then weapons is deeply embedded in how we -- like the society that we live in.

It's deeply connected to the society that we live in. So even in this book that I wrote, I was like very critical of like the society that we live in. I'm not taking the responsibility off of us. Like I should not shoot somebody.

Like, we know we shouldn't be doing that. We also know there's trauma and there's all these other things happening, but ultimately, we shouldn't do that. We need to stop doing that. That's why I was a violence interrupter at one point.

But also understand that that is somewhat futile work in this society. Like you think about racialized capitalism; let's think about a violent society. Right? We in that place, we hold onto the Second Amendment more tightly than we hold onto voting rights.

That's our value system here. Our value system is not for democracy. Our value system is really deeply rooted in violence. That's where it is. Right? So I just wanted -- like that's not a Black people problem, that's not a Brown people problem, in the sense of we're
not fostering that. Right? We're not initiating in that. Right?

And this kind of leads right into the political education, thinking about it, that like it's important for us to understand, and for people, particularly who have had experience that have a deeper insight into how they ended up where they were at, and it's bigger than, you know, whatever the incident of the crime or the multiple crimes or offenses. It's so much deeper than that. I say it somewhat crassly, but I mean it when I said, you know, everybody who did a bid don't need a mic in front of them. Right?

And I -- you know, and I -- and the reason why I say that, largely, is not that everybody who had an experience with the carceral state doesn't have a story to tell. Of course they do. Yeah. And they should be afforded a space to share their story in whatever forum they want to.

But also if you don't have the understanding, the insight into the system that you fell into, then you probably would do more harm. You probably would even bolster the system. Right? Like when people come home and they say, man, I'm so thankful for prison.

I've heard people say that. And I'm like, no, you're doing the wrong thing there, because somebody is
taking that down, writing that down, putting that in their next report. Prison: this person is thankful for that.

I was getting a little excited. But you know, this is -- you embedded the question around abolition. Abolition is not a new term. We all know that. It just got much more -- I don't want to say credibility or even legitimacy. It's just spoken about much more now, within the last two years, maybe. Right?

And a lot of people want to believe it as a certain illogical, improbable thing. And I'm saying that, even -- kind of like getting back to the book that I wrote like -- I didn't write a book -- and this is answering your question, Daryl.

I didn't write a -- I didn't go into this saying I'm going to write a book about abolition. That was not my intention. Abolition didn't come into this book until the end. If you read it, the term doesn't even get mentioned till near the end of the book.

And the title doesn't come in until like the second or third revision of the book, the term "abolition." Like this is a journey to it. Right? It's a journey to it. So in all the things, whether it be to violence in our communities, unfettered access to weapons and the political education, like all those things are important, but particularly the last point.
The political education is probably the most important, because those things lead to help us as a society in this country deal with the other two things, the unfettered to weapons and violence. And that's the most important part, because not only for people who are directly impacted, but our society is not really politically educated.

We live in a society that is the most -- might be the most advanced. We call that advanced, but we are the least politically educated, in this country. We don't believe -- and I'm going to say -- and this is my last sentence here.

We don't believe that this country is founded on violence. We don't believe it. Like most people don't believe that. And I think that that's a problem in and of itself, because if we don't know how we started, we're going to keep ending up in the same muck that we're in.

The mere fact that people keep -- we have these mass shootings in this country. If I was a doctor and I was trying to like -- checking on a patient, and like there's something really wrong with this patient -- these mass shootings are very -- they're very indicative. They're telling us something. There's a sickness here, that young people are doing it. The last one was 20 years old. Right? These are young people doing it. These
aren't like men our age, jaded and tired, and tired of the man and all.

These are children doing these mass shootings. And if anything, we're not listening to the children. Like the children are telling us something. I said, you know -- okay, it wasn't my last sentence. You know, what happened at the -- on January 6 in D.C. were the parents of many of these young people who were the age of where some of these young people do these mass shootings -- they look up to these older -- these were people our age running up in the Capitol.

And it's the young people who come from that, who had the same ideology of them, who have the same sort of -- watch the same news or whatever it is. They're younger versions of themselves, are the ones shooting up these schools, or whatever, churches, mosques.

You know, they're the ones who's doing this. And there's a sickness that we just refuse to sort of like acknowledge around like -- it's really telling something.

And for what it's worth, Daryl, the political education part, if that is not addressed in a real way, the other two things that you mentioned, abolition, reform, whatever you want to call it, can't do anything.

MR. ATKINSON: All right. Katharine, I think you were telling us it was time maybe about 15 minutes
MR. PETERSON: Yeah, that's on me.

MS. HUFFMAN: No, no. I was --

MR. PETERSON: That was my fault. It's my fault.

MS. HUFFMAN: There -- you are -- absolutely not. Your timing is perfect, and Marlon, you just keyed us right up for the rest of this conversation. Thank you both so much. You have taken us on a journey that is not over, through Durham and Brooklyn and Patmos and all over the place, to get us to this moment.

I want to invite the rest of our roundtable participants to rejoin via video, as you're available. Folks will probably start popping onto the screen. But while they're coming on, Marlon, Daryl, just, you know, a follow-up question.

You were just talking about this problem that we have, and you posed it as a problem, and I think we would agree that it is, that we are more adherent to the values of violence and to the structures that keep us focused on violence than we are on the values that take us to freedom and engagement and community.

You put that in terms of the right to -- the Second Amendment rights in relation to voting rights. There are a lot of, I think, other iterations of that.
You know, what do we do with that? What's the path forward for that?

Is that the political education that you're talking about, or how do we start to shift that in this moment?

MR. PETERSON: That's a question to us or it's to the crew, to everybody? It's to us, me and Daryl?

MS. HUFFMAN: Especially to you, us, yes, while others are joining.

MR. PETERSON: Oh, to me? Okay.

MS. HUFFMAN: Or Daryl. Both of you.

MR. PETERSON: Okay. I'll take a shot at it first, no pun intended. And I mean, for what it's worth -- right? -- I'm mostly somebody who is aware of what's happening in the present, and I do see people -- like the mere fact we're having this conversation is -- and like we're not the only ones having this conversation.

You in your circles, whatever state you're in, you know, variations of these conversations are happening, and I think variations of these conversations happening is, as you have spoken to earlier, Daryl, signifying of some level of progress -- right? -- in air quotes.

I think that's a part of it. And I think as -- we also should be like -- I think part of what we can do is being courageous about speaking up about the things
that are outside the group-think. Right? In the criminal legal space here, as we know, there's a group-think.

We all know there is a group-think in any of these circles. Right? And I think it's important to be able to step outside of the group-think of what it is, because those of here on this call -- I'm saying this call -- on this -- in this meeting, have a level of political education, probably more so than most people in our society, and so we have a little bit of a responsibility to make sure that we're always echoing these things out.

And the unpopular things -- and not only unpopular things for the group-think, but the unpopular thing to our own conditioning, because we are also somewhat conditioned to a certain way of understanding the society that we live in, on our own experience.

And I think, you know, as being comfortable with that -- being comfortable with being uncomfortable, I firmly believe that we have to be better at being comfortable with being uncomfortable. I recall -- and I'll pass it off to Daryl -- I recall at the first roundtable, I think I -- yeah, that's the first roundtable in Durham, and we had to do our introductions.

And I can't remember what the prompt question was, but I know my -- one of my answers was like -- I was
nervous on the inside about wanting to say like the
word -- the A-word. Right?

I'm going to be a nerd and say, this A-word
hit, and I was, like, oh, shit. All right, Marlon. I'm
going to drink some water, and I'm going to say it, and
I'm going to say it out loud, and the word was
abolition -- right? -- and it wasn't like nobody ever
said -- but we also know that in some spaces it was like
this term that would get you laughed out of the room.

Right? And now it's a thing where everybody is
discussing it. They're got whole websites, and you know,
all the things. Right? And that's good. That's
progress. And I'm not saying I'm in any way to be
commended for that.

I'm saying that the emotion that I had was
nervousness. And I wanted to step beyond the nervousness
of saying that out loud in front of people in a meeting.
Right? And in that meeting, I'm now meeting people for
the first time -- no matter what, even if you did a bid,
no matter the mere fact that people know about my history,
there's a story that -- oh, people may not see me as
legitimate, because I've also got this record; so he might
just be somebody from jail that's saying it.

Like all those things are working up in my
feelings, and I was like, let me say this thing. And I'm
just saying that like we come to these spaces. It's important to say the thing that might be unpopular, not disrespectful, but unpopular, because we might be saying the thing that needs to be heard. And we've seen in our society the things that need to be heard in our society right now, because if not, well, we know what the end results are also.

MS. HUFFMAN: Yeah. Thank you.

Daryl, do you want to add to that? And we can call on a couple of folks for questions as well.

MR. ATKINSON: What was the initial question again about -- what's the path forward?

MS. HUFFMAN: What's the path forward, if we want to shift our values, where we see them to where they should be, where they must be, as you said?

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah. I don't think America is ever going to change, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever. And I think it's serious times for, you know -- whether it's Black folks, other folks, to seriously entertain going somewhere else that's less harmful.

I don't think this place is ever going to be any different. I really don't. And if we ever build the political power, the people power, to actually effectuate where we'd be radically different, history has shown us, what happened on January 6 was not unique, every time.
Look at Radical Reconstruction, and it happened in Wilmington, North Carolina, when folks exerted their political and economic power. They had political and economic power. Folks came, radical insurrection, and took it.

It happened in Utah, Alabama, around the same time. It's happened in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I don't think this place is ever going to change. Now, some folks may say, you know, it is part of my lineage and destiny to help bend it towards some kind of other change.

I think all options should be on the table, because what we've seen in the same week that some folks want to equate some measure of "accountability" with the conviction of Derek Chauvin -- in that same week, the very next day, a 16-year-old girl was shot, when other methods could have been used to de-escalate that situation and make sure everybody got a chance to breathe another day.

I don't think that's ever going to be different here. It's in -- as Marlon said, it's in the DNA of this place. Now, that leaves us a set of alternatives of what we're going to do. Right? And it's interesting, when you look at history, the largest membership-based organization for Black folks was Marcus Garvey's organization, and they organized around leaving this place, because since the moment that we've gotten here, they've tried to rape,
kill, drown, bomb, shoot and degrade us in every single way that they possibly could, and do we somehow believe that the historical record, the evidence is going to be any different?

So we have to decide on how we're going to respond to that, and I believe everything should be on the table, and that includes looking for other places to live that are less harmful than this.

And I understand imperialism is global, racism is global. But they ain't killing Black folks the way they're killing Black folks everywhere else in the world.

MR. PETERSON: Yeah, that's the whole word.

MS. HUFFMAN: Uh-huh.

MR. PETERSON: That's the whole word, and --

MS. HUFFMAN: So -- oh, go ahead, Marlon.

MR. PETERSON: And I just want to add, too, just real quick, that -- and I know that leaves us feeling pessimistic, and I think that is something that we should like sit with that. Right? I think we should sit with that pessimistic, because we're ultimately saying, this -- Square One, this whole thought about dealing with issues within the criminal justice, like how would we do it differently? Right?

That's how this whole thing started, if I'm not correct -- if I'm correct. And you came in from the entry
point of crime and violence. That was your entry point, like how would we address it, if we did everything differently?

And I'm just -- and you know, what Daryl is saying and what I'm saying is that in order to do things differently, we've got to do America differently. That's what we said. We're literally saying you've got to do America differently.

You can't like extrapolate it. It's -- you can't extrapolate it. You can't -- I mean, for what it's worth, there is measures of things that folks are doing that are harm reduction -- right -- and we're all -- you know, no matter where you are with abolition, you are in a place of harm reduction.

Right? But we also know that the harm is -- we're doing the latter part. We're doing the reduction, but we're not really doing anything about the ultimate harm, and I think here we just kind of get to like what Daryl is saying.

It's kind of like, you know, it ain't on us. It ain't on us.

MS. HUFFMAN: Who is that really going to be? Yeah. What's that really going to be? I want to invite in Nneka, who had a question to bring to the conversation. Nneka?
DR. TAPIA: First, just, Daryl and Marlon, thank you for your candor and sharing your thoughts and a part of your personal stories with us.

Marlon, you talked about being nervous about saying the A-word, and feeling that people wouldn't take you serious because of your history, and I want to get both of your thoughts on a similar feeling I have about what is the role for people who were system actors, such as myself, who now want to be a part of the abolition movement?

I also get nervous saying that A-word, having been a system actor, but now understanding, based off of what I've seen and what I've witnessed and what I've done, the need for abolition, but wonder what your thoughts are on the role for people who have been system actors in that movement?

MR. PETERSON: Because Daryl will be like, I'm staying away from that abolition shit. I think one of the things I'll say -- you have something -- you have to deal with something that I don't have to deal with, in that -- what's a little bit different in that you may have to rearrange your relationship with some of your past friends and colleagues, and that's just -- you know, that's just a reality. Right? That's one of the things.

And I ain't -- and this is all I'm going to
say. You might lose some. And I don't want to say that.
I say you just might have to rearrange your relationships
with some of your friends and colleagues, for one --
right? -- because there's a corporate culture that, you
know, you were a part of at one point, and now everyone is
where you're at. And that's just reality. I don't have
to deal with that. Right? So that's one difference.

But I also want to say like you're here. Like
I mean, if you're here, you're here. Like we ain't going
to -- you know what I'm saying? Like Harriet Tubman said,
come on. Right? She said, come on. You come on with me.

So come on with us. I mean -- and I think
you're already there. You know, there isn't like an
initiation process for this sort of thing. You know what
I mean? And -- but the other part for that, like we want
people to be on the train. Right?

Abolition is like -- I mean, we're going to get
stuck around that word and that term, and I get it and I
understand why, and there's utility in that, but also
ultimately understand that we want people to live free and
safe lives.

And we're saying like this is one way to deal
with it, one way we can address that -- right? -- is
understanding, one, abolition and saying that like, you
know -- and reform, whatever. We are also saying that
people who have committed to harm has also experienced the harm.

So that's why we're saying, let's get to the root of it. All of y'all experiencing this harm, let's get to the root of it. And that's ultimately what we're saying. You know what I mean? And I think that, like, when more people understand that's what we're saying, like yourself -- right -- I mean, that's ultimately -- we want people to live free and safe lives.

We don't want anything different from anybody else. And we're saying that we don't want to use force. And we're saying we don't want to use force. Why is that not attractive? But anyway, I'm just saying, though, like, you know, with people like you who are system -- who were system actors, I mean, you're on the process too?

Right? And I think that even somebody who's currently a system actor, like, might be embedded in the system now, the CO or cop or whatever it is, or prosecutor, what have you, there's utility in them in that place too, in disrupting it. You know, you've got to figure out where you can disrupt from.

MR. ATKINSON: I'm deeply skeptical, Nneka, deeply, deeply skeptical of currently embedded actors in the criminal legal system claiming that they want to abolish it.
They would be abolishing their jobs. They would be abolishing their very professional identities and how they make their money and how they sent kids to college and how they've gotten pensions and paid for houses.

You think about 14 million arrests, and all of the criminal legal system bureaucracy that it takes to run that machinery, we're talking about deconstructing a lot, y'all. That's a lot of people who need to find some alternative ways to make some income.

Right? And I'm deeply skeptical that people will be advocating against their self-interest. What I believe is happening and what I see happening is the system morphing and coopting and adjusting right in front of our very eyes.

Right? You're hearing the oxymoron of progressive prosecutors and private prison providers providing reentry services and therapeutic interventions and things of that nature. Right? The system is shifting right in front of us -- right? -- where people are saying, this is how I get to stay in my lane and how I still get to make my bread and how I still get to have my privilege and comfort and benefit of a system that we know is crushing folks.

So I'm deeply skeptical of any current criminal
legal practitioner saying that they are abolitionists.

MR. PETERSON: What about this, though, Daryl? I'm going to just join this -- I'm sorry. Can -- I don't know --

MS. HUFFMAN: No, no. Go ahead. Finish up. We have other questions.

MR. PETERSON: But it's -- I also know this -- right -- that when I -- if I didn't go to jail, I probably would have took a state job. I would have took all the tests to get the state job. Right? You know, that's what my father did, my cousin did. We took all the state tests.

You know, they took state tests and they got a state job. One of the state jobs that people take are CO jobs and police jobs. Right? And it's just like -- it's a job, and then when you get into it, that's why I keep going back to the corporate culture.

And you know, you're taking care of your family. Right? And there's obviously a conundrum here -- right? -- and this goes back to racialized capitalism, where you've got to take care of your family now.

And you know, I work for myself. Everyone can't do that. Right? And there's a privilege in me saying that even. But also I understand too that, like those folks working -- like I have -- you know, one of my
good friends is -- I grew up with him.

I write about him in the book. He's a cop, like a lieutenant -- right -- but he took the state job. He's the person I first learned how to smoke weeds and pull guns with it. But he took a state test.

I didn't take the state test yet. I went to jail. He took the state test and became a cop. Right? And I'm just saying that like -- and he can't easily just say, I'm going to stop doing this job, and -- you know what I mean? And this is where they're to come across and give a justification.

What I am saying, though, is that people like him, if he really want to be, you know, on the train, you have to rearrange -- there's a rearrangement of your relationships with a lot of people or even the institution that you're in.

Right? There has to be a -- because I also understand that capitalism requires that we do things -- that we slave. Like you've got to protect. Right? You know, you've got to slave; there's labor. You have to have labor to support yourself.

And that's all part of this conversation. That's all a part of it, like the racialized capitalism and in the way this country works, particularly this country. Like, you know, sometimes people are in
professions out of necessity and not necessarily out of want and need. Right? And that's a hard reality to deal with, because particularly when we think about COs -- I think about COs -- Rikers Island -- all the COs there are Black, and they're from the block, and they're from the block; like, you know, they're from the block.

They hanging out with us and then they go to work. Right? And I'm just saying that like it's a complicated -- it's complex, but it's not so complex to understand when you've committed to a thing.

Whether it be DMX committing to his rap or whatever it is, you've got to be committed to a thing, and if you're committed to a certain politic, you have to be like that at your job too, and you've got to be disrupting in your job too, and at some point you may have to realize that there are some risks that you have to take that may not benefit you, and you've got to figure out how to deal with that also.

MS. HUFFMAN: Thank you, Marlon, Daryl. We're going to jump around a little bit here, just to get in a couple more questions from folks --

MR. PETERSON: I'm getting too long.

MS. HUFFMAN: -- beforehand, and so -- no, no, no, no. Don't say that.

Let's turn to Jon for a minute. I know you had
a question.

DR. SIMON: Thank you both so much. I'm sitting heavily with much that you said, especially the sense of the enduring feature of American violence, which hangs over both our carceral state and the things that it doesn't accomplish in our society.

And the only thing I would say is that there are moments like -- you know, the night in Chicago behind me when American society seems to see violence and see state violence more clearly, and then there's discussion, like there was in the Kerner Commission of trying to do something profound about the inequalities that drive it.

And it feels to me -- I don't want to be too optimistic -- like we're in one of those now. It may not be a turning point, because there may not be turning points in this game. But I'm wondering what you think about, one, how to keep that open as long as possible before the veil comes back, as W.E.B. DuBois would call it, over this violence.

And also, especially thinking of your book, Marlon, how to extend it to incarceration, because it feels like people see the violence of policing right now, and I'm not convinced they see the violence -- I thought COVID would help people see the violence of incarceration, but not so clearly.
MR. PETERSON: Yeah, I mean, if we -- they had -- if everybody had cameras in prison, you'd be -- you know, you'd be -- your mouth would be on the floor if everybody had cameras in the prison, and if we want to think about physical violence, think about the sexual violence too from -- particularly in women's prisons -- right? -- from officers.

And those tend to lost, because we put them away. Going back to our core, what the values are, we feel we can just throw it away. You know, so -- and we won't have to deal with it, but then you have to deal -- then -- but then the people inside have to deal with it and the COs have got to deal with it, and the people -- and the nurses have got to deal.

Everybody is dealing with it inside. I mean -- yeah. I don't want to get into a long story about it, but anybody can tell a story about if you did time, you know, you know the extent of the violence, like state violence in prison. It's common; it's part of doing the bid. It's just like part and parcel with it.

And for what it's worth, most of us in society are comfortable with it, when -- particularly when there's somebody who did something particularly egregious. Right? We usually say, I hope that person has a hard time in prison. We -- you know, we're kind of saying we want that
violence to continue. Right? We're not getting to the core of why the violence is there. And I mean, I agree with you with that, Jon, in that, you know, we are in the flashpoint now.

And here's the thing. Maybe in 30 years police don't kill Black and Brown people as much. Maybe in 30 years there aren’t as many Black and Brown people and Indigenous folks in jails and prisons. But America has also shown that they -- it's sort of like this -- it's like a shape-shifter.

America shape-shifts the same thing. Right? We went from -- you know, you read your Jim Crow. Right?

So I'm just saying like we don't know what the next iteration is, but part of the fabric of this country is oppressing certain people in order to win. That's part of how we win. That's the American way.

MR. ATKINSON: Yeah. I mean, I'm hopeful that the perceived momentum -- because I'm sure some researcher is going to study the mass demonstrations that happened after George Floyd and quantify how much of that is, you know, genuine kind of allyship in an anti-racist movement, and how much of it was people just wanting to get outside during the pandemic.

You know, so we're -- you know, I try to read history and try to be a student of history, and what the
historical record of this country has shown is to not get too high about these grand moments of awakening and transformation, because they're really, really fleeting, really, really short.

I mean, take Radical Reconstruction, for example, 1865 to 1877, and there was mass violence going on in that 12-year period. You know, take the second Reconstruction, '59 to '71. These are blips in time in the history of this country.

And our multiracial democracy, if we want to call it that, which happened after the '65 Voting Rights Act, is really, really fragile. So when you look at the history of this country, we really hadn't done multiracial democracy for the vast majority of this country.

That ain't who we be, not for real. Right? That's been a really, really short moment in our history, so I think the jury is still out on where we're going to go as a society, what this reimagining and this reawakening really is, because we've had these blips on the radar screen of American history previously.

MS. HUFFMAN: Thank you, Daryl, Marlon. We're nearing the end of your time, so we have two more questions.

I'm going to ask Dona and Monica to share your questions pretty briefly, and then we'll let Daryl and
Marlon respond to that, and then we'll wrap up our time together, with just huge gratitude to everybody.

And Dona and Monica, if you guys could share your questions? Then we can talk about it all together. And sorry for consolidating folks there. Go ahead, Dona.

DR. MURPHEY: Yeah. I had other questions, but now, if I'm trying to be brief, I guess I'll just follow on what Daryl was talking about just now, on these blips or this short moment in time that we're now in presently.

I mean, I kind of see it as that's where the hope lives -- right? -- is where we're at now, and in this pluralistic democracy, even as, you know, people in power now are trying to dismantle the opportunity that exists in that little blip -- right? -- by suppressing voter rights and all sorts of other things.

And I wonder if you both think, I guess, that there is a real opportunity here with coalitions that are being built with now communities that are increasingly empowered, that are increasingly enfranchised -- right? -- to vote, people who look like our communities, who have the experience, the life experience of the people in our communities into positions of power where they really can codify the policies that allow us to live in a society that is really just for everyone.

And I think that in that implicit -- and I
think it has to be explicit in that, is the experience of
African-Americans in this country, but also I think what
has to be a part of that is that being a part of a broader
collective struggle, of which I think many communities of
color, immigrant communities, and other communities
marginalized on a number of other kinds of axes, are part
of.

But do you think that we are in a moment where
there -- that kind of promise does exist?

MS. HUFFMAN: Thanks, Dona.

Monica, do you want to jump in?

MS. BELL: I'll jump in and I'll be quick. I first just want to thank both of you for this really
amazing conversation. My question is about abolition and
also pessimism, and I want to ask about Chauvin and how
you react and deal with -- so I'll say, as someone who
identifies as abolitionist, I didn't want to do the whole
thing of, well, this doesn't matter, you know.

Actually, we shouldn't be rooting for prison at
all or something like even in Chauvin's case,
understanding that the meaning of the conviction for a lot
of people was hope and a sense of -- I don't know --
accountability, just whatever you want to call it.

How do you navigate being abolitionist or being
just essentially like an Afro pessimist -- is how I
interpreted you, Daryl -- given this outcome, and not wanting to be the kind of wet blanket with your people -- or our people?

MS. HUFFMAN:  Daryl, I think that was a question for you right off the bat there, so --

MR. ATKINSON:  Yeah, I mean, I guess I'm going to be consistent and be Daryl Downer here as well, you know. I mean, the verdict -- the fact that -- I guess the thing I felt the most was -- the emotion that I identify with the most was relief.

The fact that that the evidentiary standard has to be an officer kneeling on your neck for over nine minutes to get a conviction is disconcerting, because as someone who does, you know, civil rights litigation a lot, versus police departments, I'm not going to have that most of the time.

Right?  And so you know, that was a little bit disconcerting. I do have a theory, though, about the prosecution of both more police officers and more white folks. Right?  I don't want more white folks to go to jail and more police officers to go to jail because I think it's going to bring survivors back, and you know, offer restorative and therapeutic kind of remedy to them and their families and their communities.

No. I want them to go to jail because I think
when more of them feel the pain of prison, feel the pain of the rigidity of our system -- right? -- we might start to see it change for the betterment of other marginalized communities.

That may be a little bit warped, but I mean, Derrick Bell had this whole -- he was a Harvard academician -- had this whole entrance convergence theory. It's kind along those lines -- right? -- that when they start hurting bad enough -- right? -- you'll start, you know, seeing some changes in our institutions and systems.

So yeah, that's kind of how I navigate that space, and just -- Monica, for definitional purposes, I kind of consider myself more of a reconstructionist than anything. I see those as discrete periods in time that we can study and learn from, to see how we can, you know, continue to advance in this country if we continue to invest in transformative, because one of the things I'm weary of -- and I don't know about y'all -- I'm weary of, you know, BIPOC communities putting in the sweat and the labor and all of the hurt and pain to transform and lurch this country forward into being a more perfect union.

I'm kind of over that. Let's take our genius and Black magic and all of our ingenuity somewhere damn else and help build up their institutions and structures, rather than continue to invest in a place that treats us
like a redheaded stepchild.

    And so I'll stop there.

MS. HUFFMAN: Thank you. Marlon?

MR. PETERSON: A redheaded stepchild. I just -- I want to -- Dona asked, you know, kind of -- and then I'm going to come to you, Monica -- in terms of like are we in a moment when promise exists? Of course, we are. Like this -- I mean, we don't do the work we're doing with it if we don't have hope. Right?

    I think that's ultimately the question you're asking. Right? Is there hope? And I always look back -- I think about the video of George Floyd's daughter on the neck of Stephen Jackson, the NBA player, and she's like, My daddy's changed the world.

    Right? And she's a little -- you know, a little child, and how she's like seven, eight, nine, ten, whatever, around that age, and she's saying that. And I mean, I'm going to look at her as the person who is an expert of her experience, I mean, at that moment.

    And she understands that her father's not here, but she understands that her father may have changed something, and that can hopefully inform her and people like her and her age group to like -- we can continue to change something.

    And there's promise in that video for me in
this moment. But I also think that where my, you know, Afro pessimism may come into play is that the way we get -- the way we sort of -- the way we get better, the way we progress as a society -- right? -- or bringing in just a more perfect union, because ultimately that's our -- you know, we get -- we're in this country; that's how people who would defend it. Like we're still in the process of becoming this perfect union. Right?

And voting rights or extending voting rights, more people, among other things, are the way that we get to that more perfect union, granted.

Our propensity for oppression to come into play is that it's on our backs. We have "better policing" than we had in the '50s because Black people had to die, and involuntarily.

George Floyd was not a voluntary martyr. He didn't walk out of his house and say, I'm going to -- I love America; I'm going to do what I can to make us a more perfect union today. I'm going to go and let myself be killed by a cop.

He didn't do that that day, and that's what we forget, that, yes, there is progress that's happening, but we are the ones that's dying. Like we the ones that's dying -- it's our health outcomes. COVID exposed that. COVID exposed the fact that our health, that just -- that
our comorbidities were allowing us to be more susceptible to this disease, and why do we have these comorbidities? Because of the communities that we were in and the socioeconomic conditions of our communities.

And we're going to get better at it, but because we die; we offered our lives, and that's why we're getting better, and that's the problem of -- so that's where the Afro pessimism comes into play.

And in thinking about, you know, your question, Monica, about "the meaning" of the Chauvin -- I emphasize -- I put in quotes "the meaning." I don't know. I don't know what that means. Right?

When it happened, I was -- I had gotten the verdict -- I mean, I had heard the verdict literally maybe a half hour after I left that Barnes & Noble store. I left the Barnes & Noble store and I got the verdict in my car, and I felt nothing. For what it's worth, I felt more joy when OJ got off, and I was a child then.

Like I felt like we did -- I felt like something happened. Right? And I still believe OJ -- but that's a whole another story. But like in the moment of the Chauvin case or the Chauvin verdict, I know, Vivian and I, we had a little dialogue on Twitter.

I understand that there is relief, a sense of accountability even, particularly, and I think about his
family. I think about his daughter again. Right? Like
there's a feeling, like, yeah, you know, the state did
right by us; the system did right by us in this moment.
Like I get that. You felt like they heard. It felt like
they were heard. They weren't dismissed like all the
other cases. But then I know that's going to happen
again.

So I don't know what it means. I know it's
going to happen -- we all know -- there's no one on this
Zoom right now, if I said -- if I asked you question, who
believes that another police shooting or killing in some
sort of way -- of an unarmed Black, Brown, Indigenous
person, who -- how many people here believe that it will
not happen again? Nobody here is going to raise their
hands.

So I don't know what that verdict means. I
know one thing that -- what I do know is that another one
of us is going to die at some point. And we've seen it.
Right? Somebody here mentioned it. Right? And we hope
that it's caught on camera. We hope that it's caught on
camera, and with such vivid and such -- with texture and
display as we had in the Derek Chauvin situation.

We don't get that often. And I think if it was
a five-minute video instead of an eight-minute video, if
that person had shut their phone off a little -- shut it
off -- put it on a little bit later or shut it off a little bit sooner, would it be as obvious?

The police reports didn't show what happened, didn't speak to what happened. It took somebody to have a video to show that. Right? The police didn't tell us what happened. I don't know what the Chauvin verdict means.

MS. HUFFMAN: Marlon, Daryl, everyone, I -- we have to wrap this conversation up, but we are going to continue it tomorrow with our roundtable, and this actually will weave so directly into those conversations.

You all tonight, Daryl and Marlon, just such gratitude to you for this time and for your thoughts and for all that you bring to this. You know, you've really -- and at Square One, we try to move outside of this narrow justice system into the much broader, entire society, the social contract, the broader culture in which we live and think about these questions.

And you've really pushed us to do that and given us a lot to think about, as we do, going forward. So I will just thank you all again. We'll look forward to rejoining again tomorrow at 12:00 p.m. Eastern time.

For our participants, we'll be inviting you all to join a little bit beforehand, and then for our audience who's watching, please join us again.
We'll be livestreaming starting right at noon, and we'll look forward to having you join us then. Our sessions tomorrow are on the Irreducible Minimum and Abolition, following from our conversation tonight, and on Operationalizing the Values of Justice, Guiding Principles.

What might that actually look like? And does that give us a path forward on any of the questions that Daryl and Marlon have put before us tonight? We'll be hearing some opening thoughts from Marcia Rincon-Gallardo, Jonathan Simon, Nneka Jones Tapia and Danielle Allen.

And all of the materials for tomorrow, participants, you received them directly, and they're available on our SquareOneJustice.org website. So with that, I will say thank you again to all. Just Marlon and Daryl, we can't thank you enough for the time you've given us and the thoughts you've given us.

You're getting rounds of applause there around the Zoom screen. And everyone, we'll see you all tomorrow. Thank you so much.

(Whereupon, at 7:39 p.m., the meeting of the Square One Project Roundtable was recessed.)
CERTIFICATE

MEETING OF: The Square One Project
LOCATION: via Zoom
DATE: April 22, 2021

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 104, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Latrice Porter.

DATE: April 27, 2021

/s/ Adrienne Evans-Stark
(Transcriber)

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