Bret Weinstein and John McWhorter\_ George Floyd Protests and...

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**SPEAKERS**

Bret, John McWhorter

**Bret** 00:07

Hey folks, welcome to the Dark Horse Podcast. I am very glad to be with dr. john McWhorter. professor at Columbia University in English. He is a specialist in linguistics. His particular focus is Creole languages and American history. Do I have that right, john?

**John McWhorter** 00:25

Um, you could say that American Studies and Creole languages and language contact in general and language change.

**Bret** 00:34

Yeah. Wonderful. Well, thank you for joining me. I do hope at some point, we get to talk about linguistics and Creole languages, it is an absolutely fascinating topic. At the moment, though, I think what is taking place in the Republic is of great importance. And I know you feel the same way. And so we are going to focus on that today. If that's all right, by you. That works for me. All right, great. So let me lay this out a little bit for you. I am I am feeling a bit called at the moment by what is taking place. And I think the urgency of it is, is quite great. Are you also feeling called? Is that a fair assessment?

**John McWhorter** 01:21

Yeah, I certainly am being called in terms of suddenly the the number of emails and tweets and various kinds of Facebook messages I'm getting. But yeah, a moment has come when something that's been kind of verbling. Since the year 2013, is about when there was a real sea change has really come to a head and left a lot of people who would consider themselves liberal or even leftist curious as to what this new, extreme prosecutorial strain of the left is, that now actually seems to be making its way into mainstream institutions. And so I think there are many of us, whose work and thoughts have been relevant to that over the past six or seven years, where suddenly over the past three weeks, it seems like it's a time when we're needed or that we need to say something, it's felt almost like a burden to me, because things are happening so quickly, that it's hard to have a large picture idea that you can imagine standing the test of time, but I have to get over the idea that everything you say is gonna stand the test of time or, you know, sound like wheeled around. But yes, this is this is a tough time.

**Bret** 02:35

It's a tough time. And I know that there's also just the fact that we're walking a Razors Edge of sorts, and one doesn't want to say something that one discovers is taken the wrong way. And that makes things worse. So that's a problem. I think, probably we're both facing in this circumstance. But in any case, I think you and I have never met in person. But I think we have established a rapport online in the way that happens. It's a very odd process, but I think we trust each other. And what I would suggest is for this conversation to be maximally useful, that we suspend all rules of politeness. In other words, I would like you to be absolutely as direct with me as you think, is helpful. And I promise you, I will not be thin skinned. Even if the corrections of my perspective are substantial. And I will do the same. And in so doing, we can model how a conversation about race which is unavoidably going to be at the center of what we talked about might sound and maybe people can get a sense of an alternative to the dialogue that we see unfolding on on the streets of, of the US at this moment.

**John McWhorter** 03:58

Okay, that makes sense. I want to say beforehand, though, and this is going to seem trivial that for those of you who are watching this, as well as listening, my appearance is probably quite unpleasant. And it's because I am in a rustic cabin, not by myself and not filling envelopes with anything, but I'm up far away. Not in the view of too many human beings other than my children. I have COVID hair. I have not styled it today. I haven't shaven, I'm wearing the wrong glasses. So letting you know I know what this looks like. This is not how I look. But in any case, let us proceed to weightier matters.

**Bret** 04:32

Well, you know what, you look great. Look, you've also landed in the right place because my audience is thoroughly used to COVID hair. I have had COVID hair from the start before anyone had heard of COVID-19. So anyway, By comparison, and in absolute terms, you're you're just fine. So okay. What is going on? in the Republic I have the sense that a story I lived in 2017 at a tiny cottage College in the northwest corner of the country has suddenly spilled over. And it's now in every major city in the US.

**John McWhorter** 05:08

Yeah, and it's funny. The, what happened to you outside of your office where we can now see on video, it's been fashionable to say that that frame of mind was just a bunch of crazy kids among people who some people, I think really do think that and other people haven't wanted to allow that that kind of view is becoming dominant, partly because a lot of the people who are inclined to dismiss that as a lot of crazy kids are people who are inclined to let it pass in general and often aren't aware that there's a part of those people and then themselves, but the question is, why has it become what? I almost can't let come out of my mouth. It's becoming a mainstream sentiment, this unreasoning form of leftism, where language is misused in ways that seems so Stalinist and Orwellian that it's almost like a cartoon. And yet the people are standing there actually taking themselves seriously and having no idea that what they're doing is recapitulating, some of the most futile and useless socio political currents in history. It's really an interesting cocktail. Because you even wonder, George Floyd, what happened to him was absolutely unjustifiable. And yet, the fact is that similarly, absolutely unjustifiable things happen to black men, and I should say, men in general, not to mention women in the United States practically every day, why that particular person? Why did that bring this out to the extent that it did. And we've seen this kind of ideology brought out by cop killings before I think an iconic time was with Trayvon Martin, when social media, as we know, it was relatively new. And it brought out a great many white people as well, that was new ahmadu diavolo, in 1998, was one thing, in my mind was another it was the same with Ferguson. Here, though, you know, Brett, and I'm just, I'm going by the seat of my pants here. But I think that we're dealing currently with how social history can be confounding and often random, the butterfly flaps, some of this, I think, and this is not to minimize how important it is that we reform the cost, it's absolutely important. But I think that the virus had something to do with the heat of the response here, I think a lot of people were really tired of being trapped inside, we're really tired of the muzzle feeling that we've all had since the middle of March, and the weather starts to get better. And that man was murdered at a particular meteorological time. And I think a lot of people and when I say this, I don't just mean black rioters. I mean, everybody, you've seen these protests, a reason to get outside, I don't think it was deliberate. I don't think they were being cynical. But I think there was a joy in being able to be with other people to express some passion and to get outside. And so to tell you the truth, if that leads to cop reform, I say fine, that's the way history works. But nevertheless, it did bring out this particular kind of person with a particular kind of message. And we now have a particular kind of social media. And we have a particular president, that doesn't help either. We have a truly repulsive moron, as a president who makes a lot of people very, very upset and justifiably and so after 19 1960, after 2016, I imagine we were primed for something like this anyway. So I think that that's why all of a sudden, this hard, unreasoning, Orwellian social justice warrior left of the kind that was telling you, you were saying, quote, unquote, some racist shit A few years ago, is now dominating the op ed pages and toppling literary committees and making people resign, you know, with all of it involving people who know full well, that they're being bullshitted actually bowing down to this kind of rhetoric, because it's so frightening. And yeah, it's it's hard to take

**Bret** 09:09

in. Well, we have our work cut out for us. I see a lot in what you've said that I agree with, but I think I'm far more worried than it sounds like you are about what's going to come out of this for a couple of reasons. And I should say, one of the things I think I've never spoken about this publicly, but one of the things that happened as evergreen came apart, was there was graffiti about me all over the place, and posters. And there was a certain amount of Trayvon Martin stuff hurled at me as if I was George Zimmerman or something like that. And I think the reason that this matters is that it just tells you how preposterous the claims can be, and still pass muster in, in the movement. And so you say people People know they're being bullshitted. A few do. And I think they start out knowing that, but that there's an insidious process here in which people feel jeopardized, understandably. They make concessions that are initially small. And then they are marched in the direction of gargantuan false hoods that they then have to convince themselves of in order to sleep at night. And so it's a kind of spreading process. The reason that so many people got wrong, what was going on on college campuses was that they thought it was a college phenomenon. They thought, kids protests part of growing up. And that's never what this was. That's an element of it. It's why we got there first. But this is, I think, a contagious madness. And the worst part of this contagious madness is that because it is focused on a false narrative, and I really believe the narrative is false, it is obscuring the true narrative that actually explains the frustration.

**John McWhorter** 11:05

And so in what sense? Well,

**Bret** 11:08

let's start this way. I believe that what's going on is a couple things. You're right about COVID-19, there's an element I would add, which is that COVID-19 pulled the rug out from under the economy as far as working people go. So the, you know, the sort of occupy sentiment that the system is rigged, and that that haunts some of us more than others, is now this is an occupy 2.0 phenomenon that we're seeing with the Black Lives Matter phenomenon, right? So people lost their jobs discovered that their jobs were garbage to begin with, you know, in the COVID-19 situation are looking forward and realizing that their, their slice of the pie isn't very large, and they're spilling into the streets. So the frustration, I think, is quite real and understandable. Yeah, absolutely understandable. But I would argue that policing, and in particular, brutal policing and militarized policing are a symptom of an economic system that is actually rigged in ways that are obvious sometimes and in ways that are subtle, in other in other places. But that, in effect, we are now having a battle about policing. That makes no sense. Yes, policing needs to be reformed. This is clear, but you can't certainly a discussion in which police reform is being blurred with the concept of, you know, eliminating the police. There's no conversation to be had, even if there was some way to eliminate the police, you certainly can't start there. So we're having a frustratingly empty conversation. And this is causing the people who are maybe not as aware of the unfairness in our system and the richness of our system. It's causing them to feel emboldened, because they're seeing arguments that don't add up, and their senses will let's just shut this down. Right. And so they're missing the fact that the energy behind the protest is the result of something a very natural process and a real something. Yeah, a very real something. People have a right to be frustrated. Now. Let's just March right towards the fire.

**John McWhorter** 13:29

was George Floyd murdered? Yes, I'm, what Derek Chauvin did to him, was utterly unnecessary. I mean, George Floyd was very intoxicated, he was acting up, I find it very difficult to see from the videos, whether or not he was resisting arrest. If anything, he seems to have been in a passive sort of way. He needed to be put into a police car and taken somewhere and discipline find or something for somebody to put, you know, the knee on his neck, and he's pleading for his life. Yeah, I would call that a murder. And I'm not one for extreme rhetoric. What I think needs to be brought into it, though, is that Tony timba, was murdered four years before with a knee into his back with the same pleading for his life, equally unjustified, recorded, the cops got off, same thing and tempo was white. We're not supposed to talk about that. And, of course, more white men are murdered that way than black men. And sometimes women. You're supposed to talk about the fact that black people are killed by cops disproportionately to our numbers in the population. But then again, you can also say that poverty makes you more likely to encounter the cops and black people are disproportionately likely to be poor. For unpardonable reasons that like we're talking about, they're a larger issue. Hear that people are justifiably upset about too many black people are poor. But as it turns out, it's almost the numbers on this are almost cosmically consonant in that there are black people are 2.5 times more likely to be poor, and 2.5 times more likely to be killed by cops. I don't think that's an accident. And I didn't make up those figures. So what that means is that one may despise the cops. But to say that George Floyd was murdered because he was black, As tempting as it is to think that given that that's the film that we're going to see again, and again, and again, it's very tempting to think that it's not an accurate depiction of what actually happens. And we're in a technological moment where it's really easy to see the larger picture, The Washington Post has done a project that tells you exactly who's been killed year by year by year and under exactly which conditions at the push of a button, you couldn't have done that 10 years ago. And yeah, we're being foisted with a certain narrative. So yes, I would say that George Floyd was murdered. But the problem is that to say that it was because of his black skin detracts from solutions to America's problems that would float all boats to use a metaphor that's gone kind of stained. And what worries me about all of this is that, as I've written, often, we're dealing not with a political ideology, but with something that an anthropologist would recognize as religion. And it's easy to hear me say that and think that I'm trying to make a rhetorical point, I don't mean like a religion, it is a religion. The way that you understand how these people operate, is to actually imagine how you would interact with a Mormon who you were trying to convince that Joseph Smith didn't dig up tablets in the backyard. And again, not rhetoric, folks, exactly, that it's the same frame of mind. It's just that our language doesn't happen to apply the label religion, to the kinds of ideology that we've seen over about the past 10 years. And so the problem is that the tenant of this religion that dominates is that to be against racism, Trumps literally everything else. There are ranked priorities, and being against racism, and we have to talk about what that is. But being against racism is everything to the point that you allow yourself not to make any logical sense. And so you must be against racism and sort of George Floyd must have been murdered, because he was black, and there's no questions asked, and you cannot have any kind of dialogue with a person of color about racism, if you have any kind of dialogue with them. If you question anything that they say such as you do, you are a racist, and there are no questions to be asked. And I've seen this even in my own academic work, where you know, as a much more naive person, I've tried to be an empiricist about things. And Ben savage did not quite understood it. Until nowadays, I realized, wait a minute, I was dealing with permissions that was the pro versions of these things. Late 90s. The Oakland school board tries to address black kids lagging rates of scholastic performance by treating black English as a different language and bringing in translation exercises and dialect books. There's very little evidence that that sort of thing works and an awful lot of evidence that certain kinds of, you know, race neutral reading pedagogy techniques, really do help poor kids from bookless homes, ie for black kids. I tried to talk about that kind of thing. And I was ripped a new one by countless black and white linguists and educators. And I'd say But look, what you're proposing doesn't work as well as other things. Black English is not a separate language. Nobody thought that back when black English was a lot less like Standard English than it is now. I realized that it was the religion. It's not that this religion emerged somewhere in like in 2013, I wasn't prioritizing anti racism, you talk about my Creole languages. Creole languages are fascinating because what happens is that language is broken down into a pigeon, which is not a language at all. And then it's built back up into a brand new language out of what once were fragments, that's really neat. There's a strain in Creole studies, and it's exactly like what we're talking about, that insists that Creole languages didn't come from pigeons because pigeons are not real language. Creole languages are just mixtures and it has nothing to do with anybody ever having started with a pigeon. And the thing is, every language in the world is a mixture. Creoles are different from just mixed languages they would be like claiming that um, every single creature in the world the analogy is gonna go off the rails is some kind of hybrid and so it's it's Lynn Margulis was right about everything, everything is about combination. There's no such thing as there having been really simpler creatures in the Pre Cambrian, the idea is that the law, I'm going to throw something out, the ner, Curren creatures are as complex as jaguars and people, there's just that there's no difference. That's what's going on in creo studies. And if you insist that No, these are languages that are born again, it's like sea monkeys or something like that they built out of little eggs and they come again, you're a racist. And yes, that's been aimed at me. And of course, they're about three and a half people in Creole studies who insist on this loudly and explicitly, almost everybody else in the field doesn't want to get mauled by them. And so they decide that they're agnostic about the matter. They say, I don't really care how Creole language is formed. As if that isn't the fundamental thing that you wish to know, when you're studying languages. Where do they come from? And how are they born? It's like a biologist saying, Oh, I don't care about the DNA. I don't care how Waller says are related to salamanders. I don't I'm agnostic about that I have other things to do. That passes for actual coherent thought and linguistics in my little area of linguistics, because you don't want to say that black people ever didn't learn a language well, even if they were slaves on a plantation where no one taught it to them, because of anti racism. That's what we're up against. I see what you mean that it can take over everything. But I always thought, okay, it's not just college students. It's also college professors. It's certain college town realms, but it's not going to take over the world. Maybe I've been naive.

**Bret** 21:20

Well, I again, agree with a ton of what you say this is a religion, we are seeing exactly what you're talking about in biology as well. We're having a fight over whether sex is real, that is absurd, because this couldn't possibly be clearer, right? No, right? Yeah, no, it's happening everywhere. So that tells you how insidious it is. Because almost everybody in my field knows better. And yet, most are quiet, or they're hedging because they don't want to get more or the mob. Right. So but here's the problem. I have believed that George Floyd was murdered. I don't think that's necessarily what happened at this point. And I think the problem is that that is taking on religious momentum. And so if I can, if you'll give me the opportunity to scare you a little bit,

**John McWhorter** 22:12

that's okay.

**Bret** 22:13

Let me paint a different picture.

**John McWhorter** 22:15

I would love to know. Yeah.

**Bret** 22:16

Okay. What I saw on video, what I know that I saw is a miscarriage of justice, a massive one. What I don't know, is enough about policing, about drugs and physiology about heart attacks to know exactly what I saw. I certainly don't know that what I saw was racist for exactly the Tony timba point that you make that, you know, what we saw was that the video was running on a case that matches people's priors. And so it got broadcast and caught on. And that was about race. But we don't know whether, you know, let's say that Derrick Chauvin did murder joy, Floyd, we don't know if it would have been equally likely had he been a white guy. You can't know. But here's the thing that troubles me even more at this point is there is reason to believe that that George Floyd saying that he could not breathe was occurring before he was ever on the ground, and that he was having a heart attack. There's some evidence to this effect. We know from his autopsy that there were a very potent combination of drugs in his system fat now I believe methamphetamine. We know that the technique that Derek Feldman was using is a technique that is officially sanctioned under some circumstances. And I think we know that there was a discussion about whether or not George Floyd was in a state and I've now forgotten. I can almost remember the acronym for the state e x d. s, maybe that required some kind of restraint to prevent him from injuring himself or others. So here's the question. It is possible that what happened there as agreed just as it was fit with police policy that the police policy is what is in error, and it is the police policy that caused the miscarriage of justice. And while it's hard for me to imagine that Derrick Philbin is a good guy, because he's obviously callous enough to have ignored this man's pleading and insistence that he couldn't breathe to the point. So

**John McWhorter** 24:30

they had a record of being a very callous policeman before but anyway,

**Bret** 24:33

right? Right. So there's evidence of that. So this is about what I'm what I'm really getting at is. Our system absolutely depends on the fact that we do not convict people unless there has been due process. And yet we are now speaking about Derek Chauvin as if we all know that a murder took place. And that's certainly something you could see something on video that would tell you almost beyond a reasonable doubt that somebody had been murdered, but I don't think what we saw on video tells us that because there's too much stuff that most of us don't know anything about, like, how do these drugs affect you? What is the police policy in Minneapolis? We don't know any of those facts. So. So anyway, here's here's my concern. Is it possible for Derek COVID, to get a fair trial in, in the modern era,

**John McWhorter** 25:27

at this I'm not in the public sphere, like, I think that it's quite possible and possibly, to possible that he get off because of not only the facts of the case, but certain things entrenched in the cops and the unions, and how trial works. He could get off because a very small number of people look at the sorts of things you're looking at, and realize that he does not deserve to be called a murderer. If English had a more explicit subjunctive, I'd use it there that he did not deserve. Maybe he did. But maybe he didn't. I'm not remotely offended at you're saying that maybe he didn't, we don't know. Like, I'll even give you something. Watching the tape, there are two things that strike me and one is that the Asian one whose name I forget, it's just sitting there watching. And what we're supposed to think is that he's this barbarian. But how many barbarians like that are there who really would just stand there? And I've been told that part of it is that he actually is essentially a trainee at that point. And he's supposed to be different. But still, if somebody is down there, expiring on the basis of a clearly murderous mood, would he really be just standing there and even giving an insouciant look into a cell phone camera? I've wondered. And also, you're not supposed to say this. And I've never watched somebody die, I don't know. But it's my intuition. And I've had a few other people secretly write to me that they wonder, he doesn't sound like he's just associated. He keeps on saying I can't read. But it's so clear, it's so loud. He keeps saying, oh, man, now I don't, I've never heard anybody, it's 68. I may be really missing something. But you imagine some sort of constriction. And from the sound The first time I heard this, before I knew it was going to be a big deal. I thought, it's terrible that he died. But when he's saying I can't breathe, I hate to admit it. But it almost sounded like a quote. It's almost like he was, he remembered what Eric Garner said, and I'm not saying that he's, he's trying to do a show or that he was happy. But he doesn't sound like he can't breathe. Now, I say that out of naivete. I have never had my knee on anybody's neck. nobody's heard of their knee on mine. But I am open. I'm wondering whether the death was due not only to that pressure, but to the fact that he had other things inside of him. He couldn't have been a healthy man based on what we've heard, and he doesn't deserve it. But can you get a fair trial in society? No. And so for what we'll see based on the anti racist imperative is that he absolutely has to be guilty. And so for example, DARREN WALKER and Mike Brown. The facts make it clear, including the black people who watch this who often recanted their original testimony, which they made because they were afraid of being jumped by the narrative. But he killed Mike Brown because Mike Brown kept coming at him and he was afraid that you can have a whole discussion about why he couldn't have shot him in the knee, etc. You hear that the cops are trained to suit to kill after a certain point, we go into territory that again, I don't really have my bearing in, but he didn't just shoot the guy with his hands up. It isn't true. And yet, you know, there's a The New Yorker does a profile of DARREN WALKER that makes him sound like the devil spawn anyway, because he doesn't know the narrative 101 and so you know, he's what we must get rid of. And then today is anybody who admits that Mike Brown wasn't killed that way. And a lot of people just like to pretend as john for the legend is printed. On some level that happened, you just know there's going to be a film where at the point where Mike Brown is shot, everything goes into blurry and the strobe lights and their various perspectives. And all of a sudden that's going to be rostered on as if there are many different perspectives. And the director is going to give interviews saying they wanted to give everybody their say, it's not gonna just show what happened. And that's symbolic of the consciousness but also, nowadays, you deflect so if you don't want to talk about the Mike Brown facts, we talked about the fact that he was laying on the street for four hours, and that's unjust. I've heard people wax eloquent about that, to the degree that people were talking about his supposedly dying with his hands up six years ago, no. So that will never be able to raise his head in public. Again, it's the same thing with george Zimmerman. Zimmerman story is quite different from what we were told, and yet his life is ruined. Because these people are needed as symbols in this narrative. They are they're geniuses, and this is the kind of thinking that we're encouraged to do This is is to watch this with people who otherwise think normally and empirically, it's a religious frame of mind.

**Bret** 30:08

This is exactly what I'm worried about. So you say that he will never get a fair trial in the court of public opinion, which I agree, I also don't think he can get a fair trial in a courtroom at this point, because given the way we are all connected, it will be, I think, impossible to find a jury that will not be aware that a verdict that does not reflect public opinion in this case, will result in an eruption of anger that is on past models, right? Yeah. I mean, it's, it's Rodney King times 1000. And so here's here's the reason I find this so terrifying, is that I believe, some kind of possibly unprecedented trolley problem is unfolding in this case, and that everybody will quietly calculate to themselves, maybe not even in their conscious mind. But somewhere, that, in fact, irrespective of what the facts are in the case, and, you know, let's say that George Floyd had a heart attack was highly likely to die, and that the knee on the neck as egregious as it was, was a minor factor in his death, right? That would obviously be a very important fact, in a case where this not racially charged and were there, no protests in the streets. But if the system concludes that it must convict him, then this effectively is us participating in a witch hunt. Now, I'm not saying that he's not guilty of murder, I think it's likely he is guilty of murder. But I don't know that he's guilty of murder yet. And my sense is that we have already marked so far down this road, we are already now speaking as if we can all agree that he's guilty of murder. Here, the doubt exists where the question of race is that we are unwittingly participating in a dangerous religious exercise, even those of us who wish to resist doing that at all costs.

**John McWhorter** 32:17

You know, what's alarming there is that what you're saying is that this is going to go beyond people being unable to get justice in the rarefied world of the college campus where one wonders whether that could change within our lifetimes. But it's going to be in actual courts of law about matters having to do with physical life and death. And yes, that's alarming, especially because you know, there is this critical race theory within legal theory, the idea being that we think not always of individuals, but of general stories. And as pretty as that sounds. That's the sort of thing that leads to the idea that, even if, on some technical level, this could even you could even think of it as philosophically profound. On some technical level. If it turns out that Chauvin did not kill towards Floyd, if it does, that he did, on some other level on some narrative level, because this has been happening to us forever. And although most of the people on that hypothetical jury probably don't be critical race theory, that way of thinking is percolating into the general consciousness. And what might be alarming is that it's no longer just people with PhDs and the equivalent. It's beginning not to be just people who read the New Yorker and listen to NPR, it's beginning to just be folks. That is, um, that is alarming if that is where we're going. And the verdict on Chauvin. I don't know that they say, Shogun, I'm gonna say Shogun seven, could be seen as a bellwether of that, yes, that that is true that this time, he doesn't get off, despite the fact that the facts are muddy, and that even civilians like us can see. Yeah, that is alarming. And so then what happens, Brett, where are we going?

**Bret** 33:58

Oh, my goodness, I'm afraid if we are not very careful that we are staring at the uninvented son of the Republic. And I'm not sure that that that idea that thought that possibility, properly horrifies people, because as flawed as this republic, is, it's an invention is going to be an absolute disaster. And I think, frankly, this is something that is more easily seen by people outside the US. And I've had contact with quite a number who are frightened at what they are seeing unfold, even though they know our system is unfair. But the prospect of the US failing is, is a dangerous one for the world. So there's a lot riding on this, as to your point about what is potentially going to unfold in courtrooms given the rhetoric and given how aggressive the campaign is that is causing people to adopt To this critical race theory, now most of them don't know that that's what they're adopting. And I should also say scary

**John McWhorter** 35:05

thing that you don't, you no longer even have to know the source, right?

**Bret** 35:09

You just you're active in it, and you don't know where it came from or what it actually means. I also should say my understanding is that critical race theory was born as an honorable investigation of biases inside courtrooms, and then it sort of morphed into this monster. But But in any case, I'm concerned that we are actually much closer to the place that you suggest we might be headed with respect to courtrooms because in light of the beliefs that are being now commonly expressed, without the ability to disagree with them, there is certain to be a two tiered expression of due process in a courtroom. In other words, those who are understood to be suffering from a history of oppression will experience a bias in their favor. And those who are understood to be part of the race that has been perpetrating, the oppression will face a very different standard. Now, the really difficult part about this is that there is some truth to the fact that the reverse of that situation has existed in courts since the Republic was founded. Right? So black people have had a raw deal, not only economically, for reasons, I'd love to get back to if there's time, and if not, this time, we'll do it in a future conversation. But the system has been unfair, and it has been two tiered. But we are actually now involved in a public discussion in which instead of ending oppression, which has been the, the goal, since the Civil Rights Movement, we are actually talking about turning the tables of oppression, turning the tables and creating the inversion of the values that the nation is founded on. And that is a very dangerous idea. It is, it is bound to be unstable, and we will all suffer from it.

**John McWhorter** 37:13

bound to be unstable. Of course, the people who are hoping that this really takes over are under the impression that once we accomplish this anti racist goal, that everything would be okay, I get the feeling that I think it wouldn't be unstable. I think that what's happened before has been unstable. And the rhetoric would be because, you know, you adopt what James Baldwin didn't exactly mean, that white people's identity depends on there being black people below that white people are deeply, deeply unstable psychologically, because of their feelings about black people, and because of racism, and they need to face it in order to be old, etc. So the idea would be that, once we get beyond this, then everything would be all right. What they don't understand is that they would be busting everything down based upon an uncompromising kind of ideology that could never create a true consensus, and we'd only be on to worse things. And there's so much that would be wrong with that society. I, I probably lack a little bit of imagination. I'm not, I'm not looking at this as cleanly as you are, I suspect in the my tendency is to think that this is a pendulum shift, that things tend to go too far. And then things come back to a healthy middle that's even happened with radiology, you could have watched the sorts of things people were saying in the late 60s, you know, does she keys and black power and a rather incoherent ideology, Black Panthers, doing some violent things, some good things, as one supposed to say about the Black Panthers, but the violent aspect as well. And you might have thought that something was really something really scary was going on, as one would have thought in 1968, in general, all offensive, and nevertheless, by 1980. All those things had been tempered some what society had been changed. Attitudes on race were profoundly different even under Ronald Reagan, than they had been under Lyndon Johnson. But now here we are with another kind of pendulum shift. I'm thinking where if perhaps there is an articulate enough pushback against the extremes here and articulate means partly putting it in a way that people beyond academia can understand. Maybe we can come to sort of liberal slash leftist consensus that isn't based on refusing to face facts that isn't based on recapitulating a religious kind of thinking that Martin Luther would have recognized which and I know this insults some religious people when I put it this way, but which many of us feel that we have moved forward from many of us find it a forward idea, to not base any of our cognition to the extent that we know it on suspension of disbelief. Many of us think of that as progress. I would be fake if I did not say that I do. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, to those whom that seems to insult. But I have to be honest. And to go back to having this kind of mental cocoon, where you are encouraged to stop thought and thought that that makes you a morally advanced person. That is frightening. I wonder, though, you know, it can't be just books. It can't be just podcasts about a documentary. Out here, there needs to be good 90 minute documentary that really gets across what's wrong with this. And you know, probably not next week, it doesn't need to be, you know, during our conversation about George Floyd. But there needs to be a statement against this that people can actually watch. And that actually makes people think, I think it can be pushed back against partly because that's one of my mateys. But you think that it can possibly just topple the United States?

**Bret** 40:54

I do, I think we might be looking at. Well, let's put it this way. I think what I'm seeing in the street reminds me far too much of Maoism and that if you attempt a Maoist to take over in the US, you will get a civil war. So I am very concerned that we are much closer to a bank that frankly, I think we all know, is out there somewhere but that you

**John McWhorter** 41:26

worry that you remember that right wing crazies are going to come gunning things?

**Bret** 41:33

Well, here's the I'm hesitant to say right wing crazies, because what I think the problem is I full well understand looking at people tearing apart cities saying things that make no sense, you know, claiming that cannon venting the police, that, you know, abolishing them would be progress. That there Unfortunately, the people that you're talking about have more of a point than they should, which is This is madness, right? So I don't want them to have a point. I don't want a civil war. What I want is for people to sober up and stop behaving in this way. But I also having seen a mini version of this know better, right? So I would put on your radar if you're not thinking about it yet. The coincidence of shut down stem traveling with this religious belief system that you and I both see is extremely important. There is a reason that this religious movement that we see in our streets is also talking about shutting down stem. And we saw this all in miniature at evergreen, they came after stem also there was a reason that it was me they came after they went after my students to in fact, one of my mixed race student, a woman whose mother's Afro Caribbean, was actually confronted by the rioters and accused of race trading for being a science student. So this anti science belief system is infused into this critical race theory religion that we see protesting and rioting. And so the threat that that poses to our ability, even if you have this documentary that you're talking about, it would be I don't know what the can is their documentary burning, they wouldn't be burning, right. And effectively, it will only reach those who already in some sense, know better. So I'm, I'm just watching this thing take over people who should know better. And so that says something about the mechanism of action, the arguments that are being deployed are really low quality. But the mechanism of action is really powerful. The strategy is very, very strong. It's a smart strategy. So I don't know where that leaves us. Now, as to your point about it can't be podcasts, I agree with you. And I've increasingly started to wonder if one of the problems that we face is that the people who should be in a leadership position, people who could say something could shut down the bad arguments and substitute that or that those people are, I would say trapped in the gig economy. And they don't have the power of leaders because everybody can click away. They don't you know, a leader can tell you something you don't want to know but you need to know somebody who you know you're deciding to watch them. And as soon as they start saying things that you don't like you go find somebody who says stuff you like better. That is not a leadership position. And so I wonder if part of what's taking place is that the transformation of the way we interact with each other has ruined the concept of leadership and a leaderless movement is a dangerous movement because it's inherent likely going to subscribe to pleasant fantasies utopia among them.

**John McWhorter** 45:06

You know, you're scaring me. But I want to venture this. If what we're really seeing is a pendulum shift, like on the campuses, like this is not remotely to minimize what happened to you. But when that happened to you, there were many of us, including you, who were thinking, and I understand what you're saying about the whole attitude towards stem, and how insidious that could be. But we're thinking is this college is this what it's going to be to be at a university from now on. And as I've been observing lately, in the historical sense, that was actually only a few years in the mid teens, that was kind of a fashion and watch it happen tomorrow, somewhere, but you notice there's a cluster of events like that, and then it kind of stopped. And I think it was probably because of the pushback against it from a lot of sensible people. It's not that I think anybody was reading an op ed in the Chronicle of Higher Education and decided not to do it. But I'm not sure how these things happen. But society turned against people getting beat up when they come to speak on campus. And in this case, if that happens, after about three years, and we've got about three years to wait this out, if that happens, the good thing that will have come out of it is that I think it has been resoundingly proven that people like tanahashi coats are wrong, in their sense that America is this place that's utterly united against black people on all levels, and that nothing will ever happen. Because all you have to do is look at the color of a lot of those crowds to see that there's a certain kind of white person, and it's not only, you know, anti fi, it's not only college students, it's a lot of people who have really changed and made this country a different place than it was even 25 years ago, which to me feels like five minutes ago, maybe that'll be the result. But that that could only have happened, you get into kind of dimestore hagl. Here, with all of this craziness going on right now. That might not be what happens that we might be at a particular turning point, in which case you are the wise one right now. And I'm the one who's assuming that Hitler will go away. I'm just hoping that I'm making some kind of sense.

**Bret** 47:09

Can we agree that we are both rooting for you to be right? I mean, so strongly. here's, here's my concern, I also thought that we were actually turning the tide on college campuses. And you know, there's some reason to think that what happened at Reed, for example, is very different than evergreen, even if it started out similar. But I actually think something else explains the fact that this has died down on college campuses, and it's less hopeful, which is that in some sense, this is a millennial delusion. And I don't mean, it's all millennials, my wife and I, you know, Heather, we talked mostly millennials for the entire time we were teaching, and have a great many millennial friends. So we know there are lots of people in that generation who can think very carefully. But there is also a kind of tendency to embrace this mode of thinking that has now left college, and it's now inside of all these other institutions. And so we thought about the fact that we are seeing the same battle that we saw at evergreen now apparently, unfolding inside the New York Times and every other journalistic apparatus. That's to me, not a hopeful sign, because it means that now we're not dealing with the toy version, we're dealing with this with all of the stuff on which we depend. And that's not a that's not a helpful thought,

**John McWhorter** 48:39

you know, bread, I think this is fun. I think we should we should do a part two, and we should do a part two, when I'm in my home, and there's nobody in it, and the shower doesn't need to be fixed. Because, no, you're really making me think about these things. And the thing, though, is that college generations reproduce themselves. And I get the idea that the people from 10 minutes ago who were hollering on campuses are now in terms of the New York Times or something like that. But wouldn't you expect that succeeding freshmen classes would have kept doing the same thing because I pass it on one to another? What if it was, or if it was just one three or four year cohort who then went and carried it somewhere else? in a way that's good news, because it would mean that these people will just keep getting older and older in their current jobs. And then there'll become these graying people who are you know, strangely angry, but then there's this whole generation below them that aren't, it seems to me that usually these things are passed on to the people who are slightly younger and somehow that didn't happen and it may be just, I'm speaking from Columbia, where for mysterious reasons, nothing like that ever really happened. So I made me feel more sanguine because protests at Columbia are small and brief as opposed to there having ever been anything that made the news other than the controvert msoa was Controversy, the mattress controversy. And that's a really very different set of issues than what we're talking about here. Although there's a there's an intersection. But I don't know I, I hope I'm right to only because it would be frightening for this country to be taken over by people who refuse to reason and don't know that that's what they're doing. They don't know they're refusing the reason they think that there's certain issues upon which there can be no reasoning, and you literally can't talk to them. They cannot be reasoned with and put them in positions of power. And next thing, you know, the country does start to disappear. That is, that is a very frightening prospect.

**Bret** 50:39

Yeah, it's, it's very frightening. I don't think we can stand even a brief period in which this modality rules, I don't think it will happen, it's hard for me to conceive of how it would last long enough, but my concern is what it district disrupts in the meantime. So I don't know, again, I am definitely rooting for you to be right. But I do think we at least need to consider the possibility that what we are seeing is demographic, it's aging into power. And that that has frightening implications if we don't get around it. And I guess the two last points would be it does raise a question about how we can reboot leadership. So that there is something that can be reasoned with there is someone on the other side who's ready to, to have the discussion about what is actually taking place, and what an actual remedy might sound like, rather than the the narrative that's being deployed, which is so inaccurate that any remedy to it is bound to backfire.

**John McWhorter** 51:51

And I've watched leaders recruited even recently who, clearly part of why they were recruited as leaders is because they speak this new language. And these are leaders who have no idea they're speaking the language but and I bet the people who vetted them weren't thinking consciously, of what they were vetting the people for, but a person wouldn't have made it through who didn't have the ability to stop reasoning when it came to issues of race. That's scary to see. And I'm thinking about people who are in their 40s, who were recruited in this way, they're not kids. So yeah, I know what you mean. It's, it's creepy. It's creepy stuff. And it's why I'm doing a book, I am doing a book about the red wave, anti racism, it's pouring out of me as if it was channeled from someone else. I don't know where this book is coming from. But I just realized that something is really, really wrong. But a book alone isn't, isn't going to do it. The question is, how to really change society,

**Bret** 52:49

even working title.

**John McWhorter** 52:52

No, the title of this one, I'm waiting for whoever is channeling this book through me to give me a title, I'm not good at coming up with titles, but it's got to have, if you have any ideas, let me know it's got to have a catchy title. And the title can't be fuck all of you.

**Bret** 53:08

Is that one already taken?

**John McWhorter** 53:11

It has to be something a little more constructive. And I don't have the title either.

**Bret** 53:16

So I like your idea of a part two of this conversation, I want to propose a starting place. Okay. There is something about the origin story of the American black population that actually is mirrored not perfectly, but it's also mirrored with respect to Africa to Indians to American Indians. And it has to do with the systematic disruption of culture that took place when the US was formed, or even before. And in any case, I think this fits perfectly with one of your primary areas of study, because this is what a pigeon and this is why a pigeon emerges before a creole. And so in some sense, what I would like to discuss is whether or not the pervasive sense that opportunity is somehow held back from the population of black Americans, if this is not rooted in that special origin story. And if that does not actually point in the direction of what real remedies might be. In other words, if the frustration is real, the diagnosis is wrong, but a correct diagnosis would be helpful. Maybe we can navigate our way to a, I don't know a prototype of that discussion.

**John McWhorter** 54:48

It's interesting that you use the word prototype for reasons that I will share with you when we keep going. Um, that sounds utterly fascinating. So let's Let's do that as soon as as soon as possible. Yeah, great. Definitely.

**Bret** 55:05

I look forward to it. Alright folks, thanks so much for joining us, john. Thank you. JOHN McWhorter is professor at Columbia. He I did not say at the top, but I will say now his podcast is lexicon Valley. Yes. It's an excellent podcast on linguistic issues primarily, and in some sense in the way they interface with modern events as well. He's written a recent article in quillette. That's quite excellent on the George Floyd, protests and phenomenon. Is there anything else you want to mention?

**John McWhorter** 55:40

Um, I think that'll, that'll, that'll do for now. So yeah, let's just, let's just continue this next week or sometime soon after that, and we can explore further.

**Bret** 55:51

Wonderful. There is one other thing I should mention. JOHN is a very frequent guest on the Glenn show. Glenn Lowery's x is asked, and you guys have done a marvelous job exploring issues related to race in America for I don't know how long you guys have been doing it, but

**John McWhorter** 56:08

1007 we've plowed it since we were different people. It's really cool. Hang on. Definitely.

**Bret** 56:16

Alright, so check that out. And I look forward to talking to you further. JOHN. This has been marvelous and let's just hope you're right. Let's hope all right, be well, everyone.