

## #1358 How A System Of Power Defends Itself, A Case Study

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award winning best of life podcast. Speaking of award winning, now is the time to nominate the show once again. We have twice won the award for best-produced podcasts in the Podcast Awards. But in more recent years, we've been focusing on the news and politics category. So just to be nominated is great for us, whether we win or not, it's a great way for new listeners to find the show.

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Now today's episode is very unlike our normal episodes. I usually aim for a theme. I pull together several clips to help to bring that theme to light.

Today, I have just one big story for you and the lessons to be learned, all stem from telling that one story. I have some clips, but not in the usual sense. And I shall be your guide through all of this. And I warn you right upfront that that today's episode is it's going to turn into a bit of a soap opera. I apologize for that. I do think it is for a good cause though. And the last thing to keep in mind as we go forward, is that the story to be discussed, the kind of messy soap opera that I'm going to tell you about, it is both central, but also kind of beside the point of this story. For me, the real interesting lesson comes from the story of the story. You know, in other words, how the story is told.

So I was introduced to the story we will be hearing by Yascha Mounk on his podcast "The Good Fight." He generally focuses on anti-authoritarianism, anti-fascism, that sort of thing. He definitely believes that right-wing populism and authoritarianism are some of the most dangerous forces facing the world today.

Yascha did an episode about a New York City education council meeting, which admittedly was a little out of step for, you know, what I usually see from him, and the story of that meeting, it drew him in and then his description of the meeting drew me in. So, you know, Yascha sees this story as a kind of case study of sorts, suggesting that it is indicative of something larger.

I also see it as a case study, but for me, Yascha himself is actually part of my case study. So we're going to be following along as he introduces the scene first.

**YASCHA MOUNK - HOST, THE GOOD FIGHT:** I am proud to be an anti-racist, the opposition to racism, but disdain of racism, hatred for racism is at the very core of how I see the world.

But at the moment, in the United States there's, it's very, very strange phenomenon in which the word of anti-racism is increasingly becoming associated with some movements, with some ideas, with some positions that are anything, but.

When you read some of the best selling books in this idea space, when you read *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, or for that matter, *How to Be An Antiracist* by Ibram Kendy, the

argument in these books is that whites have to recognize that they have deep things in common with each other. They have to come to identify with their whiteness in order to then remedy the historical sense. But this is not a humanism, which emphasizes what we have in common, across ethnic and religious boundaries. This is not a demand to live up to our principles more fully than we have in the past. It is not the belief that we need to recognize and grapple with the injustices many minority groups are facing today in order to be able to overcome that, in order to be able to have more in common and be more connected with each other.

It is ultimately a racialism which sees friendship, relationships, love between ethnic and religious lines as inherently fraught, inherently problematic.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So here's what we know so far, we're going to be having a discussion about racism and whether the lessons being taught in two of the most popular books in the country right now, *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, and *How To Be An Antiracist* by Ibram Kendy are leading people down some misguided paths.

I have some thoughts about this, but first let's hear one more clip from Yascha from a bit later in that same episode.

**YASCHA MOUNK - HOST, THE GOOD FIGHT:** One of the things that strikes me as crazy about this--and I get this strong sense of that when I read *White Fragility* and I got this sense in a way from people in that council, but you know, their own lives might be so segregated, especially among the white people who sort of push from this ideology that they just don't have normal relationships with nonwhite people.

And so they think that every interaction between someone who's white and somebody who's not white, it has to be fraught with tension. You know, in DiAngelo in her trainings argues that if a white person interrupts a nonwhite person, which I think naturally happens in conversation between close friends, that is to perpetrate an act of racism, because it is using the whole machinery of white supremacy in order to silence a sort of historically oppressed voice.

I mean, if that's what I thought about my friend or my partner, or even my colleague, that they are in such an inferior status to me that every time that, you know, I get excited about what they say, and I sort of cut in to sort of add to what they're saying, I'm using the whole machinery of white supremacy to oppress them, I don't treat them as an equal. I don't think of them as an equal. I certainly can't have a close friendship because friendship by definition, I think requires an element of equality.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Okay. So I'm going to be unpacking this one by one. And I know we're not even to the main story yet, but as I said, the important part is how the story is being told. And so the framing leading up to it is important and needs to be understood.

So there are a couple of main points. But before I even get to those, a quick side note, I don't have time to fully dive into this one. I just want to mention that I think it's a complete straw man argument that he laid out there that sort of flattens the vastly different relationships like close friends or partners and colleagues.

And he tries to sort of make them all fit the same dynamic. Like everyone knows that all of those relationships are very different. A white person interrupting their black spouse or close friend during an excited discussion, isn't at all the same as interrupting and speaking over a black colleague. The examples given in *White Fragility* that he's referring to are I think, entirely focused on the more colleague-style interactions. So for him to slip in a scenario of, you know, close friends talking excitedly, it's a clear straw man argument that doesn't accurately represent the work that he's criticizing.

But to the main points that I want to focus on, in the first clip Yascha argues that antiracists like the writer of *White Fragility* suggest that interracial relationships are either inherently flawed or problematic.

In the second clip, he suggests that seeing interracial relationships as fraught with tension is akin to there being a sort of superiority-inferiority dynamic at play.

So the first framing I think is way off. I have read the books that Mounk is referring to, and I didn't come away with any conclusion even remotely like the idea that interracial relationships are inherently flawed. Though I think I may know why he frames it that way, as it sort of plays into the rest of the story about what happened at the education council meeting that we will be getting to.

The second framing I think it's a lot closer. Interracial relationships are not inherently flawed or problematic, but yes, they are fraught.

Just to be clear on the definition, at least the second definition from, I think Merriam Webster: "Fraught: causing or affected by anxiety or stress." So he's used a better word to describe interracial relationships in the second clip, but then suggests that if you acknowledge that tension or address it, then you are dealing with a person as if they are inferior to you.

Here is why that is wrong. Power can be at play without there being a question of equality. Here's an example. I have the power to ruin people's day. I can leave my home and ask the first dozen women that I come across when their due date is. Asking that question would undoubtedly cause a lot of mental stress and anguish to many, or most of the women I encounter. I unquestionably have the power to do that, but no one would suggest that me having that power makes those women inferior to me.

So similarly, white people have the power to make statements, ask questions or otherwise act in ways that are casually and usually accidentally racist, and those actions and questions and statements cause real harm to people. But that can happen without calling into question the equality of the people involved.

So in essence, my take away from what Yascha is saying is that, one, believing interracial relationships are fraught with tension leads to, two, believing that black people are inferior in those relationships. But since three, black people are self-evidently not inferior. Therefore, four, we should not consider interracial relationships to be fraught with tension.

So it's kind of understandable, solid logic otherwise. But the misuse of the idea of inferiority makes the whole thing crumble on its own foundation.

Now that we understand that interracial relationships can and are fraught with tension without implying that black people are inferior, let's actually try to understand more about the stress and anxiety that is inherent in those interactions, whether we want it to be or not.

Starting with white people, white people can have stress during these interactions in a couple of different ways. First, sort of the good way I would say, is they can have a genuine anxiety about saying something racist and causing harm that they can really not want to do that and be worried about it.

And the second source of stress and anxiety could be the fear of being called out or criticized for saying or doing something racist and being made to feel bad. So a lot of people are experiencing that anxiety in America these days.

The stress for black people comes in a very different way. It's more from being on the receiving end of racist comments. And that happens in a couple of different ways. First there's, it's just the direct impact. They have to deal with racist comments, whether they are intentional or unintentional. They hear them, they feel them, they experienced them. It causes harm on the personal level. It contributes to the broader dynamic of white supremacy that is oppressive and all of that.

That's the direct impact. And then secondly, there's the emotional labor of having to navigate relationship with white people. Because if you wanted to try to explain to a white person, even really calmly and gently, that the comments they made were racially insensitive and harmful, that is usually going to lead to an all-out breakdown by those white people.

And then just to be clear, there are more nuances that go beyond what I've just said, but I am not qualified to speak to it. And I'm just acknowledging that there are more layers there to be explored.

So on the topic of emotional labor, think of a child who doesn't yet understand the concept of rudeness and politeness, much less what things a person could say that actually falls into one category or the other. So kids, as we know, they say a lot of rude stuff. They ask blunt questions. They point out things about other people that the kid finds strange. You know, they are basically an etiquette nightmare. So over time, kids are taught by a combination of their parents and, you know, they're otherwise socialized through interactions with others to figure out what is okay to say and what is not okay to say. And that is how we end up with a society of adults who mostly don't go around asking if people are pregnant. The problem is that white people are socialized to understand the concept of politeness--through a white lens. And so there are some racist, specific elements of rudeness and politeness that we miss entirely, and we don't know they exist. And when we are accidentally rude or accidentally racist, the way a child would be, because they don't know any better, that manifests itself in accidentally racist ways. And even worse, racism, even if it's accidental, and even if we're just talking about the little microaggressions, they cause a lot more harm than rudeness does because by and large rudeness is often not attached to larger structural oppressive forces, whereas racism always is.

What *White Fragility* the book is suggesting is that there is a set of social norms that we all need to learn to help reduce the stress associated with interracial interactions, just like kids learn social norms so that they can grow up and fit in with society without going around accidentally offending people all the time.

But Yascha Mounk's suggestion seems to be that the only way for white and black people to have normal relationships is to just pretend that interracial relationships are not fraught, to assume that there is not, or should not, be any stress associated with them, and therefore not to bother to learn, to navigate those interactions in a way that helps make everyone comfortable.

This idea, which is the idea that huge swaths of white people agree with, is that we should ignore our differences, focus on what makes us the same, focus on our shared humanity, while ignoring race. Which sounds great until you scratch a millimeter below the surface. Because race is a massive aspect of our lives that helps fundamentally shape our identities.

This is just a slightly more modern rehash of saying I don't see color. Not only is that not actually helpful; it is counterproductive to your goals. To pretend to not see color is to fail to see or acknowledge a major part of a person and to discount the impact of that skin color on how that person experiences the world.

So how would you expect to form a close relationship with a person whose identity and life experience you prefer to ignore? Then on top of that, you expect that black people should just give everyone else the benefit of the doubt. And if anything accidentally racist is said, then it should be understood as unintentional.

It's more important, this argument goes, to focus on the intention of the person speaking, but intentions are far, far less important than white people desperately wish for them to be. If white people had their way, intentions would be the only thing that mattered. So that even if all of our best intentions were to craft policy that led to radically disparate outcomes, which they have, by the way, there would be no one to blame because, Hey, we had good intentions, so you can't blame us. But let's actually look at what this does to the fraught nature of interracial relationships.

Just a quick recap, why people feel stress because they may worry about being racist and not wanting to cause harm, or they can worry about being called racist and feeling bad. Black people feel the actual direct impact of racist comments, and they have to manage the emotions of white people, usually by choosing to not confront us about our harmful comments and actions.

The suggested solution to this dynamic by racially illiterate white people, is that we should all just focus on what makes us the same, therefore white people shouldn't worry about learning what types of things they may say or do that would be seen as racist. Don't worry about the racial implications of interrupting and talking over a black person, because your intention is all that matters. So if you're interrupting because you're just so comfortable with the person and excited to interject, as Yascha was saying, then that's perfectly fine because you don't have to think about it any further. You can leave it up to the black person to decide on their own on a case-by-case basis, whether you were just super comfortable with them and excited to join in, or whether you were just super comfortable with your whiteness, which gives you the implicit permission to speak whenever you want, when you decided to speak over them.

So the black person gets to continue to do what they have always done. They absorb the direct impact of the comments and actions they experience, and they have to manage the emotions of white people by usually not confronting us about what we say or do. So what a

surprise, the method preferred by white people is the one where we don't have to do anything extra, and black people get to do all of our emotional labor for us.

One last note, though, on the topic of Yascha's straw man argument before moving on. Yascha claims that anti-racists like Robin DiAngelo, who wrote *White Fragility*, want us to treat all interracial relationships like tentative interactions, fraught with racist danger at every turn. And that this is what will prevent us from ever forming genuine relationships across the color line. The suggestion that's actually made by Robin DiAngelo in *White Fragility* is that gaining racial literacy will help white people avoid accidental racism among acquaintances and know how to deal with it when it inevitably happens, with the express purpose of helping us form better, more comfortable interracial relationships that can lead to genuine friendships. The first is, like, suggesting that if you ever want to form a close relationship with the person, then you should skip past polite, socially appropriate pleasantries and treat a person like they're already your best friend, right from the start, which would make you seem sort of disturbed. The second is suggesting that healthy relationships can only form when there is a mutual willingness to manage the emotional labor of a relationship. Antiracists, like Robin DiAngelo, are asking white people to begin to shoulder their share of the burden of emotional labor that comes with interracial relationships.

And to be clear, All relationships of all kinds require some degree of emotional labor, but interracial relationships have additional unique qualities that cannot be ignored or wished away. People who think that they're antiracist, almost exclusively white people like Yascha Mounk, think that the best way forward is to pretend that there is no unique emotional labor involved with interracial relationships. But that only serves to perpetuate the power structure of the status quo the way it is and continue to add to the emotional labor of black people.

And if you've ever wondered why black people are tired of talking to white people about racism, this is why: white people are exhausting because we're always demanding that other people manage our emotions for us, to affirm to us that we are good people, to recognize that our intentions were good, and to forgive us for any unintentional harm that we cause along the way, because if you don't, we will cry. We will get defensive. We will get angry. And oftentimes, ultimately insist that we are the real victims. In other words, we will make the cost of confronting us so high that a black person will make the rational decision to take the path of least resistance by remaining silent, continuing to carry the burden of managing our feelings for us, because confronting us about our accidental racism can be downright harrowing.

Better yet though, here is an actual black woman who has words on the subject. Quote, "White people can be exhausting. It's work to be the only person of color in an organization, bearing the weight of all your white coworkers' questions about blackness. It's work to always be hyper-visible because of your skin, easily identified as being present or absent, but for your needs to be completely invisible to those around you. It's work to do the emotional labor of pointing out problematic racist thinking, policies, actions, and statements, while desperately trying to avoid bitterness and cynicism. Quite frankly, the work isn't just tedious. It can be dangerous for black women to attempt to carve out space for themselves, their perspective, their gifts, their skills, their education, their experiences in places that haven't examined the prevailing assumption of white culture. The danger of letting whiteness walk

off with our joy, our peace, our sense of dignity and self love is ever present. As a black woman, working in white spaces, my perception of racial dynamics have been questioned, minimized, or denied altogether." Unquote. These words come from Austin Channing Brown's new book, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*.

Okay, let's get to this New York City Community Education Council meeting. As I said, the council meeting is both central and a side note in this story I'm telling. It's how the story is told that is more important, and Yascha Mounk was the lens through which I was introduced to this story, so understanding his perspective is important.

I read the title of an episode of his podcast that asked an unbelievable question: is it racist for a White man to bounce a Brown baby on his lap? The scene was described in the notes of the podcast as happening during a New York City school board meeting, and it was suggested that "one member accused another of perpetrating racism by holding his girlfriend's nephew."

Yascha introduces this scene with all of the context I just gave you and responded to, and he is pointing out what he saw as deep flaws in books like *White Fragility*, which helped shed light, he believes, on the scene that he wants to talk about. So, continuing his commentary, here's how Yascha Mounk introduces the scene.

**YASCHA MOUNK - HOST, THE GOOD FIGHT:** You might think I'm exaggerating, or you might think that this doesn't really play out in any context where it has a real impact on the world. Well, to answer that objection, I want to take you into the actual day-to-day world of education in the United States at the moment. And what I'm going to start the podcast off by doing is to play a short clip from a meeting of a local Board of Education in lower Manhattan. Now, you will see that emotions are running very high, and you may be a little confused about what exactly the woman who is about to talk in a moment or two is accusing somebody of. Bear with it.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** It hurts people when they see a White man bouncing a Brown baby on their lap, and they don't know the context. That is harmful.

That makes people cry; it makes people walk out of our meeting! They don't come here! They don't come to our meetings, and they give me a hard time because I'm not vocal enough, and I'm not trying to be a martyr. I'm trying to illustrate to you! That you think I'm a -- fuck -- excuse me, you think I'm a social justice warrior, and you think I'm being patronizing and I'm getting pressure for not being enough of an advocate!

I take that to heart and that hurts me, and I have to want to make how to be a better White person.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** I would like to know . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** . . . You don't have people telling you that...

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** I would like to know before this meeting adjourns how having my friend's nephew on my lap was hurtful to people and was racist. Can you please explain . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** Tom, I've explained it. you can google, you can read a book . . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** . . . You, I'm asking you . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** . . . Read a book! Read Ibram Kendi! Read *White Fragility*, read how to talk to White people . . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** . . . to explain what you just said, no, no, no, no, no!

**ROBIN BROCHI:** . . . It's not my job to educate you. You're an educated, White male, and you can read a book and learn about it yourself. . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** No! No, you're right. My friend js going to educate you! You, Robin, my friend will educate *you*.

**YASCHA MOUNK - HOST, THE GOOD FIGHT:** Did you catch that? Did you, did you catch what the accusation here was ?That's right. It seems to have been that it is somehow bad and is somehow racist for White man to have a Brown child in his lap that without explanation people would be traumatized by seeing that.

And then of course you see the obligatory reference to *White Fragility*, to Ibram Kendi. When this position is questioned, these books are invoked as the explanation. Now, what kind of vision of society does this speak to? What kind of idea of progress is it, that, say a White man who happens to have mixed-race children would have to be afraid of how holding the own child in the lap might trigger a bystander who isn't aware of the fact that this White man happens to have a spouse of a different ethnicity. It is a vision of a world that is deeply antithetical to the kind of anti-racism that I stand for.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So, I may have had some problems with Yascha's interpretation of concepts discussed in *White Fragility*, but I must say that is pretty damning audio on its face. What that woman, her name is Robin, is saying sounds entirely unbelievable. I cannot think of a scenario in which holding a Brown child on a lap could be called racist.

I have no idea why she would think that reading *White Fragility* or *How To Be An Anti-Racist* by Ibrahim Kendi would help support her position. I am dying to find out, though. So, I listened to the entire episode of Yascha Mounck's podcast *The Good Fight*, but it is never explained. There is never context given that could explain Robbin's internal reasoning, even if it is horribly flawed. I assume there must be some reasoning that she has for herself. Instead, Yascha has a conversation with another member of the education council, a Latino man who had spoken out passionately during this meeting to call out council members for being blinded by their privilege and their whiteness, and attempting to move forward on policies, ostensibly intended to be helpful to school kids of color, but going about it all the wrong way, he argues. That's a whole other conversation. It's an interesting and an important one, but I'd have to set it aside for the time being. So, the whole episode goes by, and there is no explanation about the Brown baby incident, which is why I'm listening in the first place. But, as I said, I'm dying to find out. So, I have to go and find out for myself by watching the entire meeting on YouTube, something that by the way, Yascha Mounck also claims to have done.

So, let's figure out together what happened as we hear a bit of this meeting. Just a quick reminder, this is where it's going to turn into a soap opera. I don't like that that is the case.

That is not why I'm talking about it, but the more I looked into this story, the more I found it to be a beautiful, I mean also horrible, but a beautiful case study.

So, we are still on our way to making larger points and learning larger lessons about all this. So, toward the beginning of the meeting, Robin, the woman who made the Brown-baby-on-the-lap comments, made a comment pointing out that the vice president of the council, Edward Irizarry, the Latino man who was later interviewed by Yascha Mounck and railed passionately against, you know, the privilege of others on his council, Robin was making a comment about how he had only one vote sort of intimating that he didn't sufficiently represent the council in an action that he had been taking. So, here's a quick snip of Edward's response during the meeting to Robin about her comments about his one vote.

**EDWARD IRIZARRY:** Now, tell me about my one vote. Maybe I have one vote because people like you keep us out of these opportunities to speak. Perhaps you don't want me to speak, perhaps you'd rather me be quiet. Well, I won't be quiet because I have a voice, Ms. Roshi, and I have a voice, Ms. Tonnaqual and Mr. Goldberg, I have a voice now. And that's what we want. We want Black liberation. We want Latino liberation. We want you to respect us. Do you understand that? We don't want handouts. We don't want to be said to, Oh, come to Clinton. Come to Beacon with my child because you're inferior and perhaps some of your intel... some of our intelligence can rub off on you. But, I see through this nonsense, and I see through this racism and I understand it, and I am going to vote no when I see all of these nonsensical diversity positions that lack substance, that are really cosmetic in nature. Cosmetic diversity, that's what you're looking for. You're not looking for true change. You're not looking to really educate all of the people of this district. You're comfortable in your capitalist, unbridled, capitalist world. You don't want to teach Latinos and Blacks fractions and decimals, and how not to get ensnared in these mortgages where they're adjustable rate, you don't want to teach them that because that's how you remain comfortable. That's how you remain where you are. Do you understand? Well, I have one vote, and I'm going to make the most of this one vote.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So, that was quite a speech. Passionate. He's obviously angry. He's emotional, he's calling out privilege, which is almost always a good thing. And it was that fiery speech that made Yascha Mounck want to interview Edward, which is what he did. So, Edward was just addressing Robin and Robin is going to respond. And, based on what we know about Robin so far, who is apparently a privileged White woman from New York who we heard make some odd comments about a Brown baby on a White lap being racist, now that she is being directly challenged about her privilege, what I would say is that it is a really safe bet that we are headed for a classic DARVO. DARVO is a really important phenomenon. I want everyone to be aware of it. It is usually a concept applied to instances of sexual offenders, that's kind of where it came from, but it has been reframed to focus on race by Rachel Cargle from The Great Unlearn project. So, hat tip to her for this. So, here's a basic definition of DARVO. It stands for Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender.

So, the perpetrator or offender may deny the behavior, attack the individual, doing the confronting and reverse the roles of victim and offender, such that the perpetrator assumes the victim role and turns the true victim or the whistleblower into an alleged offender. This occurs, for instance, when an actually guilty perpetrator assumes the role of falsely accused

and attacks the accuser's credibility and blames the accuser of being the perpetrator of a false accusation.

So, you may recognize that as a pattern that comes up a lot when people are accused of racist actions or abusing their privilege or things like that. So, it's a safe bet that's what's about to happen. So, let's see what Robin has for us in response to Edward.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** Edward, actually, Eric, can I please jump in?

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** I'd like to give other council members a chance to speak before

**ROBIN BROCHI:** I want to say something, I want to say something because I was called out by name

[Multiple speakers talking over each other]

**EDWARD IRIZARRY:** You called me out . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** I want to admit, I made a mistake. Edward, I want to apologize to you. Are you going to give me a space to apologize?

**EDWARD IRIZARRY:** Would you like me to leave? Would you like me to leave?

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Just to interject, there's a lot of crosstalk going on there. So, note that Edward is crosstalking as Robin begins to speak. He is still angry, obviously. And he's reminding her, you called me out by name. I have one vote. Would you like me to leave? And my interpretation of this, just my interpretation, is that Edward is fully prepared for the backlash that he knows is coming. He knows this White woman feels attacked, and he is preemptively not going to let her get away with attacking back. And then this happens.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** I want to acknowledge that.

**EDWARD IRIZARRY:** Would you like me to leave?

**ROBIN BROCHI:** You're calling out the one vote was an example of White privilege, and it was an example of trying to silence the legitimacy of your space on this council.

**EDWARD IRIZARRY:** Well, you should read *White Fragility* and understand what you said . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** That was a mistake. I am apologizing. Edward, I'm apologizing, and you don't have to accept my apology, and I, and there's work, everyone has work to do, and I have work to do. I have 40-plus years of White supremacy I need to undo, and that was unfair of me to make that point. And I don't want to silence your voice and your voice has merit, Edward. And I did, I did sit with you before this council started, and I would talk to you again, and I'm sorry that, and I acknowledge that my words hurt you. And I, and I'm sorry that I haven't been able to express the way that I feel that the NYSIP grant in its current form is a deficit mentality and is born of the deficit narrative. I hear what you're saying about what 'White savior complex' is, and this idea of throwing non-White students a bone and say, Hey, you need some extra points to get into Clinton. And that hurts me. And that's why this NYSIP grant hurts me. Because I hear it as a way of not acknowledging the merit that a kid -- when I hear our superintendents say that we have to adjust for kids that get ones and twos, and

then when we have to adjust for kids that come from Title I schools -- all I hear is that those kids need extra support. And I want a model that says every kid brings something special, and that the traditional metrics that we use to measure children, whether it's test scores or grades, is a way to marginalize students that are traditionally Black and Hispanic. If you hear it different way, and if you think the NYSIP grant is actually in a language that celebrates those students, I want to hear that. I do want to hear that from you and I shouldn't have, I shouldn't have minimized your voice because you are the vice president of this council.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So, as far as White-lady apologies go, I got to say that is pretty near the top. When you start with, I am apologizing and you don't have to accept my apology, as she said, that is a great start because the cornerstone of White fragility is the perpetual demand that not only should our intentions always be given highest priority when judging our actions, but that our apologies absolutely must be accepted. To not accept a White person's apology is usually enough to send them into a victim-mentality panic attack. So, all of a sudden, Robin sounds a lot less ridiculous than she did in that original clip, which makes me wonder how could someone capable of making such a good apology, exhibiting a reasonable amount of awareness about race and privilege also be so misguided as to think that a Brown baby on a White lap is racist.

Well, we're not done. So, right after the emotional comments from Edward and the emotional response and apology by Robin, the subject of much of this discussion chimes in. Tom, the infamous holder of the Brown child, asks if he can speak, and although it's a little hard to tell from the audio, you can see clearly on the video, he is shaking with rage and here's the context you need; the baby-holding incident in question happened in a previous meeting of the council during a discussion about school integration. The accusations of racism regarding the Brown baby had been lodged between that previous meeting and this one that we are hearing. So, this is Tom's first opportunity to confront his accuser directly. And, as I said, he is shaking with rage, doing his best Brett Kavanaugh impersonation in reaction to what he sees as a false accusation of racism.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** Robin, I would like to directly ask you a question. You alleged racist behavior. What exactly was that racist behavior about having my friend of five years over my house, in my living room with her daughter who is best friends with my daughter and her nephew. What is racist about that? Please explain. What you have committed is slander. Go ahead

**COUNCIL MEMBER #2:** I don't think this is a . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** [talking over] Proximity

**COUNCIL MEMBER #2:** . . . I don't think this is a forum for direct Q and A, I don't think

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [talking over] Oh yeah? I'm asking her a directly I don't care what you . . .

**ROBIN BROCHI:** Tom, I'll answer your question. I have no faith that you will, that you will . . . I am not going to change your mind,

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [interrupting] What was racist about my behavior, Robin?

**ROBIN BROCHI:** I will say that proximity . . . so it's the distinction between . . . individual acts

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [interrupting] answer the question

**ROBIN BROCHI:** . . . proximity to color does not mean you're not racist. Strom Thurmond . . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [interrupting] What was racist about my behavior during that meeting

**ROBIN BROCHI:** [interrupting] Tom, when you said 'my living room is integrated right now' as a response to discussion of systematic racism,

[interrupting] It was. It was. It was.

[crosstalking over Tom] No, you had friends over. That's not . . . Integration is a system

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [crosstalking over Robin] define integration. Define it Define it.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Okay, now, let's let's hold everything right there. This is sounding a whole lot different all of a sudden. Now the accusation is during a discussion about school integration, Tom referred to the child on his lap and the friend visiting his home, both of whom are Black, and said, 'my apartment is integrated right now.' And he doesn't deny it. It's clear. You know, his only response is to reiterate multiple times that it was. It was. And I ended that clip with him, demanding that Robin define integration, which is a classic go-to in discussions about racism. So, let's have some fun, let's do it. The definition of integration: the act or process or an instance of integration, such as incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups, such as races. So, too bad for Tom, even his by own demand for a dictionary definition, I don't think that his living room qualifies as either a society or an organization, whereas school integration fits that bill perfectly. So, you know, maybe he was joking. Maybe he wasn't, he claims he wasn't, but either way it wasn't correct nor clever. For a little more context, these are public meetings being streamed live online during the incident in question. Parents watching from home apparently began texting members of the council asking what is going on here? Why is there a member of the council appearing to make a joke about school integration? And some parents even began to log off from the meeting.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** Tom, I don't know what to tell you. I know that you believe that you did nothing wrong but . . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [crosstalking over Robin] You called me racist.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** [crosstalk] You have a hundred people that told you . . . I am not calling you racist. I said that was racist behavior...

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [crosstalk] You committed slander as well! . . . You just did!

**ROBIN BROCHI:** [more crosstalk] Sue me! Did you read Ibram Kindi? Did you read *How to be an Antiracist*?

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** [more crosstalk] That does not make me racist for not reading that book.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** I'm not calling you racist!

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** You just did!

**ROBIN BROCHI:** No, I'm saying that was racist behavior. We are all capable of racist behavior. I am capable of racist behavior. I owned up to it in this meeting, right now, when I apologized to Edward for minimizing his one vote.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** When did you say something racist?

**ROBIN BROCHI:** All people are capable of racist behavior. And we should apologize when we offend people of Color. When they get upset, when they say this is a harmful space, when they log out of a meeting immediately because they see White people exhibiting their power over people of Color.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** Should I . . . [attempting multiple times to interrupt with unintelligible comments]

**ROBIN BROCHI:** So, to convince you, if you won't even read a book about white fragility, or Ibram Kendi, I can't sit here on a working business meeting and educate you about the distinction between interpersonal racism and systemic racism. '

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** I don't think like you, and I have no right to speak. I got it. I got it.

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** Tom, she did not say you have no right to speak. You asked her a question and she answered it.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** I just want to pause here partially to break up the yelling, but also just to put a pin in that last exchange right there. We're going to come back to that. I would love to end there, but there's just one more piece that's missing and a little more context. In addition to sending a few text messages, around 100 parents co-signed a letter that was written to the council president asking that this incident of council racism be dealt with by the council.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** and you kept calling me up . . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** What was racist about what I did?

**ROBIN BROCHI:** I told you what was racist, Tom, and I could find 100 other parents that would tell you the same thing, and you're choosing not to listen

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** And I could find 100 parents to say you're a racist. I could find parents that would say

**ROBIN BROCHI:** How can you say I'm racist? That's the difference between you and me, Tom. If people tell me I'm racist, I want to hear it. I want to learn from it and I'm not going to get defensive.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** You send your daughter to the Whitest, most exclusive screened school in all of District 2.

**ROBIN BROCHI:** Do you think that that's a Trump point that you dragged my children into this conversation?

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** That last comment by Tom is a reference to the role of privilege in cases like this and the accusation of hypocrisy that can so often arise. You know, many supporters of public schools send their own kids to private schools or charter schools, or in this case, a so-called screened school. And it happens for complicated reasons that are not as simple as just hypocrisy. I think it's sort of along the lines as a rich person who advocates for higher taxes, which is good, but then someone comes along and says, well, if you want to pay higher taxes, why don't you just go ahead and do it? You can donate some extra money to the IRS. Otherwise, you're a hypocrite. And advocating for systemic change versus working within and having to make personal decisions about how to navigate a broken system that you're trying to fix are just not comparable. Again though, I don't really know Robin's positions or anything like that, so I'm not really defending her. The only thing I know for sure is that Tom's attack is an incredibly weak one.

Speaking of attack though, let's go over DARVO one more time, as a quick refresher. Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender. Remember what I said about this being a beautiful though horrible case study?

Deny:

**ROBIN BROCHI:** Tom, when you said 'my living room is integrated right now' as the response to discussion of systematic racism

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** It was. It was.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Attack the accuser's credibility:

**ROBIN BROCHI:** and I'm not going to get defensive

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** And you send your daughter to the Whitest, most exclusive screened school in all of District 2

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** and Reverse Victim and Offender:

**ROBIN BROCHI:** . . . interpersonal racism . . .

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** I don't think like you, and I have no right to speak. I got it.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Now as we get closer to wrapping up, I want to play a couple more clips from other people on the case council who chimed in to explain the problem to Tom and mercifully with very little crosstalk or yelling. I think there were hearing they help flesh out the story and demonstrate the kind of clarity that anyone could have gotten if they had bothered to try and get the real story.

**COUNCIL MEMBER #2:** Here's the thing. I left that meeting. First of all, I had several friends who joined that meeting. They were interested in coming. People literally were texting me within the meetings, texting me, saying, what the hell is going on? What is this? It seems like there is a council member making a joke about segregation. I literally was too embarrassed to even text back in that moment. I doubled back the next day. I was actually horrified with the premeditated, obnoxiousness that you started off with, with the whiteboard, the premeditated I had, excuse me, I am telling you. Okay. You had a premeditated agenda. You came to that meeting to rile it up. You started off by that. Then you had a smirk and a grin on

your face when you pulled that child in. And then three minutes later, you in a joking tone said, "Oh yeah, my living room is integrated right now" in a joking tone as if the hundreds of years of, first slavery and then segregation were nothing and would go poof because you happen to have a black friend. It was so belittling, it was so snide I cannot even explain how embarrassed I was, that I had invited friends to this meeting.

So the fact that you, perhaps you didn't intend it to be racist and that does not matter, actually, that was precisely racist.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** And the context for the second clip is that Tom, the accused, had asked that the incident be investigated for racism and here's another council members' response.

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** Most forms of racism today is not the kind that warrants an investigation. These are called microaggressions. It's all the subtle ways people put down black, indigenous, and other people of color.

Some of them are even compliments. Oh, I'm East Asian so I must be good at math. People might think that's a compliment. It actually isn't. That's an act of racism. It's called microaggression. It doesn't warrant an investigation because that's not how this society system is set up, but it's still, it's detrimental to the person who's receiving that kind of microaggression on a daily basis.

The fact that a lot of people cross the street when they see a young black male; that's microaggression. That's not called for investigation by somebody, but those are actions that are driven by implicit bias that we've lived with for decades, and some of us do not know how to check that, but these are the things you all have to learn.

It's not about having an investigation, it's about being curious, being openminded and having the desire to understand why our system is the way it is and what it is that we as individuals are doing about it. It's not about attacking other people or calling somebody else racist, it's about looking inward to see what you are doing to perpetuate the system that exists.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** My friends, like to be treated as people, which is, and I would like to know what microaggressions occurred when I had my friend over in my living room and had her nephew on my lap. What was the microaggression there? I didn't cross the street to get away from my friend. I didn't say that they were bad at math or good at math.

They were just in my house. And you consider that a microaggression. I don't understand.

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** Of course you don't understand.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** Oh, I deserve an apology for that.

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** Okay. Here's the thing, the fact is it's racist, not that you had your friends over or that you had baby of any race or nationality on your lap, that was not the racist behavior. The racism, racist behavior was making light of segregation and likening, an integrated living room to having black friends over. Having black friends in your living room has, is not integration.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** It's where it starts. It's where it starts

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** Listen, just listen to what I'm saying.

You asked so clearly what was racist about it? Basically what happened was when you had that baby on your lap and pointed to the idea that your living room was integrated when we were talking about school integration is literally belittling and saying, oh, just because I have some black friends over, A not racist, which is also not true. We can all be racist by even if we have black friend right?

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** I didn't say that

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** We agree on that right?

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** Mmhmm.

**COUNCIL MEMBER #1:** And then you laughed, as you were saying, what, my living rooms integrated.

It was in a light jocular tone that was literally belittled, the pain of hundreds, of years of segregation. And if you didn't intend it that way, it actually doesn't matter because that's how. I literally have texts on my phone from friends saying to me. Did he possibly just say that? Was he making fun of integration?

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So, as you can imagine, there's a lot more of this conversation, but it all goes pretty much like that, but now we're moving away from the story itself. And back to the story of the story, the point is made over and over again by Robin and others, that the offense in question was Tom's comment in reference to a black friend and a black child in his apartment, constituting, some form of integration.

The only instance in which that is not explicitly clear. Is the one quote from Robin taken out of context that I first heard played by Yasha Munk that never had context fully added to it. And I only pick on Yasha because I have high expectations of him. He's a source I've used in the past. He's on the left.

He's obviously a very smart guy. He's a Harvard grad, he's an expert on authoritarianism. I had no reason to think I needed to have my guard up with him, but as you will see the people who I agree with his takeaway on this puts him in some very unfortunate company.

So zooming out looking at these two main characters; there's Tom, the racially illiterate, angry white guy who doesn't understand the definition, much less the historical weight of integration. Who put on a great DARVO display. I mean, to be fair, I'd, I'd mark down a couple of points for mixing up the order of operations. Technically you're supposed to base basically attack your accuser before claiming to be the real victim and pouting about it, but he did those things out of order. Still though, 7.5 out of 10 for flawless execution, otherwise. And of course he continues to this day to be willfully ignorant about the complaints against him. Insisting. It's just about holding a Brown kid on his lap. And how do I know this? Since the incident went a little bit viral, Tom has been interviewed by several anti social justice warrior YouTube channels.

And yeah, they were really insightful discussions. One sort of representative sample started like this.

**MATT ORFALEA:** So Thomas, tell us what's going on at the, at your New York school board.

Education council, education council.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** Education council. Yeah, I mean, if any of you watch that, uh, I'm not sure what's going, hang on. It's insanity, uh, to be quite honest.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So yeah, they're, they're really informed, thoughtful discussions. It's mostly just white guys telling Tom how correct he is and them talking back and forth being confounded about how they don't understand anything about what's going on. Tom has also made a literal, *I have a black friend* video with his black friend to explain that he had done nothing racist by holding her nephew during the meeting.

**TOM WROCKLAGE:** Hi Tom Wrocklage here. I'm here with my friend, Ms. Moore. She's the aunt of the baby. That was on my lap during the June 11th, CC District 2 meeting, which apparently caused a lot of outrage. You, all told her how she should feel. She's here to tell you how she actually does feel.

**MS. MOORE:** Hi, I'm the aunt of the black baby that was on Tom's lap that night, his name is John Muir, by the way, he's so cute. I feel like if you guys were in the living room with us that night, you wouldn't know that nothing wrong happened. And, I don't think there's anything wrong that went on on that night, but the fact that middle age white women are telling me how to feel. And I'm a strong black woman. I'm a strong black young mother. I don't need anyone to tell me how I feel. I wouldn't let anyone disrespect my nephew.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** And I know you think I must be almost done; I am not done. Tom also launched a fundraising campaign for a college fund for the child in the video, framing it as a way to help support the children who had been so callously used as props by social justice warriors. And finally, the incident was used by Tucker Carlson, the grand wizard of white grievance just before being forced into vacation from Fox News, amid swirling scandals about being too racist. Tucker used the incident, obviously only the misleading clips taken out of context, to rail against the evils of anti racism and the hateful ideology pushed by the book *White Fragility*. And it may make you wonder if it gives Tom pause to realize that his position in this debate over racism is being defended by the TV personality who's too racist for Fox News. Well, after the segment aired, Tom tweeted at Tucker Carlson in the hopes of getting an interview to further discuss the event. I don't think he heard back though.

So that's Tom on one side, then there's Robin. A racially literate person capable of it apologizing without defensiveness when called out, which is incredibly rare, who was speaking in support of a hundred parent constituents who seemed perfectly capable of explaining the situation, if not taken out of context.

And when describing her, here's some of the video titles that I saw about this story aside from Yascha's podcast, of course. *Okay everyone, is she nuts or what? Robin Brochi goes nuclear on a white council member for holding a Brown baby. Robin Brochi is mad. NYC ed council, woman explodes at fellow council member for....holding a black child. Watch snowflake goes nuts during education meeting over race. Social justice warrior Karens accuse New York Volunteer of Racism - Interview with Tom Wrocklage* and finally *Surviving a Struggle Session - Interview with Tom Wrocklage*. Robin, meanwhile, unsurprisingly made her

Twitter account private, presumably to avoid the bulk of the death threats and the hate speech that would have otherwise flooded her notifications.

She has since unlocked it and seems to be doing fine. A fun side note though, this story, wasn't the only opportunity that Tucker Carlson took recently to rail against the evils of white fragility. And I found this bit from a segment dedicated to the book, a particularly interesting.

**TUCKER CARLSON:** In America, DiAngelo writes, "we are socially penalized for challenging racism" really? Where and how? The country, the rest of us live in, the United States of America, hates racism.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** If you want to find an example of socially punishing someone for challenging racism, look no further than the person who was held up for ridicule for doing just that spreading virally on Twitter and YouTube to the point where it actually got on Tucker's radar, and he joined in the fun. So let's recap this case study and see some of the ways that white privilege is upheld, not just in the story, but in the telling of the story. One storyteller, Yascha Mounk, seems to misunderstand some pretty easy basics about race relations, arguing that in essence, the best way to have healthy interracial relationships is to ignore racism, which works about as well as trying to make friends by ignoring social norms that define the difference between rudeness and politeness. Not that accidental racism is akin to rudeness in terms of severity and harm, but the dynamics can be similar. He then argues that to deal with racism rather than to ignore it will inevitably lead to ironically racism, as evidenced by a story of a woman calling out racism over a Brown baby on a white man's lap.

The only problem being that the story was decontextualized so much as to make it unrecognizable from reality. And frankly, it was just about as bad as a prosecutor hiding exculpatory evidence before going to trial. And let's look at the dynamics of how the story was handled. You know, even though many people were highly emotional and angry that meeting the men's anger was reacted to very differently.

Yascha Mounk, invited Edward misery on his show to be interviewed specifically because of his angry tirade at Robin Brochi and many of the other members of the council, the tirade that Robin immediately eloquently and apologetically responded to. Also Tom Wrocklage demanding to know what was racist about his actions and again, you should really see the video he is, shaking with rage, but his anger is essentially never questioned. With all of that anger flying around only Robin is called out in headlines for *going nuclear*, *going nuts*, *exploding*, *being nuts*, and *being mad*. And at no point in any other discussion of this story, did I see mention of the fact that a hundred parents had written the letter supporting the position that Robin brochure was taking.

In fact, I saw no mention of the real position she was taking, which had everything to do with what Tom had said, and essentially nothing to do with the straw man argument that he himself had erected to defend himself, and make his accuser seem ridiculous.

So this is how systems of power perpetuate themselves. That is the lesson to be learned here, a complex, but predictable pattern of behavior always emerges to discredit, distort, undermine, and ridicule anyone who attempts to stand up to it, the system of power you can

have all the fact on your side, you can be speaking up on behalf of a constituency of supporters, and yet you can be made to look foolish.

All it takes is one misspoken quote to be taken out of context, speaking just a little too loudly or with a little too much passion, though, this mostly only applies if you're a woman and the real meaning of whatever you're trying to say can be discarded. Your claims can be ridiculed as absurd and just the rantings of a single crazy outsider who speaks for no one.

And when it's done in public like this all the better, then it's like putting a head on a pike to warn the next person who thinks about standing up against the system. Hey, do you want me to go our words to be taken out of context, distorted out of recognition and use to unleash a tsunami of internet hate on you?

Well, then you better keep your mouth shut. And the demand of the average person coming across this story to dig deeper, to get to the truth is just too much to ask. Most people won't take the time so they quickly move on, but maybe not before leaving a comment to say, yeah, that lady is a crazy bitch and coming away with a vague idea that, well, maybe those anti-racist aren't as smart as all those books sales suggest.

And so humanity hums along maintaining its patterns and power structures thinking to itself that the status quo must be pretty okay, because after all, if it weren't someone would point it out and we'd all work to fix it right? After all, as none other than Tucker Carlson will affirm the United States of America hates racism.

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