

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

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(512) 450-0342

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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

1 last week and was very struck by -- if you were to do a
2 word search through this transcript from last week, I
3 think the word that would show up most frequently and
4 perhaps most unexpectedly, but certainly most frequently,
5 would be "healing."

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

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

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

22 So even though our discussion was about values
23 and that's what we wanted to foreground, that we're here
24 to talk about the role of values, the importance of
25 values, and what values would we aspire to, as we imagine

1 justice, the tagline of Square One, we very quickly ran
2 into issues of politics and how do we think about
3 strategy? How do we think about coalition-building? How
4 do we think about the really fascinating discussion at the
5 end where Nicole, who can't be with us tonight, but she
6 really helped us think about the question of working with
7 stakeholders, you know, and who sits at what table?

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

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

19 We'll take this on directly tomorrow when we
20 take on the question of abolition versus -- and we put
21 them in tension intentionally -- some irreducible minimum.

22 Is there something that we need a system for as we're
23 thinking about what gets abolished, what gets torn down
24 before we build something up?

25 So this values question is very much part of a

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

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

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

19 One of the benefits of taking the roundtable
20 over through three sessions, even though it's one
21 roundtable, is that we have a chance to reflect and a
22 chance to think about the sessions in between times. So
23 who would like to get started with anything that struck
24 them as important, something they wanted to continue to
25 discuss, something that they wanted to bring into the

1 current moment, and including an invitation to talk about
2 the moment in our country's history and how this affects
3 our thinking about values and reimagining justice?

4 Kris?

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

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

25 Like you can run over somebody that -- like if

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

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

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

23 I mean -- and so I've been struggling with that
24 since our last discussion, and then particularly, even
25 more so this week, in just the events that are taking

1 place, both nationally and locally. I don't have an
2 answer.

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

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

11 Nneka?

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

21 And it made me reflect on two comments that
22 were made in our discussion last week, and that was, one,
23 that -- I wrote them down -- compromise has failed, so
24 there has to be a radical re-creation. And for me, I
25 think what happened on Tuesday was a representation of how

1 compromise has failed, and even in the face of the Chauvin
2 verdict, how we can't afford to celebrate that, even
3 though a part of me, which is that we could, but there's
4 so much more that needs to be done, that we have to
5 continue to push, or at least I believe we have to
6 continue to push for that radical re-creation of this
7 system.

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

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

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

1 appreciate.

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

4 MR. WESTERN: I wasn't going to.

5 MR. TRAVIS: Oh, okay.

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

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

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

12 MR. TRAVIS: The floor is yours, Vivian.
13 Thanks.

14 MS. NIXON: Thank you.

15 MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Jon.

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

24 On the other hand, there's so much more work to
25 do, and there are so many reasons to still be vigilant,

1 that celebration doesn't seem like the word, but you know,
2 I want to find a space somewhere in between the constant
3 anxiety-provoking rage and celebration that I can live in
4 for a minute, just for a short period of time, and maybe
5 think clearly and come up with innovations and ideas in
6 that space, because I think that if you're constantly in
7 that heightened state of anxiety and fear and worry, it's
8 hard to be creative and think about the future in a
9 different way.

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

11 MR. TRAVIS: Jon?

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

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

22 I was growing up in Chicago, and a year after
23 the events that Jeremy will remember, the police riot in
24 front of the Democratic National Convention which, as you
25 can see, involved a lot of white reporters and delegates

1 as well as -- and probably less Black people than normally
2 were getting beaten up in Chicago that particular night.

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

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

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

22 And maybe in retrospect, people will say that
23 he should have, but I don't know that it would have
24 worked. I mean, I think he calculated that it wouldn't
25 work this time. And again, that's not justice, but it may

1 be a kind of cultural progress that will allow more
2 political momentum to gain.

3 MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Jon.

4 Yes, Marcia, your thoughts?

5 MS. RINCON-GALLARDO: Hi, everyone. Yes, I do.

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

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

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

17 The first event that happened on Tuesday,
18 little did we know that the verdict was going to happen
19 that same day, and this -- the organization where I am the
20 executive director, Alianza for Youth Justice, we had been
21 working for six months building our base to be able to do
22 this event, a screen convening, and we had more than
23 67 organizations represented, and literally, from the
24 beginning to the end was -- you know, we hovered with
25 healing.

1 And it was a feeling. We made space with the
2 feeling that needed to be just a particular feeling, to
3 really hold us in sacred space so that we could talk about
4 what it's going to take to end incarceration for Brown
5 youth, and the diversity of our Brown youth, everything
6 from two-spirit Afro-Latinos to Indigenous and everything
7 in between.

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

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

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

24 Yes, in some ways, you can see it as a huge
25 victory for the family and maybe even for the Black

1 community, but one by one, they started saying, first of
2 all, he's probably only going to do this -- you know, you
3 remove this.

4 You remove that. He's not going to do 40,
5 50 years of time. He'll do maybe four. He's not going to
6 be -- you know, he'll be treated well. You know, and
7 they're saying he's not going to be treated the way I got
8 treated, the way that I was put in.

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

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

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

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

1 Thank you for that.

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

8 Yes, Courtney?

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

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

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

24 But what is expected is that officers will
25 leave more aware, hopefully, and engage differently in the

1 community. Now, Austin as a city, we're doing some really
2 great things. Sukyi is actually leading a group that's
3 looking at police policies.

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

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

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

23 I started watching some videos with Angela
24 Davis as she talked about radical self-care, and Alicia
25 Garza, and I'm starting to think about how does that

1 really look in everyday life for me? And how do I
2 continue to do this work around race and policing, and
3 around race and schooling, and around race and
4 incarceration for young people, and not dive so deep that
5 I'm sad and miserable all the time?

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

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

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

20 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you.

21 MR. TRAVIS: -- Jon Simon said your training is
22 not -- it's too narrow a word to talk about what you're
23 doing, which is you're representing, you're talking about
24 history, you're standing up for what you just said you
25 find important, as a value to represent.

1 And then -- and that -- and we talked about
2 this also in Oakland, I remember, about the need for --
3 maybe this is a Square One Project, actually, for -- to
4 keep connectivity so that people can find sources of
5 support and self-healing and encouragement and mentoring.

6 It's a big challenge that you just articulated,
7 Courtney, and I just want to say, I commend you for, on
8 the same day, being -- standing in front of the Austin
9 police officers talking about, for four hours, the history
10 of race and policing.

11 God bless you. And that's really, really quite
12 spectacular, and --

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

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

16 MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

17 MR. TRAVIS: And whatever it is --

18 MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

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

21 MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

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

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

25 MR. TRAVIS: And if any of us can help you on

1 that, we're happy to be your support system. I see that
2 Keith has his blue hand up. So you are recognized, Mr.
3 Wattley.

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

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

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

21 And it has the same effect as what I saw with
22 the Rodney King beating. And it's kind of like, you
23 know -- we talk about a type of, you know, post-traumatic
24 stress, but if you never get post the trauma, then it's
25 like it's just always here.

1 And you know, it's one -- even this Chauvin, I
2 mean, I didn't -- I don't even think I got a sigh. I
3 didn't -- this is -- it's kind of what I thought would
4 happen, and I have no reason to believe that it represents
5 anything positive from this system, and then, turn around,
6 there is, you know, Ma'Khia Bryant.

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

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

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

24 And so we wanted to start this series of
25 conversations. And something that I thought was really

1 brilliant is the woman who is facilitating this whole
2 series was very intentional about making sure that we get
3 together and have fun.

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

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

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

22 And that's just what it is. I mean, the system
23 was built over hundreds, if not thousands of years.
24 Right? The argument can be made that some of these
25 systems have been around in some form for thousands of

1 years, so it's not going to change overnight. And we
2 can't always be in it such that it like is impacting our
3 mental health. Yeah. So anyway, I just wanted to share
4 that.

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

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

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

24 I just want to open it up for any other
25 comments. Bruce?

1 MR. WESTERN: Dona's comments were very
2 resonant for me, and I -- all the comments were. And I
3 think it's interesting, the -- I've -- you know, it's very
4 close to the surface right now, and we sort of know it,
5 but we're more or less aware of it at different times, but
6 the work we do is very proximate to violence.

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

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

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

1 and our work.

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

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

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

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

22 MR. TRAVIS: Thanks. Thank you, Bruce. Very,
23 very sobering observations, but the proximity to violence
24 which is -- does define our world and our work and our --
25 what's front-of-mind for us, and as Keith said, even if

1 people don't watch the TV, it's still front of mind,
2 because we have seen this movie before.

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

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

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

16 So it's just like -- who is doing things that
17 they think are worthy of sharing with our colleagues here?

18 Because we are in common purpose, doing different things,
19 each of us, but making contributions. And if it's hard,
20 it's hard.

21 And who has a suggestion before we wrap it up?

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

23 MR. TRAVIS: Yeah.

24 MS. STAMP: -- to sign off.

25 MR. TRAVIS: Yeah.

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

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

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

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

22 MR. TRAVIS: Thanks, Abbey. I know that you
23 have to leave us for another appointment. So thanks for
24 being with us today. Other suggestions or thoughts,
25 stories?

1 (No response.)

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

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

11 Katharine, I'm looking to you for a yes. Okay.
12 Come back in --

13 MS. HUFFMAN: Yeah.

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

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

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

25 MALE VOICE: Great. Thanks.

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

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

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

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

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

22 MS. HUFFMAN: Great.

23 MR. TRAVIS: Perfect.

24 MS. HUFFMAN: Excellent.

25 MR. TRAVIS: See y'all soon.

1 MS. HUFFMAN: Beautiful. Sounds good.

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

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

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

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

10 MR. WESTERN: Thank you.

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

14 (Whereupon, a short recess was taken.)

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

21 Over the course of this roundtable, which began
22 last week and continues into next week, we're grappling
23 with the values of justice. And tonight I'm thrilled to
24 welcome our keynote speakers, Marlon Peterson and Daryl
25 Atkinson.

1 Daryl is the founder and co-director of Forward
2 Justice, based in Durham, North Carolina, and Marlon is
3 the host of the Decarcerated Podcast and the founder and
4 Chief Re-imaginor of The Precedential Group, based in
5 New York City.

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

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

20 Daryl has also been a member of the Square One
21 Executive Session, which has directly influenced the
22 trajectory of these roundtables, and as an Executive
23 Session member, he's coauthored a forthcoming paper on the
24 power of parsimony -- the value of parsimony, with Jeremy
25 Travis.

1 The list of contributions that Marlon has made
2 and continues to make to Square One is lengthy. In
3 Durham, he was a participant in our roundtable and also
4 provided a really breathtaking on-stage interview with
5 Melissa Harris-Perry, and at our Oakland roundtable, he
6 again joined us as a participant around the table and then
7 took to the stage to interview Black Lives Matter
8 co-founder, Alicia Garza.

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

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

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

25 Daryl, Marlon, I'm going to hand things over to

1 you both and ask you to consider the question that's front
2 and center in this roundtable: What are the values that
3 should guide efforts to create safety and reduce harm?
4 And can a focus on values contribute to creative paths
5 for, guide us towards a reckoning with the justice system?

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

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

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

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

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

23 A lot of good conversations are obviously had.
24 I got to meet you. Right? You know, I'd heard about you
25 but never got to meet you, so I got to meet you and

1 obviously other people, so there's definitely some good
2 that came out of this.

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

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

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

16 MR. PETERSON: No, no.

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

19 MR. PETERSON: You know, I'm happy -- I think
20 the personal is where we've got to go. Right? I mean,
21 not necessarily like, you know, everyone's personal
22 situation. I don't have to discuss everything, but I
23 think the personal ultimately -- you know, the question
24 that they posed for that is posed, where the values that
25 should lead the discussions on safety and harm, these are

1 personal -- this is a personal interrogation, this is a
2 personal sort of deliberation that's required, I think.

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

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

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

1 harm?

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 You know, we know what values are currently
25 reflected, you know. You know, I mean, equity, obviously,

1 and not equality, but equity, where we're really looking
2 at institutions and judging them by the outcomes that they
3 produce.

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

12 One that I've thought about a lot, and you
13 know, Jeremy and I have a forthcoming paper, is parsimony.

14 And that's I think irrespective of even after the
15 reimagining -- right? -- let's say, we completely wipe the
16 slate clean, abolish, and we come up with some kind of
17 ideal utopian state -- right? -- because I believe that
18 there would still be a function for the state.

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

24 And I think the state can serve a positive role
25 in people's lives. Take, for example, our most recent,

1 pressing example of vaccine dissemination. Right? The
2 state is playing an integral role and to make sure that
3 people get access to this lifesaving vaccine.

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

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

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

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

22 MR. PETERSON: You know, listening to you,
23 Daryl, you know, and to -- you know, I kind of want to
24 give some of the things I think that, you know -- the
25 values as well, and I think a good part of it that divides

1 us, that you sort of just, you know, shared are some of
2 the values that I have.

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

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

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

21 You put that "should," like you emphasized
22 should -- is that like the idea of forgiveness is
23 something that we should just imagine a community where,
24 no matter what happened, our value that we had at the core
25 of how to address this thing in our community was

1 forgiveness. Right? And we could have forgiveness along
2 with other things. Right?

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

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

19 Like right now we do, just in terms of a
20 state -- or the state leads with police. That's what we
21 lead with. We lead with, you know, a hammer. And I'm
22 just staying that -- let's say the hammer exists. Let's
23 say the hammer -- as you said, there's some utility for
24 the state -- let's say that utility existed, continues to
25 exist.

1 Imagine if it was led differently, with a
2 different sort of core value, with love or dignity, with
3 equity, with forgiveness? You know what I mean? We're
4 parsimony -- or parsimony?

5 MR. ATKINSON: Parsimony.

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

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

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

24 We're not getting to the root of anything. We
25 just want to figure why you did that crime and how do we

1 prove it and how we punish you for it. There's nothing
2 about what -- like how did that -- like what got this
3 person to that place?

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

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

15 MR. ATKINSON: I mean, I focused on it because
16 it seemed -- I think you're hitting it right on the head,
17 Marlon. It's conditional. Right? It is -- oh, we should
18 do this, but if we don't meet this mark, we tried really,
19 really hard. Right? I would rather -- I would submit, it
20 should be a must. Our system must reflect these
21 things --right -- to make them, you know, absolute
22 requirements. And you know, you mentioned, you know, how
23 do we deal with different concepts of restorative or
24 therapeutic or transformative justice in the context of
25 officer-involved killings.

1 Right? And it's funny, man. I've come up with
2 this concept. Like they should be at the back of the line
3 for that. It should be available, but they should be at
4 the very back of the line, meaning that we should be
5 trying -- because it always seems like when the innovation
6 comes, and you know, we've seen some of this with law
7 enforcement assistance diversion.

8 When the innovation comes for the lighter,
9 kinder, gentler way, it ends up benefitting white folks.
10 It ends up benefitting folks from majoritarian societies.

11 Right? So let's not do that this time. You know what I
12 mean?

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

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

25 So restoration and reconciliation I think is

1 the flip side of that coin of forgiveness.

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

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

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

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

24 And it is a way -- you know, it's out of sight,
25 out of mind. We don't have to -- in a way, we don't have

1 to worry about -- not only do we have to worry about the
2 person, necessarily, but we have this sort of idea that we
3 also have to worry about the problem in the first place.
4 We think we can incarcerate the problem.

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

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

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

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

25 MR. ATKINSON: And when you say that entity --

1 MR. PETERSON: So I think about the state, so
2 in this --

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

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

8 MR. ATKINSON: Yeah. I mean --

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

11 MR. ATKINSON: But -- we are dreaming a little
12 bit, but I'm going to reflect it back to some of my
13 personal experiences -- right -- when I was incarcerated.

14 I was incarcerated at an institution, St. Clair
15 Correctional Facility.

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

22 And one thing I remember from that experience,
23 being around all of those men who had that much time, you
24 know, who we have banished -- right? -- there was a very,
25 very small percentage that I guess, if you -- for whatever

1 would be categorized as sociopaths; I mean, literally do
2 not play with others in the sandbox.

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

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

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

22 Each community comes up with its own kind of
23 set of criteria on how they're going to hold folks
24 accountable and things of that nature? I was
25 reflecting -- I was telling -- reflecting on my time

1 reading *Things Fall Apart*, and just some of the practices
2 that they put in -- you know, that were listed in that
3 book with regards to harm.

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

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

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

23 I don't -- it was not long before he passed. I
24 don't know; it was definitely maybe this year. And he was
25 talking about -- you know, telling stories about -- almost

1 all war stories, you know, war stories when he was inside,
2 when he was home, and you know, and even recent history.

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

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

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

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

21 The point I'm getting to is that -- and things
22 like -- I'm not saying money is -- in no way am I
23 injecting that money is the mitigating factor necessarily.

24 I think coming out of poverty is a mitigating factor. I
25 don't think like an abundance of money is a mitigating

1 factor necessarily.

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

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

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

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

25 And it seemed like his music was outlet.

1 Right? That was his art. His art was his outlet. This
2 is a long point I'm making.

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

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

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

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

24 But like there is a model for how we can work
25 with people who may seem incorrigible. X is somebody who

1 I can see would be incorrigible, even as a 50-year-old
2 person -- right? -- but he had other things that helped
3 save him.

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

9 What are the things that prevented you from
10 continuing to rob and steal or whatever, or to be
11 committed to rap? Right? Because he had to be committed.

12 There's something -- there's a part of him that had to be
13 committed to that and not committed to robbing people
14 anymore. Right? And that happened.

15 Like what was that thing? Because that thing
16 exists. I think there are buckets -- there are examples
17 in the people that we know that can teach us -- that lead
18 us to what we want. And it's not easily evaluated.

19 Right? It's not easily evaluated. That thing about all
20 the research that's done by Nicole on -- who's listening
21 right now. You know, you may not be able to evaluate it
22 and put it in, you know, an evidence-based model. Right?

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

1 put enough things -- we don't put enough value in those
2 things.

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

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

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

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

19 MR. PETERSON: Oh, yes.

20 MR. ATKINSON: -- get your reaction.
21 Reckoning.

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

1 reckoning.

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

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

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

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

21 Right? And I'll give you one example and I'll
22 move on to the next point. Two days ago -- you know, I've
23 got this new book out I'm very proud of. I walk into a
24 Barnes & Noble in Manhattan, and I'm in there to sign.
25 Right?

1 You know, I speak to the manager, signing
2 books. She's placing it up in the front and all that sort
3 of stuff, and I'm standing right next to the manager or
4 employee. I'm assuming she's the manager. And while
5 she's there with a -- like a Barnes & Noble name tag on,
6 like an apron apparently they have them wear, and I'm
7 their regular.

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

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

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

1 this country.

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

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

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

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

21 The idea of this racial reckoning, I think it's
22 both yes and no, and I'm going to agree with you largely
23 on, you know, some of your critiques around some of the
24 rhetoric around racial reckoning without a whole lot of
25 demonstrative changes and actions, if you will.

1 And some things are starting to shift in the
2 popular culture, and I use my -- I was -- you know, we --
3 because we got vaccinated, my mother got vaccinated, and
4 were able to, you know, let her see her granddaughter for
5 the first time in about a year and some change, and you
6 know, I was talking to my mom, and I use her kind of as my
7 informal focus group of, you know, just -- look, run-of-
8 the-mill Black folk.

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

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

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

24 Right?

25 It was not Law and Order, what you going to do?

1 What you going to do when they come for you? And I can
2 remember when the Law and Order and the Cops, and that
3 whole kind of perspective of law enforcement was the
4 predominant and the only perspective that you would get in
5 popular culture about the role that law enforcement played
6 in people's lives.

7 So I highlight that Gray's Anatomy example to
8 talk about -- there is some shift in popular culture
9 around certain aspects of whether it's policing and our
10 prison system that are not the same as they were 20 and
11 25 years ago.

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

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

22 MR. ATKINSON: Racialized capital.

23 MR. PETERSON: Yeah. Racialized capitalism.

24 So I don't hear as much of a critique, even in, you know,
25 some of our most progressive, you know, circles --

1 right? -- around capitalism with as much vehemence, with
2 as much targeted kind of interventions as I do around
3 anti-racist efforts, particularly the manifestation of
4 racial violence that police forces impose on Black folk.

5 MR. ATKINSON: Yeah, yeah.

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

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

21 It allows -- everybody can have measures of
22 benefit from it in a way, but there's definitely some
23 groups of people who are harmed by it the most. But I
24 also think kind of going back to the -- you know, kind of
25 back to the values thing, like are those values that we

1 spoke about, the equity -- I'm going to keep saying it for
2 people -- you know, the equity, the human dignity, the
3 parsimony, the love, the forgiveness, you know, getting to
4 the root, can those things exist in a racial -- in a
5 society where we have -- you know, in a racially
6 capitalist society? Like can those things exist?

7 MR. ATKINSON: No.

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

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

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

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

21 I mean, there's no other way. I mean, it is --
22 show me where it's worked for Black and Brown communities.
23 Just show me. Give me the evidence and, you know, maybe
24 I'll be persuaded. And I think of it, Marlon, because I'm
25 certainly not a purist.

1 I'm benefitting as well, but you know, just
2 like I try to reduce my carbon footprint, I try to reduce
3 my capitalist footprint as well. You know, I mean, I'm
4 not, you know, trying to acquire as much as some. So I
5 just think it's, once again, an underdeveloped muscle,
6 that in addition to these alternative systems that we're
7 considering, we've got to think of alternative economies
8 as well, because they're linked together.

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

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

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

25 In so many ways, like the atmosphere that we're

1 in is going to continue creating that thing in various
2 ways. Right? It's going to -- that's a byproduct of
3 racialized capitalism. You know, also it's a collateral
4 consequence.

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

12 And in order for America to work, we have to
13 have people in jails or in plantations, once upon a time.

14 That's what makes America work. You know what I mean?
15 And that's the reckoning.

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

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

1 bad as well.

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

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

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

21 Not everything that they proposed was
22 restorative and rehabilitative; some of it was
23 retributive. And I highlight that, that we've all been
24 swimming in the dirty pond of not only white supremacy but
25 of excess punitiveness and just thereby creating another

1 institution to give community control over a certain
2 aspect of order maintenance doesn't necessarily mean that
3 that control would be any less punitive than what some of
4 our institutions and systems are producing, unless we have
5 targeted interventions to disrupt that and make so.

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

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

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

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

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

24 Yeah. We have nine to ten minutes; I see we
25 have a few minutes ago. Let me finish my point. But what

1 I would say is this. Right? One is that I'm like
2 thinking about Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who speaks about
3 this very well and always talks about getting to the root.
4 That's why I spoke about that. Right? And abolition is
5 about getting to the root. It's also about what we can
6 create in place of, sort of what you spoke about earlier,
7 like what we need, what we want. That's also what
8 abolition is. Right?

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

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

21 I always think like, one, there's more guns
22 than there are people in this country. America is the
23 number-one exporter of firearms in the world and has been
24 so for years, and they increased over the quarantine, over
25 the pandemic. Right? Or we increased over the pandemic.

1 And the reason why I bring those two things
2 into the conversation around the issue of violence and
3 unfettered access to firearms is that, to deal with this,
4 it's not something that -- this is not a -- that's not a
5 local issue.

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

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

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

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

21 There is a need. Right? There's -- you know,
22 basic economics, you know, in terms of supply and demand.

23 So I'm just getting to that first. Part of what we're
24 saying is that -- and why we're thinking about abolition
25 and getting to the root of it is also saying that the root

1 of the problems of particularly violence, when you're
2 thinking about violence as a whole and then weapons is
3 deeply embedded in how we -- like the society that we live
4 in.

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

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

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

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

1 not fostering that. Right? We're not initiating in that.

2 Right?

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

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

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

24 I've heard people say that. And I'm like, no,
25 you're doing the wrong thing there, because somebody is

1 taking that down, writing that down, putting that in their
2 next report. Prison: this person is thankful for that.

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

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

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

19 And the title doesn't come in until like the
20 second or third revision of the book, the term
21 "abolition." Like this is a journey to it. Right? It's
22 a journey to it. So in all the things, whether it be to
23 violence in our communities, unfettered access to weapons
24 and the political education, like all those things are
25 important, but particularly the last point.

1 The political education is probably the most
2 important, because those things lead to help us as a
3 society in this country deal with the other two things,
4 the unfettered to weapons and violence. And that's the
5 most important part, because not only for people who are
6 directly impacted, but our society is not really
7 politically educated.

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

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

18 The mere fact that people keep -- we have these
19 mass shootings in this country. If I was a doctor and I
20 was trying to like -- checking on a patient, and like
21 there's something really wrong with this patient -- these
22 mass shootings are very -- they're very indicative.
23 They're telling us something. There's a sickness here,
24 that young people are doing it. The last one was 20 years
25 old. Right? These are young people doing it. These

1 aren't like men our age, jaded and tired, and tired of the
2 man and all.

3 These are children doing these mass shootings.

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

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

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

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

24 MR. ATKINSON: All right. Katharine, I think
25 you were telling us it was time maybe about 15 minutes

1 ago.

2 MR. PETERSON: Yeah, that's on me.

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

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

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

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

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

23 You put that in terms of the right to -- the
24 Second Amendment rights in relation to voting rights.
25 There are a lot of, I think, other iterations of that.

1 You know, what do we do with that? What's the path
2 forward for that?

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

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

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

10 MR. PETERSON: Oh, to me? Okay.

11 MS. HUFFMAN: Or Daryl. Both of you.

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

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

23 I think that's a part of it. And I think as --
24 we also should be like -- I think part of what we can do
25 is being courageous about speaking up about the things

1 that are outside the group-think. Right? In the criminal
2 legal space here, as we know, there's a group-think.

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

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

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

24 And I can't remember what the prompt question
25 was, but I know my -- one of my answers was like -- I was

1 nervous on the inside about wanting to say like the
2 word -- the A-word. Right?

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

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

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

24 Like all those things are working up in my
25 feelings, and I was like, let me say this thing. And I'm

1 just saying that like we come to these spaces. It's
2 important to say the thing that might be unpopular, not
3 disrespectful, but unpopular, because we might be saying
4 the thing that needs to be heard.

5 And we've seen in our society the things that
6 need to be heard in our society right now, because if not,
7 well, we know what the end results are also.

8 MS. HUFFMAN: Yeah. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

21 I don't think this place is ever going to be
22 any different. I really don't. And if we ever build the
23 political power, the people power, to actually effectuate
24 where we'd be radically different, history has shown us,
25 what happened on January 6 was not unique, every time.

1 Look at Radical Reconstruction, and it happened
2 in Wilmington, North Carolina, when folks exerted their
3 political and economic power. They had political and
4 economic power. Folks came, radical insurrection, and
5 took it.

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

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

18 I don't think that's ever going to be different
19 here. It's in -- as Marlon said, it's in the DNA of this
20 place. Now, that leaves us a set of alternatives of what
21 we're going to do. Right? And it's interesting, when you
22 look at history, the largest membership-based organization
23 for Black folks was Marcus Garvey's organization, and they
24 organized around leaving this place, because since the
25 moment that we've gotten here, they've tried to rape,

1 kill, drown, bomb, shoot and degradate us in every single
2 way that they possibly could, and do we somehow believe
3 that the historical record, the evidence is going to be
4 any different?

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

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

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

13 MS. HUFFMAN: Uh-huh.

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

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

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

24 That's how this whole thing started, if I'm not
25 correct -- if I'm correct. And you came in from the entry

1 point of crime and violence. That was your entry point,
2 like how would we address it, if we did everything
3 differently?

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

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

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

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

22 MS. HUFFMAN: Who is that really going to be?
23 Yeah. What's that really going to be? I want to invite
24 in Nneka, who had a question to bring to the conversation.
25 Nneka?

1 DR. TAPIA: First, just, Daryl and Marlon,
2 thank you for your candor and sharing your thoughts and a
3 part of your personal stories with us.

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

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

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

25 And I ain't -- and this is all I'm going to

1 say. You might lose some. And I don't want to say that.

2 I say you just might have to rearrange your relationships
3 with some of your friends and colleagues, for one --
4 right? -- because there's a corporate culture that, you
5 know, you were a part of at one point, and now everyone is
6 where you're at. And that's just reality. I don't have
7 to deal with that. Right? So that's one difference.

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

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

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

22 And we're saying like this is one way to deal
23 with it, one way we can address that -- right? -- is
24 understanding, one, abolition and saying that like, you
25 know -- and reform, whatever. We are also saying that

1 people who have committed to harm has also experienced the
2 harm.

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

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

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

22 MR. ATKINSON: I'm deeply skeptical, Nneka,
23 deeply, deeply skeptical of currently embedded actors in
24 the criminal legal system claiming that they want to
25 abolish it.

1 They would be abolishing their jobs. They
2 would be abolishing their very professional identifies and
3 how they make their money and how they sent kids to
4 college and how they've gotten pensions and paid for
5 houses.

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

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

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

25 So I'm deeply skeptical of any current criminal

1 legal practitioner saying that they are abolitionists.

2 MR. PETERSON: What about this, though, Daryl?

3 I'm going to just join this -- I'm sorry. Can -- I don't
4 know --

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

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

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

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

22 And you know, I work for myself. Everyone
23 can't do that. Right? And there's a privilege in me
24 saying that even. But also I understand too that, like
25 those folks working -- like I have -- you know, one of my

1 good friends is -- I grew up with him.

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

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

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

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

22 And that's all part of this conversation.
23 That's all a part of it, like the racialized capitalism
24 and in the way this country works, particularly this
25 country. Like, you know, sometimes people are in

1 professions out of necessity and not necessarily out of
2 want and need. Right? And that's a hard reality to deal
3 with, because particularly when we think about COs -- I
4 think about COs -- Rikers Island -- all the COs there are
5 Black, and they're from the block, and they're from the
6 block; like, you know, they're from the block.

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

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

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

22 MR. PETERSON: I'm getting too long.

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

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

1 a question.

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

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

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

20 And also, especially thinking of your book,
21 Marlon, how to extend it to incarceration, because it
22 feels like people see the violence of policing right now,
23 and I'm not convinced they see the violence -- I thought
24 COVID would help people see the violence of incarceration,
25 but not so clearly.

1 MR. PETERSON: Yeah, I mean, if we -- they
2 had -- if everybody had cameras in prison, you'd be -- you
3 know, you'd be -- your mouth would be on the floor if
4 everybody had cameras in the prison, and if we want to
5 think about physical violence, think about the sexual
6 violence too from -- particularly in women's prisons --
7 right? -- from officers.

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

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

21 And for what it's worth, most of us in society
22 are comfortable with it, when -- particularly when there's
23 somebody who did something particularly egregious. Right?
24 We usually say, I hope that person has a hard time in
25 prison. We -- you know, we're kind of saying we want that

1 violence to continue. Right? We're not getting to the
2 core of why the violence is there. And I mean, I agree
3 with you with that, Jon, in that, you know, we are in the
4 flashpoint now.

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

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

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

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

24 You know, so we're -- you know, I try to read
25 history and try to be a student of history, and what the

1 historical record of this country has shown is to not get
2 too high about these grand moments of awakening and
3 transformation, because they're really, really fleeting,
4 really, really short.

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

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

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

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

24 I'm going to ask Dona and Monica to share your
25 questions pretty briefly, and then we'll let Daryl and

1 Marlon respond to that, and then we'll wrap up our time
2 together, with just huge gratitude to everybody.

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

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

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

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

25 And I think that in that implicit -- and I

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

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

10 MS. HUFFMAN: Thanks, Dona.

11 Monica, do you want to jump in?

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

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

24 How do you navigate being abolitionist or being
25 just essentially like an Afro pessimist -- is how I

1 interpreted you, Daryl -- given this outcome, and not
2 wanting to be the kind of wet blanket with your people --
3 or our people?

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

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

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

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

25 No. I want them to go to jail because I think

1 when more of them feel the pain of prison, feel the pain
2 of the rigidity of our system -- right? -- we might start
3 to see it change for the betterment of other marginalized
4 communities.

5 That may be a little bit warped, but I mean,
6 Derrick Bell had this whole -- he was a Harvard
7 academician -- had this whole entrance convergence theory.

8 It's kind along those lines -- right? -- that when they
9 start hurting bad enough -- right? -- you'll start, you
10 know, seeing some changes in our institutions and systems.

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

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

1 like a redheaded stepchild.

2 And so I'll stop there.

3 MS. HUFFMAN: Thank you. Marlon?

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

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

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

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

25 And there's promise in that video for me in

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

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

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

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

21 He didn't do that that day, and that's what we
22 forget, that, yes, there is progress that's happening, but
23 we are the ones that's dying. Like we the ones that's
24 dying -- it's our health outcomes. COVID exposed that.
25 COVID exposed the fact that our health, that just -- that

1 our comorbidities were allowing us to be more susceptible
2 to this disease, and why do we have these comorbidities?
3 Because of the communities that we were in and the
4 socioeconomic conditions of our communities.

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

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

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

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

24 I understand that there is relief, a sense of
25 accountability even, particularly, and I think about his

1 family. I think about his daughter again. Right? Like
2 there's a feeling, like, yeah, you know, the state did
3 right by us; the system did right by us in this moment.
4 Like I get that. You felt like they heard. It felt like
5 they were heard. They weren't dismissed like all the
6 other cases. But then I know that's going to happen
7 again.

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

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

23 We don't get that often. And I think if it was
24 a five-minute video instead of an eight-minute video, if
25 that person had shut their phone off a little -- shut it

1 off -- put it on a little bit later or shut it off a
2 little bit sooner, would it be as obvious?

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

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

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

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

23 For our participants, we'll be inviting you all
24 to join a little bit beforehand, and then for our audience
25 who's watching, please join us again.

1 We'll be livestreaming starting right at noon,
2 and we'll look forward to having you join us then. Our
3 sessions tomorrow are on the Irreducible Minimum and
4 Abolition, following from our conversation tonight, and on
5 Operationalizing the Values of Justice, Guiding
6 Principles.

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

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

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

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

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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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