

#1433 The legacy of White Supremacy in schools, health care and public pools

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left Podcast, in which we shall take a look at the mechanisms by which the legacy of white supremacy is harmful to the health and wellbeing of individuals and society as a whole. Today's clips are from *How To Citizen* with Baratunde, *The Brian Lehrer Show*, *What Next*, *Democracy Now!*, *Hidden Brain*, and *The New Yorker Radio Hour*.

[00:00:24] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** So, you described this realization that the choices available are determined by policies that other people make. Do you remember an early moment where you're, like, "Oh, that policy *creates* the set of choices people have to select from."

Why Is Our Economy So ... White (with Heather McGhee) - How To Citizen with Baratunde - Air Date 4-8-21

[00:00:42] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** I mean, I think during the welfare reform debate, which centered often around single mothers, there was a lot that was discussed in the politics of it about encouraging work.

[00:00:58] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** Welfare to work! Welfare is not a lifestyle! There's sound clips of Bill Clinton out there, "We don't want to make this a lifestyle."

[00:01:07] **PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON:** What we are trying to do today is to overcome the flaws of the welfare system for the people who are trapped on it. From now on, our nation's answer to this great social challenge will no longer be a never-ending cycle of welfare. It will be the dignity, the power, and the ethic of work.

[00:01:25] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** Yeah. Which, you know, when it was clear that if you could find a job, it wasn't actually gonna... Nothing... none of the options were going to pay enough for somebody to actually not be poor anymore. Welfare kept you basically poor, a minimum wage job kept you poor, the ability to work your way into the middle-class had long disappeared.

[00:01:57] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** When you say that the, sort of, the pathway to the middle class was closed; When? Why did that happen?

[00:02:07] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** This is the story that I then learned once I started working at Deimos when I was 22, and I was the first hire, other than the director of the program, in the economic opportunity program. And this was phenomenal, this was my dream job.

So, it was then that I really learned the progressive economic orthodoxy, which teaches that there was a period of dramatic expansion of the middle-class.

[00:02:34] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** Hunger drove our people to the bread lines. Anxiously, we waited for some sign of better days. Then came the federal government's work program.

[00:02:43] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** Where, you know, tens of millions of people made it from the working class into the middle class, through this massive economic expansion in security, you know? Through the New Deal, through social securities, through the subsidization of housing; there were guaranteed benefit pensions;

we have these state funded colleges in every state, where the government picked up the tab for college.

[00:03:09] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** Hundreds of homes have been freed from the bondage of poverty as their breadwinners find security and hope in their new jobs.

[00:03:15] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** It was just, sort of, this period of time where everything aligned to make the greatest middle-class the world had ever seen.

[00:03:23] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** It sounds like the American Dream.

[00:03:25] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** It sounds like the American dream! Ding, ding, ding! You got it! That's it! That was it! That was when we had it! You know?

And... but, the question is, who was the "We?"

So much of what I just described was done from a federal policy level in an explicitly racially exclusive way. Both Social Security and the labor standards excluded the categories that Black folks mostly worked in: agriculture and domestic work.

The GI bill excluded millions of Black veterans because of segregation in higher education. And so each of these ways that the middle-class was subsidized, that we had handouts and free stuff for White people in the early 20th century, created the American Dream, and on racially exclusive terms.

And then, the civil rights movement basically called the question; said, "Okay, are we going to live up to our ideals?" And economically, this is where the story that's at the heart of my book, "The Sum Of Us," comes in. It was, in addition to all those great freebies, there was also this building boom of public amenities, like parks and libraries and schools, and actually swimming pools.

And what happened when many of these swimming pools that were segregated, for Whites only, were forced to integrate, and Black families said, "Hey, those are our tax dollars creating this public swimming pool." And these are these grand resort style pools, like thousands of swimmers.

[00:04:59] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** They were desegregated, and Black people showed up, and White people hung out with them, and they swam together, and they played together, and they lived happily ever after.

[00:05:08] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** And they made babies! And that's why there's no race anymore! Because in the 1950s, the swimming pool created all of these mixed marriages!

[00:05:19] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** So, so, obviously, that's more of an American fantasy would describe it. What actually happened?

[00:05:25] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** What actually happened was that, in town after town-- and it's very important to me to point out, not just in the Jim Crow South, but in Ohio, and Washington state, and New Jersey-- the towns drained the public pools rather than integrate them.

[00:05:40] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** And you mean, literally, like, took the water out.

[00:05:43] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** Literally, took the water out, backed up trucks of dirt, dumped it in, paved it over, seeded it with grass. In Montgomery, Alabama, where I went on the journey to write "The Sum Of Us," they closed the entire Parks and Recreation Department. They sold off the animals in the zoo. And they kept the Parks and Recreation Department of Montgomery closed for a decade. All to avoid sharing it with Black folks.

[00:06:11] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** The idea that... what's the saying? You would cut off your nose to spite your face? That you would not only deny Black people access to the free goodies, that everybody's tax dollars are paying for, but that you would... I mean, you cancelled the public park, you canceled the swimming pool, for all the children, and all the families.

In your research, did you find any resistance to that extreme resistance? Was somebody out there, like, "Actually... look, maybe we could just timeshare? I mean, do we literally have to fill the pool with concrete? That's pretty far..."

[00:06:54] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** There was! I mean, as always, throughout history, there have been the race traitors, right? There've been White folks who said, "No." You know? Who have stood up and stood in solidarity with Black folks. There are White folks who didn't want to stand in solidarity with Black folks, but were just upset because the pool was gone.

But, what happened, and this is really, very similar to the loss of public benefits throughout our society, right?

Take public colleges: what is once a public good becomes a private luxury. And so then you get this rat race, right? Then it's like, okay, you have that individualized response. Right? Let me take another job. Let me mortgage my house. Let me refi, you know? Let me figure it out on my own.

And that's been the, sort of, slow... you know, ratcheting down of our expectations of what the public could do for us. And we put it all on our own shoulders. And so, literally, with the pool story, what ended up happening is, you saw this advent of backyard pools.

In the Washington DC area, you had, after pool integration, over a hundred private members-only swim clubs that spring up out of nowhere. And so, sure, you can pay a few hundred dollars a year for your kid to swim. Used to be free? Okay. All right. We'll keep it moving. I'll make more money.

[00:08:09] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** So, you're privatizing public goods, and limiting access to those who can afford it, which is public policy connected to your economics.

Look at you Professor! Okay!

So, so tell me this though: I'm trying to flash back to this desegregating America, and I'm trying to put my self inside of the mind and body of a White American, who is, like, "The Black people are coming! You know, guys, we got to shut down these pools."

But do they have enough discipline and savvy to explain it in a way that doesn't say "We just don't want to share this with Black people?"

[00:08:50] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** No, the pools were pretty clear. Actually...

[00:08:53] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** You saw me! I tried to help them out! I was like, they... Come on, they must have had some kind of story! Some kind of BS! Sell it!

[00:09:00] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** No! I mean... so, in St. Louis, possibly the largest pool in America at the time, the first day of the integrated swimming there, there was a mob of 200 White folks who came and beat every Black person in sight.

I later saw an interview with one of the White guys who ended up in the hospital from the melee, and he, later on, would say, you know, in his elder years, he would say, you know, "We thought we were doing the right thing." You know, they were taught...

This is the thing: they were taught, by our government, by their church, by all of the rules of society, that we were so unclean and unworthy that we should not be allowed to swim with them, go to school with them, drink from the same water fountain as them, walk on the sidewalk next to them. I mean, you know...

And what do you take from all of that information, is that there's something terribly wrong with these people. And so, we must guard what is ours from the incursion of them, into it.

[00:10:13] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** Us and them.

[00:10:15] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** Exactly.

[00:10:16] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** Yeah. So you've got this book. It's called "The Sum Of Us." Tell me more about this book.

[00:10:27] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** *Sigh* So, "The Sum Of Us" is my attempt, after nearly 20 years working in economic policy, trying to get the right data in the hands of policymakers, and, mostly, finding it to be far too difficult to convince the people in power to do the thing that was obviously in the economic interest of most people, and in the interest of economic growth in our country.

[00:10:55] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** So, you say you're proposing these policies that are obviously in the benefit of most people *and* economic growth. So that, to me, sounds like one of those win-win situations. Why was it hard to sell these ideas?

[00:11:11] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** Racism!

[00:11:13] **BARATUNDE THURSTON - HOST, HOW TO CITIZEN:** Dang it! Not again!

[00:11:17] **HEATHER MCGHEE:** No, I'm sort of joking, but I'm not really joking.

That's what I wanted to find out. Right? The first line in my book is, "Have you ever wondered why we can't seem to have nice things?" And, by nice things, I really do mean, like, really universal healthcare, a modern, world-class, or even just reliable infrastructure of public health system to contain and handle pandemics and save lives.

And it was clear that, kind of, the tools that I had been using, you know, economic policy research, the legislative drafting, and the congressional testimony, and all of that, was basically falling on deaf ears. And inequality was getting wider and wider every year. I just felt like I needed to spend some time to figure out what was really going on underneath the surface.

And what I ended up finding, was that, the biggest impediment to our progress in America, the reason why we can't have those nice things, is that, there's this zero-sum worldview, this idea that there's an Us and Them, we're not actually all on the same team, and that, in fact, progress for people of color has to come at White folks' expense.

And I say that because White people are much more likely to have this zero-sum worldview. Black folks don't believe that progress for us has to come at White folks' expense. And it's that zero-sum worldview that has led many White folks, in fact, the majority, since the civil rights movement, to politically, sort of, cheer the destruction of, and resent the provision of, public goods that could help them and their families in many instances, because it could help the people on the other team.

The Role 'Nice White Parents' Play in School Segregation - The Brian Lehrer Show - Air Date 9-9-20

[00:13:18] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Let me play one more clip of the mayor, a response to a follow-up question I asked about disparate PTA funding possibly causing more inequity in the COVID era, all of which was still in the context of the conversation that was launched by the caller who brought up the podcast.

Here's more of what the mayor had to say.

[00:13:41] **MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO:** You really want to change things in this city? Then everyone better change a lot of the way we live more foundationally. If you just talk about it and feel self satisfied, God bless you, that's not actually going to change things. What changes things is redistribution of wealth. Tax the wealthy at a much higher level, make sure that working people, who in this city are overwhelmingly people of color, get higher wages so they can afford better housing. Help us create the affordable housing in neighborhoods that so many times there's been a NIMBY effort to stop. The NIMBY effort has sometimes come from people I would've thought were more to the left, not just people more to the right.

So if we're going to have an honest discussion in this city, which a lot of times, bluntly, elite outlets and elite context don't want to have this honest conversation, you really want to break down segregation in New York city, then let's deal with the economic reality. The economic reality is pervading the racial reality as well.

I just feel like this is a lot of cocktail party comfort going on rather than people honestly dealing with this issue. Help me tax the wealthy, help me redistribute wealth, help me build affordable housing in white communities -- if you want desegregation. If you do not want to do all those things, then you're not serious about desegregation.

[00:14:55] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** So Rachel Lissy, let me turn to you on this first. The question was about the schools, but his answer is housing segregation and redistribution of wealth as the real root causes that need to be addressed. I realize your expertise is more in education, but what's your reaction to hearing the mayor put the emphasis where he did?

[00:15:19] **RACHEL LISSY:** I think that he's not wrong. Residential segregation is a hugely powerful influence on a variety of different kinds of inequities in policy, and it's definitely relevant to bring that up, but that doesn't absolve you of addressing the issue that shows up where you can control this. We see historically, I mean, this was the way that the Board of Ed responded to the initial recommendations for integration in the late '50s which was to say there's nothing we can control about this, when in reality, there were lots of ways in which the Board of Ed had the impact to control. They could change zoning in communities and in neighborhoods. They could change the way districts were created. They could change the ways in which teachers were assigned. I think this idea that because we can't control everything, we're not responsible to control the things that we can control.

I think also the disdain for the fact that people have the choices that they can make, the parents that we're talking about are not parents that can necessarily control tax policy. They vote and they likely probably voted for him, but they can control where they send their kids, and the idea that we don't have a responsibility or that there isn't merit or value to having honest conversations about those choices and the impacts that they have, to me, is a red herring in terms of how we focus on this issue.

[00:16:32] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Chana, you say in the series that there might be two different visions of integration, one comforting to white parents that's gauzy, like a time when you saw your own child's very diverse class play, you use that example. A vision of integration that might make you feel good as a white parent, but that could keep you too innocent, and you use that word innocent. Can you describe those visions and what you mean by innocence in that context?

[00:17:00] **CHANA JOFFE-WALT:** Yes. One thing that was really striking to me, and especially in researching the 1960s and learning more about Board of Ed policy that Rachel was talking about, is just how similar it felt to now, and to the experience I had both as a reporter in schools and also as a parent and surrounding the conversation around integration and diversity and a bunch of words that are used in ways that I think are a little bit imprecise. And that was very true in the '60s too, that the Board of Ed following Brown versus Board of Education, the Board of Ed in New York City said, "Yes, we're on board and we support integration and we're already integrated and look at our diverse classes," and integration is about the racial harmony and coming together and being unified, and at the very same

moment was running two parallel school systems, unequal school systems. And at the same moment there was a movement in New York City, from Black families and Puerto Rican families, saying we want our schools to be integrated, and this is not actually about racial togetherness, it's not about being on a stage and performing a sign together as moving as that actually is.

This is a remedy for injustice. This is a remedy for structural inequality that has a history and that denies our children the same thing that white children are getting, and that what we want for our children is the resources, is the experienced teachers, the quality school buildings that we are seeing white children already have in New York City.

there was this difference between what I think we now would call diversity as a value to celebrate that we all benefit from, and something that was really being pushed as a tool to remedy inequality and injustice.

[00:18:51] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Rachel, did you want to add anything maybe to Chana's answer about notions of integration and if the word is heard differently in different communities and means things in general, differently to people in different communities?

[00:19:08] **RACHEL LISSY:** I think that the word integration is often used in a way that, particularly for white people, can be similar to assimilation, which is this idea that integration just means that Black kids will come to our schools and then become more like us.

I think that the ways in which the Black communities are talking about integration has much more to do with resources, which Chana has called out, but I also think for white parents, particularly those who are interested in participating in integration, I think it's important to challenge some of those ideas and the ways in which true integration calls upon us all to change. Calls upon white people in particular to question some of the ideas and practices that they have and the ways in which they move typically in public spaces.

[00:19:50] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Let's take a call that I think is on point for this. Desiree in Park Slope. Desiree you're on WNYC, thanks so much for calling today.

[00:19:59] **CALLER DESIREE:** Hi, good morning. Thank you for having me. I have a pretty unique experience in that I started my education Jackson, Mississippi in the '70s as a child, and then I finished my education in the Bronx. I have the advantage of having been exposed to post Jim Crow schooling and busing and being bused to a far away school, but also going to a primarily Black and Brown school for high school.

I don't think that the way that people are talking about integration is useful for students. I think that if the focus was on making sure that Black and Brown schools have all of the same resources in their neighborhoods that the white schools do, and I'm calling them white schools knowing that they're not necessarily all white, that would actually [inaudible] more.

I don't think just wanting to have Black and Brown and Asian and other kinds of kids all in one class is necessarily the right goal, particularly for New York City because it's not Jim Crow and kids are not isolated, they ride the bus with other kinds of kids, they take the train, they go to the park. It's not like they have no interaction with kids who are not like them ever. So

the idea to put them all in the same class so they can get to know each other, I just feel like that's not really a useful idea in 2020 in New York City. I feel like the focus should be on boys and girls high school, what do they need? What do they not have that Carol Gardens schools have? Make sure that they have that.

[00:21:37] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Chana, you want to react to this, talk to Desiree? Rachel you're too. Do you deal with this explicitly in the series?

[00:21:47] **CHANA JOFFE-WALT:** I think that everything you're saying comes up throughout the series, and comes up in the initial early parts of the school of what integration was actually for, what was the purpose of integration. Who was it serving and also who was going to have to sacrifice to make integration possible, who was going to have to bear the burden of traveling on buses and being in schools where they maybe weren't welcomed and weren't treated well.

I do think that one thing that struck me about the history of this school in particular was after the white parents wrote letters wanting this integrated school and didn't go to the school, there were several decades in which there were not white families in the school, but the school is part of District 15, which has always had advantaged white families in it. It struck me how much, what actually happened, the conditions on the ground in the school were still shaped by the interests and priorities of white families who existed in the system with them.

I hear what you're saying, and I think that the conversation does need to be more precise and shift more. I think it also is true that kids are always part of, we're all sharing the same public systems, so there are ways in which even when there isn't the presence of white families in schools that there's still an influence. It's still a powerful force.

[00:23:14] **BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Rachel, do you want to expand on that anymore? I think that's, one of the really interesting themes of the podcast series that a lot of people might not have been exposed to before. Even when they're not going to the same schools, white parents have a lot of influence over what happens in mostly Black and Brown kids schools.

[00:23:39] **RACHEL LISSY:** Yes, and I would say just, I think it was a great question that the caller brings up, but I also think that historically that approach, which is let's just put more resources and try to equalize the resources, is not an approach that has worked. New York City tried that approach to hit a more effective schools program in the '60s when it seemed like the integration efforts were really not going to be successful, and I think part of it has to do with some of what Chana just named, which is that white parents, there's a concept of opportunity hoarding, which is that even when white parents aren't in that school, because of the ways in which when we treat schooling as this competitive, private good, there is always going to be a desire on the part of white parents to get more stuff. We'll raise your community garden and show you a STEM lab or whatever it is. I think part of the value of integration is in part in equalizing some of those resources and access to some of those resources, more so than it is about just like a gauzy idea around diversity.

The NFL's Race-Norming Problem Is All Over Medicine - What Next - Air Date 6-7-21

[00:24:38] **DARSHALI VYAS:** More and more as our technology improves and increases, there is a movement to move towards like an online calculator or an algorithm or a risk score that helps doctors make difficult decisions. There are some decisions that are clear cut and some decisions that are more in a grey area. And when we're trying to make decisions like that, it could be when to start a patient on a certain kind of medication, or how to counsel a patient towards or away from a procedure, or when to seek additional testing or imaging. There are some grey areas. And then in those cases, it can be helpful to have a tool that helps us individualize a patient's risk or a patient's risk factors and guide decision making. And in some ways it's helpful to have that because it helps doctors be more objective.

[00:25:24] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** You're not just going on your gut.

[00:25:25] **DARSHALI VYAS:** It can be helpful to standardize decision making in that way, especially when there is a gray area.

[00:25:30] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** But when race is a factor, Darshali's got to make a call, plug the data in or leave it out.

It's a decision that's complicated by the fact that oftentimes there isn't a clear answer on what her patient's race is.

[00:25:43] **DARSHALI VYAS:** There is no clear guideline on how to answer that question. And there's a lot of room for error in judgment to go into that decision. Also these tools that ask for race, they'll typically ask for very constrained categories of race. They'll either say Black, white, Asian. The patients I take care of have racial identities that don't fall neatly into those categories. So clinicians often will have to make an assumption based on -- it can be skin color, it can be what you think they'd identified as. If the patient's in front of you, you can ask them what race they identify as. But again, they're very strict categories. And I think one problem that these tools don't comment on at all is what to do if a patient is a multiracial patient, or identifies with multiple ethnic backgrounds. Do you pick one? Do you say other? And how does that affect what output you get from the tool?

[00:26:35] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** And these tools are based on previous information, right? Like outcomes of patients who have come before. And I think about race norming is this kind of closed loop of information, where it's both documenting a reality, but then there's this question of whether by documenting the reality, you are then creating a reality, because you've given this score, which now is going to impact how you treat the patient. And so you've used a stereotype to capture someone in a way.

[00:27:10] **DARSHALI VYAS:** And then to use it in predictive modeling. And so you're sort of using a current snapshot of a disparity and using it for a predictive tool to almost continue that disparity into the future.

Yeah, it becomes this warped circle of logic.

[00:27:26] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** So I'm a little curious what race norming looks like in this NFL situation in particular. If I was a player looking for compensation for a brain injury, I'm wondering what kind of tests would I get and how would they be corrected for race?

[00:27:41] **DARSHALI VYAS:** Basically to decide about the settlements, you need to assess what the damage done is to the cognition into the brain function. And so these players undergo tests, with the way they're interpreted differs based on race. And the way they differ is the tests assume that Black players have lower cognitive function at baseline. And so to qualify for the settlement, they have to show a larger decrement in cognitive function.

And it's based in what the NFL has defended the practice in the past, saying this was based on sort of long established tests and widely accepted scoring methodologies, but there's no scientific evidence to show that that Black patients have lower cognitive function of course. And that's at odds with all of our genetic understanding of race to begin with.

[00:28:30] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** Race often pops up in these tools the same way a biological characteristic might, like blood pressure or cholesterol.

The problem, Darshali says, is that race is a social construct, not a biological condition.

[00:28:43] **DARSHALI VYAS:** Just because something correlates with an outcome doesn't mean it's a causation. And just because race correlates with an outcome of interest, doesn't make it part of the causal pathway. It's not something about being Black that makes people more or less likely to have an outcome of interest.

It's the experience of being Black. And so in some cases it's easier for us to recognize a social factor that doesn't end up in the model. Like for a lot of these analyses, people will find that insurance type also correlates with the outcome of interest. Insurance type doesn't end up in the final tool, because we can recognize that insurance status is a social determinants of health. But when race ends up with a signal, it often ends up in the final model. And that does imply that we're using it in a biological or genetic way.

[00:29:29] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** It's interesting because I'm sure the argument that someone coming up with one of these tools might use is well, the signal is so loud. Like we have to include it because race was just the loudest signal we had. And so obviously we must include it.

And I wonder if if you might see that differently where you're like, yeah, that's like a clanging bell for the racism in medicine, not some kind of indication that we need to be sorting people in this way.

[00:29:59] **DARSHALI VYAS:** Right. And I think when you see the signal for race, that should be a call to action that these racial disparities are really stark and that they need to be addressed at their root cause. Not that we should correct for them and to just adjust our models around the disparity.

[00:30:15] **MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT:** Which means in a way kind of accepting the disparity.

[00:30:18] **DARSHALI VYAS:** Right. And in the worst case scenario, perpetuating the disparity forward, if we're just correcting our tools around them.

One Bad Algorithm Advocates Say Facial Recognition Reveals Systemic Racism in AI Technology - Democracy Now! - Air Date 6-26-20

[00:30:28] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** After Detroit police arrested Robert Williams, they held him overnight in a filthy cell. His fingerprints, DNA sample mugshot were put on file. This is Williams describing how the officers interrogated him based on the false facial recognition hit.

[00:30:43] **ROBERT WILLIAMS:** So when we get to the interview room, the first thing they had me do was read my rights to myself and then sign off that I read and understand my rights. A detective turns over a picture of a guy And says — I know, and he's like, so that's not you? I look, I said, no, that's not me. He turns another paper over. He says, I guess this is not you either. I pick that paper up and hold it next to my face. And I said, this is not me. I was like, I hope you all don't think all black people look alike. And then he says, the computer says it's you.

[00:31:22] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** But the next day police told Williams, quote, "The computer must have gotten it wrong." And he was finally released nearly 30 hours after his arrest.

This comes as Democratic senators Ed Markey and Jeff Merkley introduced a bill Thursday that would ban the use of facial recognition and other biometric surveillance by federal law enforcement agencies. On Wednesday, Boston city council voted unanimously to ban its use in Boston.

Earlier this month, Amazon placed a one-year moratorium on letting police use its facial recognition technology. And IBM has announced it's pulling out of the facial recognition business entirely.

Our next guest is a computer scientist and coding expert who documents racial bias in this type of technology.

Joy Buolamwini is a researcher at the MIT Media Lab, founder of the Algorithmic Justice League. She's also featured in the documentary *Coded Bias*. Welcome back to Democracy Now! It's great to have you with us again, Joy. It was great to interview you first at the Sundance Film Festival. But, Joy, talk about this case. Talk about the Williams case and its significance, how it happened, what's the technology and what's happening with it now.

[00:32:39] **JOY BUOLAMWINI:** Yes. So the thing we must keep in mind about Robert Williams' case is this is not an example of one bad algorithm, just like instances of police brutality. It is a glimpse of how systemic racism can be embedded into AI systems like those that power facial recognition technologies. It's also a reflection of what study after study after study has been showing, studies I've conducted at MIT with Dr. Timnit Gebru, Deb Raji studies from the National institute for Standards and Technology, showing that on 189

algorithms, right, you had a situation where Asian and African American faces were 10 to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white faces. You have a study February, 2019, looking at skin type, showing that darker-skinned individuals were more likely to be misidentified by these technologies.

So it is. not A shock that we are seeing what happened to Robert Williams. What we have to keep in mind is this is a known case, and we don't know how many others didn't have a situation where the. Police or the detective says, oh, the computer must have got it wrong. And this is an important thing to keep in mind.

Oftentimes, even if there's evidence in front of you, this man does not look like the picture. There is this reliance on the machine. And when you have a situation of confirmation bias, particularly when black people are presumed to already be guilty, this only adds to it. Now, the other thing I want to point out.

Is, you can be misidentified even if you're not where a crime happened. So in April, 2019, you actually had Ms. Majeed. she was a brown university, senior who was misidentified as a terrorist suspect in the Sri Lanka, Easter bombings. She wasn't in Sri Lanka in the movie coded bias. The filmmaker shows a 14-year-old boy being stopped by police in the UK.

because Of a misidentification. So again, this is not an example of one bad algorithm gone wrong, but it is showing again that systemic racism can become systematic. When we use automated tools in the context,

of policing.

[00:35:13] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Joy, let me play clip from the documentary Coded bias that shows that story police in London, stopping a young black teen based on surveillance.

[00:35:26] **SILKIE:** Tell me what's happening

[00:35:27] **GRIFF FERRIS:** this young black kid's in school uniform got stopped as a result of a match

Took him down that street just to one and like very thoroughly searched him. It was all plainclothes officers as well. It was four plainclothes officers who stopped him.

Fingerprinted him after about like maybe 10, 15 minutes of searching and checking his details and him. and they came back and it's not him. Excuse me, I work for a human rights campaigning organization we're campaigning against facial recognition technology. We're campaigning against facial — we're called Big Brother Watch. We're a human rights campaigning organization, We're campaigning against this technology here today. And then you've just been stopped because of that. They misidentified you. And These are our details. here. He was a bit shaken. His friends were there.

[00:36:53] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** more. He was 14 years old.

[00:36:57] **JOY BUOLAMWINI:** Yes. And him being 14 years old is also important because we are seeing more companies pushing to put facial recognition technologies in schools.

And we also continuously have studies that show these systems also struggle on youthful faces as well as elderly faces as well as. on Race and on gender and so many other factors, but I want to also point out that while we are showing examples of misidentifications, there's the other side. If these technologies are made more accurate, right?

It doesn't then say accurate systems cannot be abused. So when you have more accurate systems, it also increases the potential for. Surveillance being weaponized against communities of color black and brown communities, as we've seen in the past. So even if you got this technology to have better performance, it doesn't take away the threat from civil liberties It doesn't take away the threat from privacy.

So the face could very well be the final frontier of privacy, and it can be the key to erasing our civil liberties, right? The ability to go out and protest. You have chilling effects when you know, big brother is watching, oftentimes there is no due process in this case because the detective said, oh, the computer must have gotten it wrong.

This is why we got to this scenario. But oftentimes people don't even know these technologies are being used and it's not just for identifying someone's unique individual. You have a company called HireVue that Claims to analyze videos of candidates for a job and take verbal and nonverbal cues.

Trained on current top performers. And so here you could be denied economic opportunity access to a job because of failures of these technologies. So we absolutely have to keep in mind that there are issues and threats when it doesn't work and there are issues and threats when it does work and right. now When we're thinking about facial recognition technologies, it's a high-stakes pattern recognition game, which equates it to gambling.

We're gambling with people's faces, we're gambling with people's lives, and ultimately we're gambling with democracy.

[00:39:28] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!**: So, Talk about the agencies that you understand are using this. I mean, you've mentioned this in your writing drug enforcement administration, DEA customs and border [Protection] ,CBP ice explain how they are using them.

[00:39:45] **JOY BUOLAMWINI**: Right and in addition to that, you also have TSA. So right now we have a wild, wild West Where vendors can supply government agencies with these technologies, you might have heard of the Clearview AI case where you scrape 3 billion photos. From the internet. And now you're approaching government agencies, intelligence agencies with these technologies.

So they can be used to have investigative leads, right. Or they can be used to interrogate people. So it's not a situation. Where there is transparency about the scope and breadth of its use, which is another situation where we think about due process. We think about consent and we think about what are the threats of surveillance.

People Like Us, Education - Hidden Brain - Air Date

6-3-19

[00:40:37] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** More than 11,000 students from kindergarten through third grade were randomly assigned to one of three class-size groups. Researchers tracked their performance over time. The experiment is now considered one of the most important education studies ever conducted. It showed that smaller class sizes led to substantial improvements in early learning, especially for minority students. In the decades since, researchers have also come to realize the random placement of kids in Project STAR could be used to study something else.

[00:41:12] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** If you are randomizing by class size, you are also randomizing by teacher race.

[00:41:19] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** This is Constance Lindsay. She is an education professor at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. She said this insight led to a new research question. Do children who have a teacher of the same race do better than children who don't? Education researcher Thomas Dee was the first to analyze the Project STAR data in this new way. Did students do better if they were matched with a teacher of the same race? In 2004, he published his findings. Constance says they were striking.

[00:41:54] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** If you're a Black student and you have a Black teacher, on average, you're going to have a higher test score than a Black student who has a white teacher.

[00:42:02] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** The findings weren't just specific to Black kids. They also held true for white students. Both Black and white kids did better on math and reading achievement tests if they had a teacher of the same race. Thomas Dee worried that his results might cause people to call for increased racial segregation in schools. He felt that would be a mistake. He first noted that his results only apply to how kids were doing during the four-year experiment. The results did not predict achievement over longer time periods. Second, he felt the best takeaway would be more study. He urged researchers to continue exploring why race dynamics matter in the classroom. Fourteen years later, Constance Lindsay and her colleagues did just that.

[00:42:54] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** Basically, what we did is we said let's use the fact that we can follow the students over many, many years and see what happens to them in terms of high school dropout, whether they take a college entrance exam, and then whether they enroll in college.

[00:43:09] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** In other words, they tried to answer the open question Thomas Dee had raised, do Black children who are randomly assigned to Black teachers perform better over the long term? What they found is those early interactions had a lasting effect.

[00:43:25] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** Black students in our sample who were matched to a Black teacher were less likely to drop out of high school, more likely to sit for a college entrance exam - so think SAT, ACT - and then more likely to enroll in college.

[00:43:39] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** The success of Black students increased with every year they were matched with Black teachers. Black students who spent more time with Black teachers did better than Black students who spent less time. These

results could have huge implications. They suggest that race matching might be one way to get more at-risk Black kids to stay in school and go on to higher education. Of course, Tennessee is just one state, and researchers wanted to make sure they weren't looking at a one-state phenomenon, so they turned to North Carolina.

This state has a huge public school database. It contains all kinds of information about students, including their demographics, the classes they've taken and the race of various teachers over the years. Again, the researchers looked at kids in elementary school and then tracked them over time. Now, these kids weren't randomly matched like they were in Tennessee, but still, they had exposure to Black and non-Black teachers. Constance says the results told the same story. Black kids who had had Black teachers were less likely to drop out of high school.

[00:44:49] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** And then when you finish high school in North Carolina, there's a survey you fill out that says, I will attend college, I will not attend college. It's basically like an intent-to-attend-college measure. And we find that more Black students who are matched to Black teachers report wanting to attend college.

[00:45:06] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Students who benefited the most from having a Black teacher were those most at risk of dropping out, low-income Black boys. The North Carolina data showed that these boys were 39% less likely to drop out of high school if they had a Black teacher in elementary school - 39%. What Constance and her colleagues were seeing in education is what Owen Garrick saw in medicine - race matters.

Now, we don't know why these Black teachers were making such a difference in the lives of their Black students, but the researchers think a variety of forces might be at work. One could be implicit bias. Teachers may hold unconscious prejudices that negatively affect Black students.

[00:45:50] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** That prevent them from maybe identifying kids for things like gifted programs or enacting harsher discipline punishments.

[00:45:59] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Constance says Black teachers also serve as powerful role models for Black students.

[00:46:05] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** The presence of a college-educated adult in your life makes a difference.

[00:46:09] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** And then there's what's called cultural competence.

[00:46:12] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** Which is that teachers are able to read behavior better if you have cultural things that you share in common.

[00:46:21] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** This seems especially true in the area of discipline. In another research project, Constance and her colleagues have found that one reason Black boys sometimes get into trouble at school is because of something researchers call willful defiance.

[00:46:36] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** Willful defiance is, I get into an argument with the teacher and maybe I talk back, or something along those lines, and then you have to go to the principal's office.

[00:46:46] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** And so what do you see with willful defiance?

[00:46:48] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** So we see that the drops in willful defiance are huge when you have a Black teacher.

[00:46:57] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** But just as there's a shortage of Black doctors in America, there's also a shortage of Black teachers. Nationwide, teachers in elementary and secondary schools are overwhelmingly white despite growing racial diversity among students.

[00:47:12] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** So for example, in the North Carolina data, both in the long-term study and in the discipline study that I have, over 50% of the Black students never have a Black teacher.

[00:47:25] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** On a very personal level, Constance knows well the lasting impression a Black teacher can leave on students.

[00:47:35] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** 'Cause my grandmother was a teacher here in D.C. public schools for a very long time.

[00:47:39] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Constance describes her as a warm demander.

[00:47:43] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** This is someone who holds you accountable for the things that you should be doing, but does it in a warm fashion.

[00:47:50] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Her name was Mae Wilson.

[00:47:51] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** Mae Wilson. Well, dealing with her, she was stern, she kept an orderly classroom, she was the boss.

[00:48:01] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** This is Donald Williams. He's in his late 60s and has lived nearly all his life in Washington, D.C. In the early 1970s, Don was a student at a school that has educated generations of African-American students, Dunbar High School. This is where Mae Wilson taught.

[00:48:17] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** Man, it's been a long time since I looked in this book.

[00:48:20] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** From an old yearbook, Don points to his younger self, a star football player at Dunbar.

[00:48:26] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** Here, I was blocking. There, I was running with the football. There, I was running with the football. There, I got tackled.

[00:48:34] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Most of Don's memories from high school revolve around football. Except for that homeroom teacher, Mae Wilson, whom he's never forgotten.

[00:48:43] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** She's, like, 5'5", 5'4", but her demeanor was bigger than that. She didn't take a lot of nonsense. You knew it. You knew. She was like your mother away from home, but she didn't take any stuff. She didn't cut any corners.

[00:49:01] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Don says there was something about Mae Wilson that made you pay attention. Maybe it was the tailored skirt suit she wore, or her air of authority.

[00:49:11] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** She always looked business. She always looked business. She never came in a nightclub dress, or something like that. She always looked professional. So that's another message that you saw in her, she'd stick to the rules of being on time, doing things that you need to do, not being rowdy, controlling yourself in public.

[00:49:32] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Her lessons ultimately stuck and became life lessons for Don. I asked him if it made a difference to him that Mae Wilson was Black. He told me the question was a no-brainer - yes, of course it made a difference.

[00:49:48] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** As a Black kid, you can relate better when you see someone in the position that you're in, because if you're not Black, you can't understand what I'm saying. You can say it because it's the right thing, "Oh, I under-" - no you don't. You couldn't possibly know, because you're not Black.

[00:50:05] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Don has the same feeling about his football coaches. He says shared identity often led to trust.

[00:50:12] **DONALD WILLIAMS:** Like I said, a kid needs to see someone who's been there. It's easy for you to talk it when you got it. It's easy for a rich man to tell you to save your money, he got money. How can a rich man tell a poor man what's going on, what life is about? It's got to be someone that knows the avenues to go to that someone that's Black that's been through it. That's his ticket. That's his motivation there to show you how it can be done.

[00:50:46] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Giving students the feeling that they are understood by their teachers, who can say this is a bad idea? But if you zoom out, putting this idea into practice runs into all sorts of problems related to history, politics, and optics. I asked Constance Lindsay about this.

Let's say you're the principal of a school, and you have one Black teacher in second grade, and you have, let's say, 15 Black students spread across five sections of second grade. Would you assign all those 15 students to the Black teacher?

[00:51:20] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** I probably would not do that. If I had students that in that particular set of 15 that were particularly disadvantaged, I might. I might also explore ways in which teachers could co-teach so that all of those 15 students would have the opportunity to interact with that teacher, but I definitely wouldn't advocate segregating them into one class.

[00:51:40] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** Why not? That's what your data show works.

[00:51:43] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** That is what the data show that works, but I think we agreed that segregation is bad.

[00:51:49] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** But I think this is what makes the paper really, really tricky, which is it's actually suggesting that's something that we thought was a good thing might have an outcome that is not such a good thing.

[00:51:59] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** That's right. That's right. So I guess if you held a gun to my head and you said I had to pick between segregating students and making sure that students had a Black teacher, I would pick that they had a Black teacher.

[00:52:12] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** So you actually would put the students in the same class then?

[00:52:14] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** If you said I had to.

[00:52:16] **SHANKAR VEDANTAM - HOST, HIDDEN BRAIN:** I guess what I'm asking you is not so much whether I have to but if you looked at the data and said that you are improving the odds of students by 10, 15, maybe 20%, and you did not do that thing that could improve their odds by 10, 15, 20%, I mean, that is immoral.

[00:52:38] **CONSTANCE LINDSAY:** You could say that. You could say that. If I were a parent of a Black boy and there was one Black male teacher in the school, I would go tell the principal to assign my child to him.

Can We Finally End School Segregation? - The New Yorker Radio Hour - Air Date 5-21-21

[00:52:48] **DAVID REMNICK - HOST, THE NEW YORKER RADIO HOUR:** Here's a sobering fact: by many accounts, schools in America are as segregated now as they were in the 1960s, in the years just after separate but equal was declared unconstitutional. Now that's not true of every school in every state, of course, but in cities and towns across the country, white students and Black and Brown students are very commonly educated in entirely different worlds, with different resources and very different outcomes. Here in New York City, which exudes pride in its diversity and in its political liberalism, schools are among the most segregated in the nation.

In fact, in a lot of places, schools are more segregated now than 20 or 30 years ago. How did this happen? And what would it take finally to be together and equal?

WNYC's program, *The United States of Anxiety*, has been taking a very close look at how those questions have played out in one small school district, the Sausalito Marin City schools in California. Reporter Marianne McCune began visiting the district about two years ago. One of the schools is a charter: Willow Creek Academy.

Just picture it: foggy slopes, trees, and instead of a big old school building, little bungalows around the field. Classic bay area.

[00:54:19] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** The first time I visited the charter school, the board president showed me around. His name is Kurt Weinheimer.

[00:54:25] **KURT WEINHEIMER:** Do you want to look into, into a classroom I'll see what...

[00:54:28] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** The place had a really idyllic feel. They had this French chef, gets on stage every morning to announce the day's lunch menu.

The kids say "Bonjour, Chef Guillaume!"

[00:54:44] **CHEF GUILLAUME:** Well today on the menu, seasonal fruit, we're going to have...

[00:54:47] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Well, while we were watching, Kurt leans over and tells me he loves watching the kids react to the food options.

[00:54:52] **KURT WEINHEIMER:** It'll be like, "And today we've got cauliflower." And it was like, "Woo-hoo!"

[00:54:56] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** I have to say, what was most striking about my visit was the diversity in the classrooms. Less than half the kids here are white, so there's a mix of Black, white, Latino, Asian, many recent immigrants.

[00:55:08] **KURT WEINHEIMER:** It, it is integrated and inclusive and that's their day to day life.

[00:55:13] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** And economically too, there's a real mix of family income levels here. More than a third of the kids are very low income, which is saying something given where we are. Because Willow Creek is in Sausalito. This is a small town and we're talking like around 7,000 people. It's overwhelmingly white, little hippie, a lot of multi-million dollar homes, but almost half the school is from another neighborhood, Marin City. It's tiny too. It's half the size of Sausalito. But there's a big public housing complex there. There are also more affordable apartments. It's not majority black anymore, but it's a real mix of people. And that neighborhood is the reason we're here, because over in that neighborhood is the one other school in the district. It's about a mile away from Willow Creek. It's not a charter school. It's the regular public school. And it's called Bayside Martin Luther King Junior Academy. And these do schools and the 500 kids who go to them are now at the center of a big controversy here in California. Over the last couple of decades, the school here, Bayside MLK, has been shrinking, while Willow Creek Academy, the charter school, has grown.

So there are about 120 students at Bayside MLK now, and almost all of them are Black and Latino.

[00:56:34] **JEREMIAH MOULTRIE:** My graduating class was like 10, 10 kids.

[00:56:36] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** This is Jeremiah Moultrie. He went to Bayside from the kindergarten through the eighth grade. He's a sophomore in high school now. But he says back when he was at Bayside MLK, it was a real mess.

[00:56:48] **JEREMIAH MOULTRIE:** We had two teachers basically doing everything for the entire middle school. We had a math teacher, an English teacher that taught all three classes. And they also had to be the history and science teacher. And I remember specifically at one point in time, like the seventh grade would be doing math while the eighth grade would be in the back doing science.

[00:57:10] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** When he was there, they did not have an art teacher, they did not have a music teacher. Jeremiah says the curriculum felt completely ad hoc. And it was like, the teachers were just playing catch up all the time.

[00:57:21] **JEREMIAH MOULTRIE:** Everything was like, you guys don't know this, you guys don't know that. So like let's pick it back up and let's try to learn as much of it as possible and try to move on with the curriculum and we're supposed to be doing now.

And then like all the kids that left Bayside to go to Willow Creek, they were like, like rapid fire, like learning this, learning that, learning that. And like they were on track. I was like unaware of the fact that we were really missing out on all of the stuff until like me and all my nine classmates, we took a field trip to Willow Creek and they're doing this big performance like they had 20 teachers there. And all 10 of us were sitting at a table and we're just watching them. And they were doing all these parts and everybody talking and the girl, she had like a really cool dress and like the hat, like the lights and everything like that little stage lights. And it was all really cool. Right after the play, everyone was like, Bayside never has anything like that.

[00:58:15] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Jeremiah wasn't the only person in Marin City who noticed this stark difference between these two schools. There were a lot of people in the community who said, Hey, we're failing these kids.

[00:58:27] **CALIFORNIA STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL JAVIER BESSERA:** I want to thank everyone for being with us here this morning. Okay. Let's go ahead and begin.

[00:58:32] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** This is state attorney general Javier Bissera, summer of 2019. He's speaking in front of a small nerve-wracked audience and he brings up a 65-year-old Supreme Court decision.

[00:58:45] **CALIFORNIA STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL JAVIER BESSERA:** Brown v Board of Education ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, but more importantly, they said separate is not equal.

[00:58:59] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** The attorney General's office had investigated this tiny school district for two years and concluded that it had intentionally maintained an exacerbated segregation here. That the district, which encompasses just these two schools, knowingly ran one school that was almost exclusively Black and Latino and low income, and deprived them of the teachers and the instruction and the funding they needed to succeed.

And the complaint charges at the same time they were helping Willow Creek, that wonderfully integrated charter school grow and flourish.

[00:59:33] **CALIFORNIA STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL JAVIER BESSERA:** The Sausalito-Marin City school district schools were separate and they were not equal.

[00:59:41] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** He told the district to fix it.

[00:59:43] **CALIFORNIA STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL JAVIER BESSERA:** These decisions by the board of trustees violated both the equal protection guarantee of the California constitution and the equal protection clause of the US Constitution.

[00:59:54] **ITOKO GARCIA:** Good evening, thank you all so much for coming.

[01:00:00] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** As superintendent of the Sausalito Marin City school district, Itoko Garcia is the guy in charge. And that wouldn't be a huge job in this tiny district, if he didn't also have to solve the intractable problem of segregation in the United States.

[01:00:16] **ITOKO GARCIA:** [Laughing] Is that what I'm being tasked with?

[01:00:19] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** He figured out fast that people in this community were anxious and angry and upset in all kinds of ways.

[01:00:26] **ITOKO GARCIA:** So I wanted to start tonight by reassuring folks.

[01:00:29] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** The first time he gets up with a mic to explain his new mandate to the public, he gives the audience a tip for how to remain calm, cool, and collected themselves.

When you start to feel worked up, he tells them breathe in for a count of eight, out for a count of four. He demonstrates what he means immediately when he reminds the crowd of what the Attorney General's judgment actually says.

[01:00:59] **ITOKO GARCIA:** It said we knowingly and intentionally maintained and exacerbated existing racial segregation in Sausalito and Marin City.

[01:01:13] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Itoko's job was to make a school that would attract Black families from local public housing and immigrant families who spoke Spanish or Tagalog or Arabic and white families too, from the funky little boat houses on the bay, to the luxury houses on the hill. His strategy to bring the two existing schools together into one, find a way to combine the charter school with the regular district school. And the problem was distrust, a decades-deep distrust.

[01:01:46] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** I am a parent at Willow Creek, I have a fourth grader. I don't doubt that many of you relish harming the institution, but what I cannot fathom is how you continue to push an agenda that actively harms the well-being of 380 students.

[01:01:57] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** He tells those first few months on the job involved many long nights sitting at one end of a school cafeteria, listening to charter school parents damn the district:

[01:02:08] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** Why is Willow Creek Academy being penalized?

[01:02:12] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** And to supporters of the regular public school damn the charter:

[01:02:15] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** Because you guys and brag about diversity. You have flyers out, they have a Black faces on it. But Black children aren't being taught at your school.

Why is equity kind of being thrown out the window? So I ask everyone to picture this. There is a burning house, one burning house. There is a second house, which is not burning. Why would anyone light the second house on fire?

[01:02:49] **ITOKO GARCIA:** I'd like to ask that you please not characterize this school as on fire.

[01:02:53] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** As Itoko listened, one of the things he worried most about was how not to fall into the patterns of the past.

This fight over segregation and integration and resources and inequity, it's been going on for decades. You can find local newspaper clippings detailing the same debates over and over from world. War. II on. Back in 1970, a BBC documentary told the story of a sweeping effort to fix things.

[01:03:24] **BBC ANNOUNCER:** Five years ago, a locally elected school board in Sausalito California, with foresight and idealism, created one of the first deliberately integrated school systems in the United States.

[01:03:35] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** It was a portrait of this same little district's first effort to desegregate.

[01:03:39] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** Is a racist Sausalito school district. What do any of the rest of you think about it?

[01:03:45] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** When Itoko found and watched the BBC coverage, he says it actually made him cry.

[01:03:51] **ITOKO GARCIA:** I had a brief moment when I thought, oh boy, 'cause it seemed like we were in the same place in 2019 that this community was in in 1965. You know, there were accusations against school board members and actions against school boards and recalls and angry parent meetings, angry Black parents talking about racism and segregation, angry white parents talking about behavior and learning.

I mean, things that have not changed much at all.

[01:04:31] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Maybe the biggest, stickiest pattern that documentary points do is this: that desegregation alone does not equal success for Black students. The whole idea of school desegregation was to improve education for Black kids who had been forced to attend overcrowded and underfunded schools. But desegregation, just putting black and white students together, was that enough?

[01:04:59] **SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING:** We're going to keep on pushing until....

[01:05:01] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** In the BBC documentary, a Black Marin City resident named Royce Macklemore, with a gorgeous crochet sweater vest and the 1970 Afro, tells the interviewer:

[01:05:12] **ROYCE MACKLEMORE:** Me, myself, I don't care about integration. All I care is equal education.

[01:05:16] **BBC ANNOUNCER:** What you're saying, basically....

[01:05:17] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Royce still lives in Marin City. She's been an activist and an educator and a foster mom out of the local public housing complex for decades. Everyone here knows her. And at 77, she still questions desegregation. She's told Itoko, so what if the public school in Marin City has almost all Black and Brown kids? Why do we have to cater to white families now?

[01:05:40] **ROYCE MACKLEMORE:** If they're going to leave, let them leave. They left back in the day. I'd say that on the BBC. I still feel the same. I don't care about integration. It's about the best education that one can receive. Equal education.

[01:05:59] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Itoko has thought about this plenty. On one hand, research shows desegregating schools has done more to improve educational outcomes for Black students than any other reform.

On the other hand, it hasn't done nearly enough. Itoko doesn't really have a choice of the matter. The attorney general has ordered desegregation, so he can't just focus on educating the Black and Brown students who already attend his school. To desegregate, the district has to attract some white families too.

And does trying to please wealthy white families, forced compromises that are not in line with serving the families that you're talking about?

[01:06:46] **ITOKO GARCIA:** Historically, yes.

[01:06:49] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Is that in your mind? I mean, do you feel you have to find ways to resist that historic trend?

[01:06:55] **ITOKO GARCIA:** I think that feeling infuses my entire educational journey, as a student, as a teacher, as a principal and as a superintendent.

[01:07:03] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Itoko pledges not to fail Black families in order to serve white ones.

[01:07:12] **ITOKO GARCIA:** And I believe that we are very well positioned to do just that.

[01:07:16] **MARIANNE MCCUNE:** Which is exactly what the superintendent of this district was hoping, 50 years ago, before things fell apart.

Summary

[01:07:25] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *How To Citizen* with Baratunde speaking with Heather McGee about why our economy is so white and why we don't have any free public pools. *The Brian Lehrer Show* discussed the role of nice white parents in school segregation. *What Next* looked at the issue of race norming in the NFL, and then expanded the issue to medicine more broadly. *Democracy Now!* looked at the role of systemic racism in AI technology being used for policing. And *Hidden Brain* looked at the flip side of racial segregation in schools.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard a bonus clip from The New Yorker Radio Hour looking at another case study of school segregation that echoes the fight over integration from decades past.

To hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted. No questions asked.

And now, we'll hear from you.

Patriotism and the culture wars - Dave from Olympia, WA

[01:08:33] **VOICEMAILER: DAVE FROM OLYMPIA:** Hello, Best of the Left, it's Dave from Bellevue, Washington. I just finished up episode 1431, Stealing Native Children and Their Future. Your commentary at the end got me thinking, so I'm calling in specifically about that.

The question of patriotism and loving your country, I think you're right. It's not necessarily a policy debate, but it is an issue in big scare quotes in the culture wars. Do you respect the flag? Do you love the country, do you hate the country, whatever. And it's always struck me that it's such a weird measure of recognizing that there is some flaw, that the object of your affection isn't perfect in every way, shape and form, eliminates the possibility of love. If you realize that the founding fathers owned slaves, boom, clearly no chance of ever loving the country. If your spouse has ever said anything mean to you or has done something legitimately terrible, like how could you possibly continue to have affection for them? If your grandparents, and everybody's grandparents, good Lord, have retrograde ideas, how could you possibly love them? No, of course you do. Emotions are complex things and yeah you take into account these things, but that doesn't end affection, that doesn't end a sense of belongingness to a country and celebration of shared rituals and all the things that go along with patriotism. The right definitely uses, you know, you must hate America as a bludgeon, but it's such a dumb bludgeon. I don't know why they think it has -- I mean, it clearly has rhetorical power within their circles -- but it's nonsensical and it troubles me why people either respond to or fall for that. Because yeah, recognizing that there are flaws within, you know, anything, a country in particular, isn't the equivalent of hating or not loving enough or, not supporting enough. It just asks troublesome and bothering.

Your commentary is great. Ooh, I enjoyed it. It was a real hard lesson. Boy, it was well put together, but just a tough topic. But as always, thank you for bringing us the Best of the Left.

Final comments on the nature of airing dirty laundry

[01:10:55] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as a VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at 202 999 3991, or write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

Dave gave me lots of thoughts that I want to tell you about. The first of which is, when he started talking about the idea that, if you love something, you can't see anything wrong with it, and if you see something wrong with it, it almost precludes one's ability to love it. Obviously, not in his opinion, but, sort of, trying to analyze this perspective that other people seem to hold.

And what it made me think of first was, I did once have a girl friend, you know, maybe, like, my first real girlfriend back in teenage years, who said, not joking, when you're dating a person, you are supposed to, literally, think of that person as the most attractive person in the world to you; that no one in the entire world should be seen as more physically attractive than the person you're dating.

And, I thought, at the time, I'm not sure that's how this works, but it was, it was a little bit of an insight into the, uh, I don't know, Disneyfication, or just perverse ways of thinking that... that we sometimes get ourselves into.

But, moving on, the more Dave talked, the more I thought about his... his analysis that people seem to insist on being completely blind to any downsides, any detractions, from the object of... of one's affection in order to love that thing.

And the more I thought, I... I just don't know if that's exactly it. I don't know that we're hitting this nail right on the head, because I've just heard too many examples of people personally acknowledging the detriments of an object of their affection, but being very defensive of acknowledging those downsides, those detriments, to anyone else, to anyone outside.

And so, the more I thought about this, and I talked with Erin, our... one of our producers about it, and we were, sort of, digging through these different layers of psychology, and, you know, what makes people do these, you know, various things.

And we basically landed on: "Don't air, your dirty laundry." That is this, sort of, umbrella idea about only showing your most positive side. That's what that is. Right?

And, you know, it got me thinking about Facebook, because the conversation about Facebook started to be how we are curating our lives and actually creating these depression feedback loops for everyone; where we know what our lives are like, but then we see other people's lives on Facebook and they seem to be a lot happier than we are. And that makes us feel bad.

Side note, reminder, that I never really got into Facebook, and I didn't get into the habit of posting a lot on Facebook ever, but I'm aware of this phenomenon. And I completely acknowledged that if I had started posting on Facebook, that I would have done the exact same thing, because everyone does the exact same thing.

So, I realise, oh, that's not a Facebook phenomenon, that's a human phenomenon. We've... we've been curating our lives for thousands of years before Facebook came around.

And so then the question is, why? And, I think there's a few layers. I mean, first of all, like, it's kind of obvious, but it's also interesting to dig in a little bit.

And so, I think, one, could be a genuine protective sense that, you know, if there's something happened in your family, that is, you know, something that you wouldn't want other people to know about, it's a very protective instinct. You, you know, you want your family, those people who you love, to be seen in the most positive light, even though you know that there are things in your family that are not that great, or, you know, not a very lovable aspect of a given individual or something, you know, something along those lines. But you wouldn't want to share that outwardly.

And so, th-- that's what I got thinking about as Dave was talking, was, like, no, no, no. We can definitely love people and acknowledge their detrimental aspects. It's just that we don't want other people to know about it.

So I... I think that this is, sort of, a universal idea, not broken down along political lines, or anything like that. There's no reason to think that progressives and conservatives think differently about the concept of airing dirty laundry on the personal level.

The next angle, though, is a, maybe, a personal coping mechanism that you may think, there are individuals in my family, or some family dynamic that I come from. And there's something bad about some given individuals or some dynamic. And I came from that dynamic. And so it may be a bit of a personal coping mechanism to try to deal with our own imperfect origin stories and not really wanting to have come from something potentially traumatic.

And that may very well stem from, you know, I mean the same thing that makes people not want to go to the doctor. "I don't want to know. I don't want to deal with it." Right? It's just... it's just rejection. And, again, I mean, as you think about it, that's another, sort of, parallel with how people talk about the country. They might know that the history is a imperfect, to say the least; but if we deal with the history, then that means we have to do some work in the present to deal with that.

Like, if I went to the doctor and got diagnosed with something, well, then I'd have to go on treatment. Right? And, and there's a resistance to that.

So, you know, all this is on the personal level, but it does, sort of, get extrapolated to the national level, but not universally. This is where there's this big divide.

Progressives, although they might not want to air their family's dirty laundry, is perfectly happy, for the most part, to talk about their nation's dirty laundry, and actually, you know, actively want to take steps in the here and now to try to make things better.

Conservatives on the other hand, seem to be going in the other direction, by and large. They're not that excited about talking about the bad aspects of our history, just as we all would about our own families, but what makes a conservative do that, sort of, on the national level.

And, what I came to was, keeping in mind that I never referred to all conservatives as Fascists, or Proud Boys, or Nazis, or anything like that. We talked about spectrums and, you know, wide swaths of gray. That... that's what we talk about.

But there are trends that begin to emerge as you go farther to one side of the political spectrum or the other. And so, without calling all conservatives, you know, Proud Boys, and White Supremacists, or anything like that, it just came from a discussion about Proud Boys, and White Supremacists, about, sort of, authoritarianism and the tendency to identify *as* your country. Not, like, "I'm an American and I live here." That's part of my identity, too, but it's not one of my primary identity points. I don't... I don't think of American as... as one of the first ways I would describe myself.

I mean, as... as legitimate as it may be for me to do that, there's plenty to learn from me being an American. But there... there are those who put so much of the country into their

own identity. They, sort of, come to identify with the country, or, particularly, a strong leader of a country as being almost as themselves.

I am the country. The country is me. The leader is with me. I am with the leader. There's very, very strong bond that gets formed. And, of course, this was discussed as part of the legacy of the Trump years, sort of, understanding absolute dogged nature of his supporters.

And so, for anyone in that category who... who sees the country is not just a place where they live, but as deeply a part of their own identity, well then it becomes a lot more understandable why you would apply the same rules about dirty laundry, that we all would apply on the personal level, and then take that, and apply it to the national level as well, because there's not a big dividing line for a lot of people. They see national politics as so deeply personal that it might as well be their own family.

So, after having wrestled with that for a little while, that... that's basically where I came down on it. I would love to hear anyone's thoughts on either the personal or the national-level idea of this discussion. Obviously, you don't have to air your dirty laundry, but... but any thoughts about how you feel about talking about the country or talking about your family, and those... those interesting dynamics, because I'm definitely going to be continuing this conversation.

I ended up talking a little longer than I thought, cause I have a, sort of, a part B of my response that has to do with the importance of taking pride, and how that plays in to patriotism.

So keep the comments coming in at 202 999 3991, or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com and we will continue the discussion in the next episode.

That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, and participation in our bonus episodes.

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So coming to from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of left Podcast coming to twice a week thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.