



Transcript from the 2021 Holberg Debate: "Identity Politics and Culture Wars"

The Holberg Debate is an annual event organised by the [Holberg Prize](#). The Prize is awarded annually to scholars who have made outstanding contributions to research in the humanities, social sciences, law or theology. The Holberg Debate is inspired by Ludvig Holberg's Enlightenment ideas and aims to explore pressing issues of our time and to highlight the relevancy of research in the fields covered by the Holberg Prize. The debate seeks to include panellists from both inside and outside academia.

The Holberg Debate on "Identity Politics and Culture Wars" took place on 4 December, 2021, and featured the following panellists:

- Judith Butler, Maxine Elliot Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Program of Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley; Hannah Arendt Chair at the European Graduate School.
- Cornel West, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Professor of Philosophy & Christian Practice at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.
- Glenn Greenwald, investigative journalist and author.
- Moderator: Simon Critchley, Hans Jonas Professor at the New School for Social Research

The topic for debate was: "Does identity politics as it is currently manifesting itself offer a suitable avenue towards social justice, or has it become a recipe for cultural antagonism, political polarization, and new forms of injustice?"

The debate was organized as a studio production in New York City. Video can be seen on [YouTube](#) and on the [Holberg Prize website](#).

[0:05:24] CRITCHLEY: Yes, okay. Thank you Kjersti Fløttum. Thank you to all her work for getting this Holberg debate together. There's been a lot of planning. Thank you to Ole Sandmo, Solveig Stornes. Thank you to my dear pal of many, many years and decades, Ellen Mortensen. And thank you all ... and thank you also to Bjørn Enge Bertelsen who is taking over next year. And they are with us here, in the studio. And thank you to all in the beautiful, rain-soaked city of Bergen. And to the entire kingdom of Norway, of which Bergen is the only true capital city. And to all the princes, princesses, principalities, potentates, potentialities, actualities, angels, arch angels, thrones, dominions, cherubim, seraphim, the demonic powers of Norwegian black metal, Odin, Freya and Loke. By the seven stars, by the old gods and new. Welcome to the Holberg debate.

Today, tonight, from the heart of New York City. La grande pomme. And thank you also to Edmund Kuuya, creative director of SA Studios where we're gathered on 28th street in Manhattan. In the heart of fashionable Chelsea.

[0:06:57] WEST: I think it's 26th street.

[0:06:59] CRITCHLEY: 26th street? No ... [laughs]

[0:07:01] WEST: Yes. 26th street. Oh, yes. [laughs]

[0:07:05] CRITCHLEY: There is no need for introductions, you know who these three people are. And two of them have already been playing Curtis Mayfield tracks, which is why you are watching this. We have with us on live video link from Brazil, where he lives and does his amazingly important and hugely influential work, the Pulitzer Prize winning lawyer, author and journalist Glenn Greenwald. Who ... Welcome Glenn, it's very nice to meet you.

[0:07:36] GREENWALD: Yes, it's great to be here. Thank you for the invitation, I'm excited for the event.

[0:07:40] CRITCHLEY: Who according to his 44 page Wikipedia entry, did an undergraduate in philosophy. And there might be a connection with one of the other participants in this debate, which ... it just came up 15 seconds ago. And here, live in the studio with me, are two of the most important, most widely read, most discussed, most interesting and best dressed

philosophers in the world. They also happen to be friends of mine, and I am proud to add now colleagues at The New School in New York. The incomparable and incredibly funny Judith Butler. [...], so funny. And whom I've stolen so many ideas.

[laughter]

We used to teach tragedy, great tragedy together. And the bluesman, the life of the mind. The man who teaches us that in the phase of catastrophe, we are required ... courage, in the phase of catastrophe we require compassion, we require vision, and just a little bit of P. Funk and [...] funk. The bomb Doctor Cornel West.

[laughter]

Oh God, you shouldn't have asked me to do this. Let's get started. Let me explain the flow of the event. There will be ten minutes of opening remarks from each of the three speakers, where they will be invited to respond to the question of the debate, which is identity and culture wars. Even sounds angry. Identity politics. Culture wars. And we will then move to discussion which I will try to moderate. I have some questions, but more importantly we've received lots of fantastic questions in advance through the Holberg information matrix. And I will ask some of these. We've received a lot of questions. I have them in front of me, and I'm sorry if you don't get to ask the question that you've sent, but I've read them all and they're very good. And then we'll have two minutes of closing remarks from each of the participants before the event ends.

Judith Butler was asked in an interview with *The New Statesman* ... they really should change the name of that magazine. About the toxicity of the contemporary cultural climate. And Judith Replied: "I think we're living in anti-intellectual times. And this is evident across the political spectrum. The quickness of social media allows for forms of vitriol that do not exactly support thoughtful debate. We need to cherish the longer forms." "We need to cherish the longer forms." Is this true? So, we need to slow down and think? Think freely? Think openly? To think without fear. And the Holberg Debate allows us a chance for a longer form. And: "What does one philosopher say to another philosopher?", as Wittgenstein said. It's not a joke. What does one philosopher say to another philosopher? "Take your time." Right?

[0:11:06] WEST: Mm, that's right.

[0:11:07] CRITCHLEY: So, here we'll be able to take time, together, and think through this issue. Personally, I would like to use this occasion to get us to think about the state of the world, of which identity politics and culture wars are symptoms, not causes. These are symptoms. The causes are... we can get into that, but I'd like to think about the larger issues as well. We are not journalists, we are not working for *The Guardian*, we don't have to make headlines here or be controversial, we can be thoughtful, take our time and try and understand our time in thought, which of course is another definition of philosophy. It's exciting, this.

So, let me read the event description, and then I'm going to invite Judith Butler to speak first, and then Cornel West, and then Glenn Greenwald. So, let's just remind us of what we've been asked to think about here, and this is how it goes... the question for debate, as it were: "Is identity politics a force for good? A fierce debate over social justice and identity-based politics seems to have exploded in recent years in the western world, and few areas of life remain untouched by cultural conflicts. To some, identity-based politics has been embraced as the effective strategy to combat discrimination and marginalization. To others, it may seem that identity politics have resulted in culture wars, involving violent conflicts and a destructive exchange of labels. Identity-based politics often relate to volatile issues, such as abortion", which is very much on the agenda in the United States, this Supreme Court debate, Mississippi law, on Wednesday, I believe.

"Homosexuality, transgender rights, pornography, multiculturalism and racism. Identity conflicts also involve fundamental orientations such as religion and ideology, as well as political issues, ranging from freedom of speech to distribution of wealth and privilege. Debate on these issues have challenged established views of equality and brought about an alternative demand for identity-based equity as a better approach." That's something we want to flag as a question in the air, and a lot of the questions were on that issue. What has evolved in the movement from equality, this value of which we can talk about the history of it, to equity? What has evolved? What does that mean? And is it a good idea?

"Even the term 'identity politics' is itself debated, as many will contend that it is inherently biased and used by those who oppose struggles for

social justice by marginalized groups.” So, should we even be talking about this, I guess is the big question. Elephant in the room.

“Regardless of ones’ position on the current culture wars, it seems to be apparent that they involve both struggles for social justice and struggles for power.” And that is what brings us here today. And the question is the following: “Does identity politics, as it is currently manifesting itself, offer a suitable avenue towards social justice, or has it become a recipe for cultural antagonism, political polarization and new forms of injustice?” So, that’s the question we can begin by thinking about, and I’d like to ask Judith to kick us off.

[0:15:00] BUTLER: Great. Thank you, Simon, I’m very pleased to be here with you and with brother Cornel, and with Glenn, far away, but nevertheless very present. I’d like to start by calling into question the framework, and, I suppose, that’s a typical thing to do, or perhaps you may have expected that by inviting me.

[laughter]

[0:15:33] BUTLER: But I really worry sometimes, when I hear criticisms of identity politics, because it’s not always clear what is meant by identity politics. And, for instance, if identity politics is the struggle for gay, lesbian, trans human rights, or if identity politics is a struggle for racial justice, if identity politics is a demand to have architecturally accessible buildings, public and private, on the part of disability activists, do we say that those examples are identity politics? Is the defense of abortion rights identity politics, if it includes arguments about women’s lives, their freedom, their movement, their capacity?

Very often, I feel that social movements on the left are grouped as identity politics, even though they do not always argue on the basis of identity. In other words, it’s not just a question of claiming: “This is my identity, and I deserve social and public recognition for this identity.” That may be in the mix, but usually it’s: “I am living in a world in which justice, a democratic ideal of a hallowed political principle, has not yet become justice for all.” So, if I talk about racial justice, am I talking about identity, or am I saying that whatever forms of justice we’re living in have not yet benefited from the emancipatory movements that seek to establish racial justice, as part of justice?

I mean, maybe racial justice becomes something else, or gets relegated to a position of identity politics, because it questions something about the abstract ideal of justice, but maybe what it's questioning is: "Who is included in that abstraction and who is not? And how do we get to a place of having justice as something that is all-encompassing, and that is justice for all?" I mean, what would it mean to arrive there? It may well be that racial justice asks us to rethink justice, racial equality makes us rethink equality, sexual freedom asks us to rethink freedom, freedom for whom? Who has not yet been freed? Who has not yet known freedom?

It seems to me that these are large principles, that belong to any democratic project, especially a radical democratic project, or politics. And that we are most often talking about rethinking freedom, equality and justice, making it stronger, making it more encompassing, making it more substantial, less abstract and less exclusionary. So, that doesn't strike me as a particularism, like: "Oh, here are all these identities, they are struggling for their particular interest. They are taking away from a common good, they are taking away from a universal framework, they are taking away from a larger sense of politics." No, I think it is the larger sense of politics that's being identified as exclusionary, and there is a call for a rearticulation of those basic principles.

So, they are justice projects, freedom projects and equality projects, and when we dismiss them as identity projects, we're clinging to an older ideal, and not looking at the exclusions it has made, the effacements on which it has proceeded, and we're holding to a status quo that actually does need to be radically challenged. Now, I have one other point, as part of my introductory remarks, and that's the following:

The largest, most influential, and dangerous version of identity politics, that we are living with in this world, is white supremacy. That is an identity politics, that is the defense of whiteness, that is the defense of whiteness as superior, the defense of whiteness as the norm, as that which doesn't even need to be marked as part of the norm, and the neo-fascist trends we're seeing, the hyper-nationalism we're seeing, the border violence, the border closing, the border violence we are seeing throughout Europe.

These are racist projects of states, that are very often promising to their people a restoration of white supremacy, a defense of white supremacy, against racial and ethnic, and religious diversity. And so, I think that we often imagine that identity politics is a fragmenting process that the left is responsible for, or that has happened inside the left, but actually the largest and most noxious, most destructive one, is white identity politics, which takes the form of asserting white supremacy, either explicitly or implicitly, and we need to get wiser about how that's happening, and how we might oppose it.

[0:21:47] CRITCHLEY: Mhm. So, you see identity politics as a kind of a stalking horse, as a kind of a ...

[0:21:51] BUTLER: Sometimes. I mean, I think we can talk further about the struggles that we're seeing in social media, and struggles among movements, and what is disturbing about those struggles, what is helpful about those struggles, I am happy to do that. I am just not sure identity politics is the term that can describe those struggles, and I also think that it's a way of not listening. [laughs] It's like: "Call it identity politics", and then you don't have to listen, because you've got your category already, you put it in that category. You don't have to listen to what folks are saying. So, that worries me.

[0:22:36] CRITCHLEY: Yes. Would you say the same thing about culture wars?

[0:22:39] BUTLER: Well, the thing about culture ... I mean, if we have a movement for black lives on the streets, is that about black identity, or is it about racial justice, or is it about the legal system? Is it about institutions of violence? Is it about the police? Why do we call that cultural wars if the cultural is separable from issues of violence or institutionalization or state power? I think that when we separate off the ... something that we call: "Merely cultural", [laughs] we're making sometimes a false distinction. Right? If trans people believe they should be able to walk the streets of ... any street, in Poland, or any street in Hungary, without ... or Brazil, without harassment, or arrest, or violence, or potential criminalization or pathologization, are we talking about identity politics?

The: "Oh, those are cultural politics that belong to trans people", or are we saying: "Hey, this is public space, this is a public freedom, movement through the streets, that's a public freedom." You know:

“Take back the night”, was that just women, women’s identity? Is that cultural? It’s like: “No, no”, this is actually about being able to move freely in the world, without violence. Now, that’s not merely cultural, that’s about bodies in public space and what our substantial freedoms are, and how society is organized either to let us exercise that freedom, or to stop us from exercising that freedom. Now, someone says: “Oh, that’s merely cultural”, or: “Purely identity”, I’m thinking: “They’re not listening.”

[0:24:29] CRITCHLEY: Yes. We can get into this more, but while I was doing some research on the history of the idea of culture wars, it’s ... you can take it back to Kulturkampf, you know, the German ... the late 19th century, but really, from what I was ... what I found out was that there’s a book by James Davison Hunter, 1991, on culture wars, which is always about the definition of America. The issue is always about: “How do we ... we’ve lost the soul of America. How do we get it back? We’ve lost it in these culture wars.” And then, I think Pat Buchanan used it in 1992, culture wars, and it begins to be increasingly politicized then, and then we’re ... we seem to be back there in some way. So, there’s an issue about these very terms we have, identity politics and culture wars. So, thank you Judith. Cornel?

[0:25:24] WEST: Absolutely, I w...

[0:25:25] CRITCHLEY: What say you?

[0:25:27] WEST: I want to say just how excited and joyful I am to be in conversation with the three of you. I want to take the Holberg Committee for having the vision of bringing us together. I think people need to know that, when you’re looking my dear sister Judith, you’re looking at the greatest philosophically grounded critical social theorists in our time.

[laughter]

[0:25:54] WEST: That’s part of the intellectual feast, and that’s real. You’re looking at the grandest existential philosopher, and you’re looking at the most courageous and consistent intellectual in the world of journalism. So, that ... we’re going to have a good time.

[laughter]

[0:26:09] WEST:

Oh, yes, we're going to have a good time. But I want to begin, really, with the Great Henry James and his letter to Robert Lewis Stevenson, when he said: "No theory is kind to us, that cheats us of seeing", and I would say the same thing about language, I would say the same thing about philosophy. So, one of the tests of talking about identity politics, what does it blind us of? Culture wars, what does it blind us of? Now, all of us have blind spots. I mean, Adorno reminds us: "A splinter in our eyes is the biggest magnifying glass", and he gets that from Matthew 10, *New Testament*. So, that he ... the sense of coming in with a spirit of humility and recognizing the limits to which we view any situation becomes part and parcel of how we think critically.

So, when sister Judith began with an interrogation and a scrutiny of the very framework of identity politics, that's where I also want to begin. I think that's very important, you see. Because, you see, for someone like myself, who comes out of the Black Freedom movement, I have never viewed myself as part of any talk of identity politics. See, Fredrick Douglass and Martin King and Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker, they weren't part of identity politics at all. The black freedom movement is a species of the human freedom movement, of every corner of the globe, trying to affirm their dignity, and as a Christian I would say sanctity, and therefore be part of struggles against structures and institutions, as well as self-critiques of themselves, wrestling with white supremacy inside of them, male supremacy inside of them, anti-Jewish, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim elements inside of them. You see.

And so, the question becomes: "Okay, if we're going to use the word identity politics", the question becomes: "What is the moral content of ones' identity?" There's a variety of different identities one can have that lack a moral substance. There's a variety of identities that one has that have an ethical and moral substance. And then, what are the foreseeable consequences, especially political, of the kind of politics that flow from that? For those of us who are fundamentally committed to the change, the deep changes in our structures ... it can be predatory capitalist, it can be empires that are still around, the Chinese empire and the American empire and so forth.

It can be concerned with the rich humanity of non-binary precious folk, or precious gays and lesbians, or peoples of color. Those are not

buzzwords or PC chitchat labels, but rather precious human beings who are trying to look for what every human being has a desire for in the face of death, which is for protection, for association and for recognition. That goes all the way down in each and every one of us. So that when we look at the talk about identity politics, we want to give us a genealogy: “Where did that come from? Is this simply a neoliberal version of black freedom, woman freedom, gay freedom movements, that are sanitizing and losing sight of the deeper issues of human suffering and human social misery in the face of dominations, in the face of lies told about them?”

Because white supremacy is a lie that hides and conceals crimes, the same is true with male supremacy, and the other ideologies that I mentioned, you see. So, that’s my starting point, because in any dialogue for me, and here I’m with Gadamer, we were talking about Gadamer, you know, who is one of my deep influences and teachers. He says: “Well, traditions are unavoidable and escapable, and the question is in what kind of tradition you want to situate and locate yourself.” Now, he’s got a traditionalist understanding of tradition. So, he’s got ... he’s conservative [...]. I’ve got a much more subversive conception of tradition, so I’m talking about traditions of critique and resistance, but they’re still traditions.

And I’m just a small instant in that tradition. I want to be true to the best of that tradition. I want to be true to what the Harriet Tubmans and Martin Kings and W. E. B. Du Boises are concerned about, and what were they concerned about? How does integrity face oppression? How does honesty face deception? How does decency face insult? How does courage meet brute force? And so, the criteria are always going to be integrity, intellectual, spiritual, moral integrity. It’s going to be honesty, intellectual, moral and spiritual honesty. It’s going to be concerns about courage and concerns about decency. And in the end, that means I look at the world through more of a spiritual lens. I hope I didn’t go on too long, though, brother?

[0:31:20] CRITCHLEY: No.

[0:31:20] WEST: Yes?

[0:31:22] CRITCHLEY: So, for you, the issue of identity politics, and the issue that we're, you know, we're here to discuss, becomes a question of moral and spiritual integrity?

[0:31:38] WEST: Absolutely.

[0:31:39] CRITCHLEY: Which, for you, is always linked to solidarity?

[0:31:44] WEST: Absolutely.

[0:31:45] CRITCHLEY: That's the ... so in that sense, these words, identity politics and culture war, these are symptoms of something, which ...

[0:31:54] WEST: And looking at the world through the least of these. You see, I began with the genius of Hebrew scripture. Right? It's the spreading of that *chesed*, that loving kindness, that steadfast love to orphaned, widowed, fatherless, motherless, those persecuted, those subjugated. I mean, that's the best of ... the worst of Hebrew scripture, the Canaanites and other things, we notice there's a best and a worst. But I'm talking about the genius of that Hebrew scripture, you see, and so, the question then becomes: "What do we mean by spiritual?"

All I mean is what the great Rabbi Heschel understood it was, namely indifference to evil. That's spiritual decadence, its callousness to those who suffer. That's spiritual decadence. And what is a lack of morality, lack of integrity, honesty, decency and courage? And so, when we think of identity politics, we'll say: "Okay, let's give it a chance. Here's the test. If you can meet these tests, then you can call it almost anything you want. But you're probably not going to end up calling it identity politics. It's going to be struggle for human dignity and freedom, against adverse circumstances, the structures of domination in various ways, and which ideologies divides and devalue and disrespect people, you see."

And that is a challenge which is as old as the species. As old as the species. Because I think when Hegel called history: "A slaughterhouse", and when Gibbon called it: "A story of human crimes and follies", they were not completely off. Most of human history is a history of hatred and greed, and domination and subjugation, and we have these magnificent moments of interruption and disruption, of a smile, of a touch, of a laugh. Personally, of love and relationships. And then

democratic possibilities, in which you broaden the scope of who actually ought to have ... be able to play a role in shaping the destiny in the public sphere of any social regime.

And so, in that regard, you know, I have a rather dim conception of we human beings on the one hand. Baldwin used to say: "We're walking disasters", but Baldwin using the language of Ibsen, he says: "We're also miracles. We're miracles and disasters at the same time." You know what I mean, that's what Nora was saying: "I was looking for America." Don't hold your breath, Nora. We're talking about *A Dollhouse*, of 1879, that great pioneering text of ... the first great work of modern time.

- [0:34:35] CRITCHLEY: I should mention that in the Holberg ... that we're actually contractually obliged to mention Ibsen, at least once.
- [0:34:40] BUTLER: [laughs]
- [0:34:41] WEST: Well, we ought to, no matter what ...
- [0:34:42] CRITCHLEY: We got two now, so ... yes.
- [0:34:43] WEST: But we ought to mention Ibsen in Harlem, we ought to mention Ibsen in Chicago, [laughs] because Henrik is at that crucial ... but most importantly, it is this wrestling with this darkness inside of us, and the darkness in our society, and how do we cast a light? Just a flickering light, a flickering candle, to keep those traditions alive that are concerned about that light.
- [0:35:10] CRITCHLEY: Before we turn to Glenn Greenwald, just a question maybe on the, I mean, defining terms. So, identity politics, as I understand it, was first used in The Combahee River Collective, who were a socialist feminist ... black socialist feminist group in ... operative in the Boston-area between 1974 and 1980. And I think it was first used in 1977. So, we have that. And, as I understand it, again, from my reading and research, there you could get an idea that the issue there is acknowledging the place from which you come, to enter the political arena. So that's ...
- [0:35:56] WEST: Right. Honesty. Just honesty.
- [0:35:57] CRITCHLEY: Which is identity. Which ... who you ...

[0:35:59] WEST: Intellectual honesty, yes.

[0:36:01] CRITCHLEY: And so, to ... and that, we have that, the history of identity politics on the one hand, and then we have ... is this what that has become? Because, if you like, the perversion of identity politics as a trope, on the right usually, to name something, and margin... so, yes.

[0:36:17] WEST: Mm.

[0:36:20] CRITCHLEY: Okay, thank you. Let's move on to Glenn Greenwald, if you would care to say some ... make some remarks, please?

[0:36:33] GREENWALD: Yes, so, first of all, thank you so much to the Holberg Committee for inviting me to be a panellist alongside two of the scholars, Dr. West, Dr. Butler, whose work I've admired for so long. It's really an honor to be asked to participate in this conversation about an issue I regard as incredibly important, but also very complex, and like Judith and Cornel, I actually think it is important to start with the question since it is the topic, of: "What do we mean by identity politics?" And to me it is one of those terms that illudes any precise definition, a sort of platonic form. It reminds me a lot of the words *terrorism* ... or even political labels, like *liberal* and *conservative*. They kind of mean everything and they mean nothing, and they sort of get defined through their functionality, rather than as fixed terms, making them a little bit illusive to discuss.

So, I think, what we do have to focus on, is not so much: "What do we mean by identity politics?", in some abstract sense, but: "How is it being deployed? How is it being used in our discourse and in our politics?" And, I suppose, you can look at identity politics in its most benevolent form, in a way that is quite positive, and I ... for me, I use my own life as a prism in which to understand identity politics in its vast and its most admirable form.

I ... you know, the formative experience of my life was coming of age as an eleven year old, or a twelve year old, in the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan and the Moral Majority in their political ascension, learning and discovering that I was gay, having no idea what that meant, at a time when homosexuality was almost never discussed publicly, except in association with an actual, literal disease that was horrific, where the images were mortifying, of people emaciated and dying, and nurses

afraid to care for them. And internalizing the idea that it wasn't just a metaphorical sickness, but an actual sickness that had defined my identity, was an incredible difficult burden for anyone to have to internalize, and try to navigate, let alone someone who doesn't have the emotional skills to try and process something like that.

And my whole life has been defined in some way by that societal inequity, going all the way to 2005. Which is pretty recent, right? Not the 1960s, not the 1980s, but 2005, I met my husband in Brazil, we fell in love, decided we wanted to be together. But at the time, there was a law in place called The Defense of Marriage Act, enacted only in 1994, signed into law by Bill Clinton, overwhelming bipartisan support, that barred the federal government from granting immigration rights or any other spousal-based rights to same-sex couples, that opposite-sex couples automatically would receive, which for us meant, at the time, that if I had fallen in love with a Brazilian woman instead of a Brazilian man, she would have immediately gotten a Green card, we would have been able to live together in the United States, but because it was a he and not a she, there was no possibility of living in my own country with the person who I had decided I wanted to live my entire life with.

And so, we were forced to stay in Brazil. And, obviously, being in Brazil, most people don't weep for you when you say you're forced to live in Rio de Janeiro, but the injustice of that was a major factor in my life, and you know, now I have not just a same-sex marriage, but an interracial marriage, an interracial family, we have two sons we've adopted, a third child, for whom we have guardianship, none of whom is white, in a country where systemic racism is a problem. We have to have those kinds of conversations about why it is that when they leave the house, it's urgent that they have their identification, even though the white kids they're playing with don't need that. It's because the police will stop them and be suspicious of why they're there, when that's not true of their white friends.

And so, the idea of combating those sorts of injustices that are based on demographic identity and group... yes, and group membership, to me is not identity politics, it's what Judith said earlier, it's identity politics that have fostered those injustices. The idea that heterosexuals have rights that gay people don't. That white people have privileges, and are expected to be treated a certain way, that non-white people

don't, combating that to me is not identity politics, combating that to me is waring against identity politics, this kind of tribalistic notion of justice, that some groups are entitled to rights and privileges, to which other groups are denied.

And that's the kind of identity politics to which ... to the extent that label is applied to that, they don't think among decent people, by definition, is particularly controversial. I think any decent person, by definition, is opposed to the idea that what race you are, what sexual orientation you are, what gender you are, should define what your rights and privileges under the law are, or even under cultural and social mores. That doesn't mean everyone agrees with that. I mean, every decent person, by definition, agrees with it. And I think polls show, and legal changes show, that increasing numbers of people do agree with that, that we're headed certainly in the right direction. Whether fast enough or not, we're certainly ... that's the progress we're making. And like any progress, it's generating some backlash, but I think even with that backlash it's still on the right path.

Where I think identity politics gets trickier and more problematic, is when it ceases to be about ending those kinds of categorical privileges, and where the perception at least is, if not the reality, that it's about fortifying them, but maybe in different ways. In 2018 I interviewed Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, during her primary run against then congressman Joe Crowley, and it was at the time when almost nobody knew who she was.

[0:42:48] WEST: Yes, I saw that. Yes.

[0:42:48] GREENWALD: I know it's impossible to believe there was ever a time in our lives when no one knew who AOC was, but I promise you there was, it was very recent. I interviewed her when she was unknown, and one of the questions I asked her ... she was a young Latino woman, challenging a white male incumbent. I asked her: "What role should identity politics play in your election? What role should your race, and his, and your gender, and his, play in the decision that voters in this district make when deciding who to send to congress? What is your view on identity politics when it comes to those kinds of questions? Should people vote for you because you're a Latino woman and he's a white male?"

And she said: “Look, my view of identity politics is, of course diversity and representation matter, but the concern I have with it, is that it’s so often used as a deceitful Trojan horse”, is what she called it: “That status-quo standers of power can recruit different faces that look like they represent change, because they are on their surface more diverse, but in reality they become tools to protect the status quo, to create a false perception that there has been a radical change, when in reality they’re actually there to strengthen the status quo.”

I think the election of Barack Obama in 2008 was perhaps the best illustration of that. Again, no decent person could have been anything other than emotionally moved on January 20th, 2009, to see him and Michelle and their two daughters walk into the White House, given the reins to the United States. But then the next eight years was very much a kind of continuation of the neoliberal order of the Democratic party. It was a historic event in one case, but it not only didn’t radically change much, but in a lot of ways, the appearance of that kind of change was weaponized to entrench the status quo further. And I think this has become an increasingly potent tool of institutions of authority.

One of the most disturbing, for me, was two years after we did the Snowden-reporting in 2013 and 2014, showing that western intelligence agencies had instituted a program of mass-surveillance. In 2015, the GCHQ, which is the British counterpart of the NSA, and more extreme and even less legally constrained than the NSA, if you can believe there is such a thing. It’s sort of the kind of yappy bulldog that the United States farms out its surveillance wishes to the British when they can’t do it themselves.

[0:45:35] CRITCHLEY: We’re always happy to do that work. [laughs]

[0:45:35] GREENWALD: Literally bathed itself in the rainbow flag, they lit up their futuristic, creepy, UFO-style headquarters in the rainbow flag, and said: “We have had famous gay code-breakers who we drove into suicide at the time, and now to kind of rehabilitate our image, we’re going to celebrate our LGBT-employees.” The CIA releases videos celebrating Women’s Day and the diversity of their agents. Corporations put Black Lives Matter-logos on their Instagram-page, and it dresses up these pernicious institutions with a mask of benevolence that doesn’t actually change what’s underneath.

So, one thing that concerns me is it's weaponization, it's cynical weaponization, in many ways. And then the other concern I think that a lot of people have, myself included, is that sometimes the discourse that emerges from what may be well intentioned, and benevolent efforts to end certain kinds of discrimination, have the effect, or maybe even the intention, implicitly, or by ... or explicitly, to be divisive further, in how we think about different groups. That we talk not about humanity meeting on its common ground, but this group, or that group, being inherently more violent, inherently more domineering, in a way that I think is encouraging people to start to judge each other not as individuals, but as members of groups.

Like we did 50 years ago, but maybe with a different formula. And, you know, I guess, to me the ultimate objective, is when I think about the success of Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign. The shocking improbable success, of a campaign with no money, no institutional support, that came very close to defeating the Clinton political machine, and probably would have, absent interference that wasn't particularly ethical, on the part of the DMC.

What the success was, it brought together people, not based on demographic identity, but based on a multiracial working-class coalition. Which, to me, in terms of defeating the accesses of militarism and materialism and corporatism, is our only way out. And I'm concerned at some points, that discourse that's intended to ... or, is dressed up as social justice, is further dividing us along these traditional categorical lines, or demographic groups, in a way that's making that ultimate goal more elusive than ever.

[0:48:21] CRITCHLEY:

Thank you very much. That is very compelling. The ... maybe we could think a little further on that issue, that the ... there's a Tweet that you've ... from Glenn Greenwald, from August 20th, 2020, which I ... I'd like to link it to something that I also found in Cornel. The Tweet goes: "Contempt for it on the merits aside, one has to acknowledge the propagandistic genius of exploiting harmless-to-power identity politics as the feel-good cover for perpetuating and even strengthening the neoliberal order and further entrenching corporate and imperial power." Which sort of echoes some of the things you were just saying now.

And linking that together, which ... this is a remark that I found ... I don't know where I found it, from Cornel, where you're talking about the Democratic Party in particular: "Identity politics are presented by the Democratic Party as this progressive cutting-edge tool to make the class hierarchy and the imperial hierarchy more colorful, with all the talk of diversity and inclusion. It makes it seem like they are on the cutting edge because they are concerned about everybody in life, which is not the case."

And this ... I guess, the issue now is that you got ... we're ... there's the issue of, I guess the Democratic Party, [laughs] and also the issue of about, you know, what happens when corporations, institutions, universities, museums, are all so woke? Right? And will use BLM, and the rest to ... as marketing, you know? What is the ... the question ... a question that was sent in ... maybe this will focus it. It's a short question. Question 37. Questioner 37, thank you. Which is: "What is your favorite alternative approach, [laughs] to identity politics? What do you recommend instead?"

And ... because something that comes up in Glenn Greenwald's interventions, that I've been looking at closely of late ... and also Cornel and Judith, I'd like to know your views on this, is really the indictment of the corporate media. Right? And the way, in a sense, they're fetishizing certain identity claims, certain identity politics, in order to look as if something is being changed, when nothing is changing. So, what do you think about that? Maybe ... who would like to go first?

[0:51:10] WEST: Absolutely. Sister Judith wants ... do you want to jump in, before I say something?

[0:51:14] BUTLER: [laughs] Well, it seems to me that maybe it's important to mark three different categories of ... that have come up so far. One, I suggested, there's a right-wing, or reactionary, or conservative or smug-liberal, [laughs] dismissal of identity politics, as fragmentation, and I suggested that we need to ask whether white supremacy is the largest and most destructive form of identity politics, and also, is it true that what's been labelled as identity politics is identity politics, or are these radical movements for justice, for equality of freedom?

And then, it seems to me that Glenn has also given us now a second way of thinking about this, neoliberal corporations are using multiculturalism, or the rainbow flag, or even Black Lives Matter, as logos to signal or advertise their inclusivity, but they are still engaged in exploitation and in extractivism, [laughs] in other ways of destroying our planet, and our prospects of employment, especially, for poor working-class folks. So, there's that.

But then there's a third issue, which Cornel has raised, and which we might also think about in terms of the history of black feminism, which is: "Whose lives have been degraded, or whose lives have been effaced? Whose perspectives has not been heard or not included?" Like ... so, for instance, here we are, and we're all very pleased to be here, but I was mindful that we don't have a woman of color in this conversation, and what difference would it make, I would ask, to have a woman of color here?

Now, you might say: "Oh, that's identity politics", but maybe not. Maybe this kind of exclusion is a patterned one. Maybe we could look at many institutions of which that exclusion is taking place, or where intellectual dialogue is assumed to be taking place among men of color, and queer folk, and well-meaning white people. But we don't have that perspective here. Now, it's not a single perspective, it's a whole history of positions, and anybody who reads in black feminism knows that there are lots of struggles and conflicts and different ways of proceeding.

But you know, one thing that Angela Davis has always asked us to consider is: "When you're invited to be included in an institution", like ... it could be a corporation, it could be an educational institution, it could be a government post: "You have to ask yourself whether that is the kind of institution you want to be part of, or not. Inclusion by itself is not an absolute good. We don't want to be included in a fascist regime, we don't want to be included in an antisemitic regime, we don't want to be included in forms of capitalist and corporate industries that are destroying the earth and depriving the indigenous of their lands and their livelihoods.

So, inclusion itself is not adequate as a goal. Right? It's not adequate as a goal. And it can be deployed in the way that Glenn suggested, but this third category, which Cornel designates as spiritual, I want to say that

experience of effacement of not being in the picture, of not having a presence publicly, intellectually, socially, politically, and the patterned or structural ways of which those exclusions take place, we need to think about that as part of social political economic inequality, and so, I think the black feminist critique of inclusion, and it's a strong one, is precisely a refusal to accept identity: "Don't take my identity and advertise your corporation with it." [laughs] Right?

Let's be critical, let's be radical about what institutions we want to be part of, and what ones we really don't want to be part of. And what's the criteria for that? I mean, those are not identitarian criteria. We're not just ... you know, people are not just saying: "Oh, if it includes me, then I want to be part of it." No. That's not right. [laughs] It actually ... some institutions should be brought down, and we should be involved in dismantling them, rather than begging to be included in them. And if we're not able to think that way, we can't think critically.

So, identity marks that exclusion, but it also links it to this sense of debasement, this sense of not having the capacity to express spiritually, in a free way, in a way that feels living ones' history, ones' position in society, precisely because that has been effaced or demeaned in some ways that have been adequately insufferable. So, I think we need to take seriously that domain. And I think it's the more substantial and important dimension of identity claims, that are made in the service of broader political projects, that should not be dismissed, and that are not just the effect of appropriation, or description.

[0:57:37] CRITCHLEY:

Mm. Because you, in your work, as I read it ... And I brought so [laughs] many speeches, that ... Now, it's a sense which gives ... because I was reading it again this week, and it just sort of ... it's the end of *The Force of Nonviolence*, which is a book produced in 2020, which is a really powerful book, but the end of it, you really pull things together into a series of pages, and it's a theme which is elsewhere in your work, and it's very important, it seems to me. You're talking about vulnerability. And you say: "To avow vulnerability not as an attribute of a subject, but as a feature of social relations, does not imply vulnerability as an identity, a category or a ground for political action. Rather, persistence in a condition of vulnerability proves to be its own kind of strength."

And that's part of an argument about nonviolence, and nonviolence as force, force of nonviolence, and what you call, at the end, a kind of a: "Rageful love, militant pacifism, aggressive nonviolence, a radical persistence." So, it's ... I mean there it's as if you ... we need different concepts. Vulnerability, grievability, these would be ... in terms of a kind of ... how would you put it? The kind of imaginary of equality, that you've outlined in your work, these concepts will actually do some ... would be more useful. And powerful.

[0:59:24] BUTLER:

Yes, but maybe there's a way to redescribe what we're talking about, so that we understand people who are struggling. We could think about indigenous struggles, for instance, against Bolsonaro in Brazil. Or we can think about indigenous struggles in this country, in this region, on these lands. There is both a history of victimization and slaughter and genocide, and there is also a history of persistence and of keeping certain traditions alive and keeping certain political demands alive. And thinking about how that history of suffering works with a politi... with an insistent political movement, which also has invariably a spiritual dimension, maybe even the spiritual is not quite disarticulable from the economic, especially in anti-extractivist politics in Brazil, for instance.

You know, we're not denying the history of suffering, nor are we saying that these folks are determined only by the history of suffering, but it would be wrong to efface that in the name of some kind of neoliberal agency, that is attributed to: "No, their political power, their political movement emerges from the suffering", it's like they know where it came from, they know what ... how it's being continued, and they struggle and gather, and they also make, and this is extremely important, solidarity, with any number of groups, that are also struggling against corporate power or brutal prisons, or state violence, or the failure of states to intervene, when there is violence against women, trans people, LGBTQIA-people.

So, I want to suggest that ... sometimes we hear that a group just defines itself as a victim. But even that moment, like, defining your victimization? I mean, the definition of that victimization is already an assertion of life. They pass the power to define, to mark, to persist. And then the question is: "What is wanted?" Does that victimization get made into identity itself, or is it part of the process of demanding

repair, demanding justice, demanding freedom? So, I wouldn't want to take ... I wouldn't want a political vocabulary that takes vulnerability or victimization out, or even suffering, out. I think we actually need much more acknowledgement of all that. But we also need that acknowledgement to be in the service of radical transformation.

So, it's about making it dynamic. And also, we haven't really talked about solidarity, but I do believe expanding solidarity is the future of the left, quite frankly, and if some older left wants to retrench itself, and reinstall white men at the helm, and make other ... make a variety of oppressions into secondary or tertiary, they're never going to win. Because even class goes across color. Like how is class lived as race? Right, we have that question: "How is race lived as class?" Paul Gilroy taught us how to ... and Stuart Hall, you know, they insisted ... and intersectionality within black feminist movement insists on that kind of questioning. So, we need to actually open up to new social movements and to hear what they're saying, and to find ways of linking, if our movements are going to be transnational and fulfill radical ideals.

[1:03:33] CRITCHLEY: Glenn Greenwald, would you like to pick any of that up?

[1:03:39] GREENWALD: Yes, absolutely. I think ... you know, I'm finding this conversation fascinating. I'm, you know, doing all the thinking as I'm listening. I think one of the things that Judith said at the very beginning is something I just want to focus on for a second, which is noting the lack of women of color participating in this conversation, and what impact that exclusion might have, or that addition it might have on the conversation. To me, this gives a really great window into the complexities of how we talk about identity politics.

So, you can certainly imagine that if you were to ... you know, we obviously have racial diversity and gender diversity and sexual orientation diversity, and all other kinds of diversity on the panel. It's true we don't have a woman of color. So, how are that ... how might that ... how does that exclusion affect the discourse? How might its addition alter it? It depends a huge amount on which women of color you decided to integrate into the conversation. So, we could for example imagine that we invited Kamala Harris or Stacey Abrams to participate in the conversation. They would be a woman of color.

[1:04:48] BUTLER: [laughs]

[1:04:49] GREENWALD: That would maybe change the conversation in a little bit of a way, maybe it wouldn't.

[1:04:52] WEST: [laughs]

[1:04:53] GREENWALD: You could pick Nikki Haley or Tulsi Gabbard or Condoleezza Rice or Candace Owens, all women of color. That would probably change the conversation even more. And then you could pick, you know ...

[1:05:07] WEST: It wouldn't just change it, brother, it be more impoverished, but go right ahead. [laughs]

[1:05:11] GREENWALD: Yes, no, I'm not saying it would be better or worse. In fact, that's exactly my argument, right? It's ...

[1:05:15] WEST: No, I just wanted to be explicit about what impact it would have.

[1:05:18] GREENWALD: Yes, and then maybe ... I think in some senses it may not have an impact, depending on who it was. And then you can imagine for example picking someone who isn't well known, who is, you know, somebody who is a single mother and unemployed, or works as a construction worker, as a police officer, who is a woman of color, who probably would bring a vastly different view, than any of those other people that I named, and which would change the conversation in much different ways as well. And so, I think it's difficult to predict if you say: "Well what would our conversation be like if we added a woman of color?", because the range of views that a woman of color would bring, would be so wide-ranging depending on who they are and what their position in life is.

And I think, you know, one of the things that always interest me so much is if you look at elite discourse about, say law and order and the police, and this kind of, you know, slogan that arose in the last year from the murder of George Floyd, of: "Defund the police", and the like, that has a lot of currency among a kind of elite guardians of discourse, of all races, and then you look at polling data of poor communities, black communities, brown communities, and you say: "Do you think there should be fewer police in your communities, more police or the same amount?", the overwhelming majority of people, and multiracial working-class communities, will say: "I want the police in my

community either as much as they are or more.” And very, very few will say: “I want fewer.”

And I think as well that when you look at the lack of diversity, to the extent you want to analyze it in the panel, you can of course say: “Well, there’s not a woman of color”, but there’s also not someone who, say, is a member of the working class.

[1:07:09] WEST: Oh, okay. [laughs]

[1:07:09] GREENWALD: I grew up in a working-class family, I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, but you know, let’s be real about what our lives currently are. You know, we are people who have spent a lot of time in elite academic institutions, who have a lot of career and economic stability, because of that. So, you could bring a working-class person into this discussion as well, somebody I don’t mean who has working-class origins, as I do, and I believe probably everyone here to some extent does, but someone whose life right now has been defined by being a member of the working class, and all of the hardship that that has entailed over the last 20, 30 years.

A white man, for example, from a town with shuttered factories and opioid overdoses, and that would bring an entirely different perspective as well. And so, I think when we talk about diversity, it is important to think about the full range of diversity, and not just a certain kind. Because in so many ways, if the life in America is, you could certainly argue, defined at least as much by one’s class as by one’s sexual orientation, gender, or race. And I feel like a lot of times, in identity politics discourse, that gets overlooked.

[1:08:30] WEST: I mean, the danger here, yes, the danger here is again, you know once you slide down the slippery slope of labels and various personal categories, then you’re missing out, on not just the quality of the conversation, because I believe what Adorno ... the condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak. You can talk about the suffering of other people without being a member of that group. You can have a deep concern, without being a member of that group. So, you’re right about what kind of person it would be in that sense, and be able to make sure there’s a variety of voices. I mean, that’s what the negro national anthem is: “Black People, Lift Every Voice”, not echo. We don’t want extensions of echo chambers, we want quality voices, right?

But quality voices is not reducible to one social position, it just isn't. So that, on one hand, I'm with sister Judith in terms of making sure that we've got heterogeneity, variety and diversity, but if we end up fetishizing diversity, then we end up with just a counting game. That's the last thing we want. I look at the world through these lenses, one fundamental question: "How do we cultivate the capacity of the species to avoid self-destruction, given ecological catastrophe?" That's a need-for-question. I don't care what color you are, I don't care what gender or sexual orientation you are. We don't have a planet that make a whole lot of difference what identity you have.

The second is: "How do we cultivate the capacity to preserve the best of democratic experiment, that put poor and working people at the center?" Because we live in neo-fascist times, and democracies are waning, in terms of their substance. Those are fundamental questions. I don't care what color, gender and so forth, you are. You see. And then the third, is existential: "How do you fight off despair and despondency and self-violation and self-destruction?" Because we live in dim and grim and bleak times. One of the challenges of the people who wake up. If you wake up and you see how dim things are, you might want to go back to sleep. Like, [...], you see? Waking up is not the necessary sufficient condition for being an agent of force for good at all. Not at all, if you stay woke forever, you're going to suffer from insomnia. You've got to fortify yourself and be a long-distance runner in the quest for truth and beauty and goodness, and so forth.

So that it seems to me that when we talk about the lens through which we view things, all the talk about identity politics and culture wars, they're going to have to adjust to how one defines things. You don't define it through those categories. And if those categories in the end aren't ... don't meet the test, they need to be called into question. Even when we talk about white supremacy as identity politics, I can't accept that kind of nude, sanitized, sterilized, deodorized language. White supremacy it is barbaric, it is monstrous, it is calamitous, the Ku Klux Klan is not identity politics. These are gangsters who like lynching people. Let's just call it for what it is.

You see, once we get into this kind of Orwellian talk, of: "Well you know, and they lynched so and so, that was identity po..." No, that was

thuggish behavior, on behalf of people who hate people of color. Or the same are true with women. People who hate women ... we have to use our language very explicitly here. And we can't pull back, but in doing that, we got to keep alive the common ground of the overlap of our humanity. See, for me as a revolutionary Christian, that means that I got strong connections with revolutionary humanness, because we're talking about our humanity all the way down, and white supremacy is simply one particular barbaric way of perceiving the world, that loses sight of the rich humanity of indigenous peoples and black peoples and brown peoples, and so on. And let's just call it that. It's not identity politics in this vague sense, it's not even just culture wars, you see.

And so, the real challenge becomes, you know: "How do we hold on to a language that's clear enough?" There's always going to be some levels of obscurity in it. Clear enough, and then test ourselves. And that's why I'm calling into question the name-calling and the finger-pointing, because we all, in some sense, are complicit with the ecological catastrophe. You see, the more colorful empire, the black face at the head of an American empire called Barack Obama, that people were breakdancing about, and couldn't say a mumbling word about drones being dropped on children in Somalia and Pakistan.

And we can go on and on and on, in that rec... give him a peace prize, and he's got seven wars going on. Please. That level of hypocrisy is so overwhelming, and you can still win prizes from *The New York Times*, talking about it. You see, that's the thing that needs to be called into question. That's part of our intellectual vocation. That's part of our calling in the life or the mind, to tell the truth, expose the lies, with a spirit of fallibility and humility. And getting in trouble... because we all ... all of us get in trouble a lot, that's a compliment. Especially from a neoliberal establishment. Believe me.

[1:14:04] BUTLER: [laughs] I mean ... if I may?

[1:14:05] CRITCHLEY: Yes, you may.

[1:14:06] BUTLER: It seems to me, Glenn, you demonstrated why the idea of formal inclusion doesn't work, that formal inclusion could be infinite. We could keep, you know, producing categories of people who've been excluded, and then we would be, all day, trying to include them. And that form of inclusion strikes me as a display, a kind of advertisement

of multiculturalism. It's not necessarily thinking about the history of social movements, or the future struggle that we have before us, to counter all the destructive forces that we are up against right now. And there are many.

But, you know, what if we took a different attitude, like: "Oh, I wonder who in the academy has written on identity politics and culture wars, and who has some things to say about this?" Well, maybe Kimberlé Crenshaw has been talking about that her whole life, or maybe Saidiya Hartman would have an incredibly interesting perspective, or, you know, maybe Christina Sharpe or maybe Gina Dent or, you know, any number of people would come to mind, who would ... who has been working on this for a long time, and have things to say and are published, and are invested in this.

Now, on the one hand, we can say: "Oh, well, they should be part of any kind of conversation like this, because we need a black woman." Oh, anxious, white anxiety, [laughs] you know. That's not the point. The point is that we can't have the conversation we need to have without people who have thought about this, who bring a different kind of history and perspective to it. So, you know, I agree with you that there are manipulative and false forms of inclusion, which is why inclusion itself is not the ultimate goal, but I also think that what we call identity is sometimes a point of departure for thinking about history, and also a struggle against effacement, a struggle against degradation, and a struggle to exist.

Now, you know, you don't... you don't exist when you're called the right name, but you stand a chance of existing [laughs] more than you did before, if you're called the right name. And politics can't just be about: "Oh, let's learn how to call each other the right name." That would be a very narrow idea of politics. Then we would just be offering kind of narrow linguistic recognition, wherever we go. On the other hand, if I'm never called the right name, that doesn't really work, or if someone doesn't recognize something fundamental about my history and situation in the world, and just calls me a human like any other, I'm like: "That human never included me. That human might be part of the problem", and I would imagine that Cornel's humanism, his revolutionary radical humanism, would have to revise most, if not all the ideas of the human that have come down to us, because they have

never been ... because they ... the human has worked in the service of the very effacement we need to overcome.

So ... and then, I'll just say one last thing, is I agree with you, that white supremacy will never be adequately described by the term identity politics. At the same time, how do we describe that defensiveness? Like: "This world is mine. This world belongs to me. It always did." If you look at Zemmour right now, in France. Right? He's putting out these videos, he's running for president, he's a reactionary, and he's basically saying to white people in France: "Nobody is saying this out loud, but you feel it, just like I feel it. This country no longer belongs to us. Look at all these people who are in our streets. Look at what they brought." And then the picture of hijab, the picture of black men walking down the street. It's like: "We have been overtaken, we are being replaced."

Right, so it's a really strong petition to white nationalism, and to a sense that whiteness is a prerogative to own public space, to have itself reflected exclusively in public space. Now, I want to say that that is a kind of identity fascism, [laughs] identity nationalism, that basically wants to have the world reflecting its identity and to expunge all elements that interfere with that exclusively white reflection of self. So, I mean, identity politics doesn't do the work of the description we need, I agree with you, but it is an identitarian politics, which is why one of the groups that goes out and pushes migrants back to North Africa or lets them drown in the Mediterranean, is called Identity. That is a right-wing white nationalist group.

[1:19:28] WEST:

Yes, no, I hear what you're saying. But what's the difference, though, my dear sister, between calling identity politics as opposed to monstrous tribalism, immoral nativism? It's situated into the larger history. I mean, the age of Europe itself. 1492-1945, an age in which the European colonial empires are reshaping the whole globe in their image and in their interests, using the same language. You see it in Conrad, you see it in Graham Greene. Which is to say that once you hear the different term, it makes it difficult to keep track of the longer history that goes all the way ... we're talking about the worst of Europe, not the best. But the worst of it, so that ... and that's it. It is identitarian, but it's not surprising, given the worst of the age of Europe, and which is precisely that possessive sense of: "My land", and:

“My body”, and: “Somebody else’s body, their possession”, and so forth. You see.

- [1:20:32] BUTLER: Yes. I would agree with you, but here, you both have used the term tribalism, which I find interesting, and I generally don’t use it, just because I get worried, like are we talk... are we saying that contemporary fascism or hypernationalism or white supremacy is a barbaric and premodern problem, and that we are regressing to a premodern form of sociology, when we see that?
- [1:20:58] WEST: Yes, no, that’s a good point.
- [1:20:59] BUTLER: So, what about actual tribes? What about native tribes? I mean, there are some pretty serious contemporary politics about tribal rights, and about the destruction of tribal inheritance and the stealing of tribal lands, and I kind of feel like when we use the tribalism term as something premodern, we’re imagining that the modern, or the late modern, is ... should be more civilized. And I mean, I know you wouldn’t use that, I know you’re not going there. I know you’re not going there. But I ...
- [1:21:34] WEST: Yes, that’s true. No, exactly, I’ve read too much Jonathan Swift for that. I’m on the edge of misanthropy sometimes, when it comes to how human beings come together. I’m telling you. [laughs] Absolutely.
- [1:21:41] BUTLER: Yes. No, I’m, with you. I know that. But if we say it’s a recurrent, like if we say white supremacy is recurrent, or we say that fascism is a recurrent ...
- [1:21:51] WEST: Refashioned, reformulated.
- [1:21:53] BUTLER: Right. But it’s got to also be understood as historically specific, right?
- [1:21:56] WEST: Absolutely, I’m with you on that.
- [1:21:58] BUTLER: Right. And some of the movements we are seeing are anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ, and anti-immigrant and anti-progressive, racial justice ... you know, so these are reactionary formations that have their ... that are very specific. They draw ...
- [1:22:15] WEST: Pull from ...

[1:22:16] BUTLER: The draw from the former forums.

[1:22:16] WEST: Absolutely. That's my point I'm making.

[1:22:19] BUTLER: But they're conste... getting constellated ...

[1:22:21] WEST: Absolutely.

[1:22:21] BUTLER: Okay.

[1:22:22] WEST: They're being reconstituted. Absolutely. But nothing novel ... is holy novel.

[1:22:29] BUTLER: Okay. Yes, I'm with you there.

[1:22:31] WEST: Our sense of history is very important. Very important.

[1:22:35] GREENWALD: Can I interject here for a second, or do you guys have a question you wanted to get to? Because I just wanted to ... yes, so, I ... just a couple of points. You know, on the issue of how we think about diversity and diversifying thought and the like, for me journalism provides a really interesting window into some of the difficulties. One of the big changes in journalism over the last, say, six or seven decades, is the corporatization of journalism.

[1:23:05] WEST: Mm, absolutely.

[1:23:06] GREENWALD: And with that, has meant that, you know in the 1940s, and 1950s and 1960s, without romanticizing that era, it was often the case that journalists didn't have college degrees at all. And yet now, in most national newsrooms, they make great progress. Not enough, but great progress, diversifying from the perspective of race and gender and sexual orientation. You know, huge increases in the number of women, and black and Hispanic, and gay people working in the major newsrooms, the major national media outlets, and yet almost all of them, the percentage is rapidly increasing, come from the same set of 30-40 elite colleges.

And sometimes I wonder, you know, as we celebrate the diversification of newsrooms, whether that really is a diversification of newsrooms, in the sense that if you look in a modern United States, let's say a white woman and black man, who grow up in an upper-middle class

neighborhood, or even a rich neighborhood, with parents who are partners at Goldman Sachs or ophthalmologists, or venture capitalists, go to the same schools, live in the same neighborhoods, end up working in the same job.

Obviously there's going to be some difference in their experience, by virtue of the fact that they're different, they have different identities, from a perspective of race and gender, but I think you can make the argument that their experience might actually be more similar than, say, the white man who grew up that way and ends up at that job, versus a white man who was born into a, you know, a mining town in the Appalachians, and lives in a town in Pennsylvania, where opioid overdoses are overrunning the town, and has to work three jobs at Amazon and Walmart, and has no health insurance, and has no ability to start a family. Lives at his parents', because of economic deprivation.

If you're not including, and you're not including people like that, in the conversation and in the discourse and in the newsroom, to what extent are you really diversifying, and to what extent are you kind of doing a more superficial form of diversity, that though valuable, certainly better than the alternative, is almost like a way of avoiding the more difficult kind of diversity. That's one point. And then, the other point I wanted to make, just about the kind of far-right populist backlash, that Judith was talking about in France, but we've also seen it, obviously, here in Brazil, where, you know, Brazilians for four straight elections voted for kind of a left-wing, certainly center-left party, the Workers' Party, founded by Lula da Silva, a factory worker, a Union leader, and then suddenly in 2018, went all the way over in the other direction and voted for a far-right figure, an authoritarian, Jair Bolsonaro, it's something we've seen repeated over and over.

After eight years of President Obama, people voted for Donald Trump, millions of people twice voted for Obama, and then voted for Donald Trump. And we can kind of look at these trends and say: "You know what, this is ... what this is, this is white people engaged in racial backlash, and resentment politics, and anxiety over losing their privilege, having their kind of racist impulses stimulated by saying: 'Look, we're being replaced'", as Judith said. And definitely, there's a part of the appeal of these movements, explicitly aimed at that.

But I think we also have to consider that Trump, and people like him, or Marne Le Pen, or Jair Bolsonaro, or Brexit, and Nigel Farage, did not appear out of nowhere. They were the biproducts of an ideology that has destroyed the economic security of millions and millions of people who feel as though the elites, whatever racial diversity or gender diversity you want to put on them, no longer really care about their lives, and that perception, you could certainly argue ... And I would argue, there is validity to it.

And I think one of the most interesting dynamics is if you look in the United States, and you would read elite discourse over four years about Donald Trump being kind of the new Hitler, a white nationalist, somebody who does nothing, or little more than stimulate the worst bigotries among us, you actually see an increase, a big increase, in Hispanic support for President Trump and for the Republican Party, some mild increase in the support of African-Americans, though certainly much smaller. Overwhelmingly, they are still voting Democrat, but it's going in that direction.

And I think we have to be careful that we don't kind of take this reductive explanation of why these ... this kind of populist, nativist politics is finding success. We can call the people who support it racist, say that they're just concerned because immigrants are entering the country, because Muslims are entering the country ... the country, Africans are entering the country, but I think, in doing that, we kind of bury another factor, which is that neoliberalism has been an incredibly cruel ideology on an economic level, and this anti-status quo, anti-elite sentiment that is being ... that is driving a lot of it, and that their demagogues are successfully tapping into.

And a lot of cases isn't racism, as evidenced by the fact that it's getting multiracial support, but this kind of growing cleavage between elite discourse over here, and the lives of ordinary people over here. And I think kind of just dismissing it away with a simple explanation, or kind of a one-stop shop explanation, that these are just racists concerned about their racial privilege, doesn't tell the whole story, and might actually make it more difficult to combat, to understand what the appeal of it actually is.

[1:29:26] CRITCHLEY: That's a strong point.

[1:29:26] WEST: This is ... but this is one of the reasons why my dear sister, Wendy Brown, one of the grand radical Democratic theorists, teaches us, not either or, but a number of different factors. You got the colossal failure of neoliberal elites to be able to deliver to poor people. So, you get escalating [...] wealth and inequality, that's in part what brother Bernie was about. And that's not reducible to race, but it has a xenophobic element. It has a white supremacist element, it has a homophobic element, and it has a male supremacist element, and you can't lose sight of that, but there's a crisis of legitimacy.

Neoliberals leads with their Harvard, Pentagon, Silicon Valley or anywhere else, they have ... they are the target of a certain kind of contempt. Fox News has it, but it's deeply neofascist, more and more. CNN doesn't have it, they're in the bosom of the neoliberal project, you see. Our dear br... sister Amy has it, of Democracy Now. Thank God for sister Amy, right?

[laughter]

[1:30:30] WEST: But it's a left critique of it. But the problem is that there's a sense of impotence. These neoliberal elites keep reproducing themselves, no matter how many folks hit the street, no matter how many critiques they receive. They just push it ... or just keep going. And that's where the despair comes in. And once you have folk giving up and caving in, then you've got neofascist possibilities, because you've got financial elites sitting back, you've got military elites sitting back, and they're the ones who really need to be focused on it, talking about this neofascism. It's not just everyday people, it's these elites behind, and in the United States they are imperial elites. The 800 million military units around the world, 53 cents for every 1 dollar, going to militarism. They're the ones sitting back and saying: "This disorder, this anarchy, this chaos, is getting out of control." You see?

[laughter]

[1:31:25] WEST: And that's like ... that's Plato's republic, the tyrant is about to intervene, democracy is failing. That's where we are. And ... you think I'm going too far, sister Judith?

[1:31:34] BUTLER: No, I'm liking it.

[1:31:36] WEST: [laughs] Alright, this is what's frightening about the moment, that's why we have got to keep a smile and some style. Because ...

[1:31:40] BUTLER: [laughs] Yes.

[1:31:42] CRITCHLEY: A smile and some style.

[1:31:43] WEST: You ain't lying, we have got to keep swinging.

[1:31:44] CRITCHLEY: I want to get a little bit to ... because in Glenn Greenwald's intervention ... I have been watching a lot of your videos in the last couple of weeks. The target is increasingly the corporate medium. Yes? And in a sense, what you said about journalism is very important, and also to add to that, the misunderstanding of the relation between journalism and activism. Right? Increasingly. Which is leading to an increasing kind of narrowness of focus.

[1:32:13] WEST: Right. Truncation.

[1:32:15] CRITCHLEY: It's leading to journalism ... your former employer, [laughs] *The Guardian* ... you feel like you're being hit over the head with a stick. You know, it's exhausting. And I wonder what you think about that. The fourth estate. And I was thinking about this also, without wanting to make matters too controversial, but why not? Your video after the Rittenhouse-verdict, which ... I was looking ... I look at the other things you said. It's very interesting, because you're ... or what you're arguing for there, what you're arguing against, is this is ... so, you're saying, in one of your interventions: "There's a new civil religion in the corporate media", a new civil religion.

And against that, you are claiming a freedom of thought. Right? You know, even quoting Bertrand Russel and figures like that. And very interesting too. And the ... and with the Rittenhouse-verdict, what you were arguing there, is due process, law, evidence, a jury ... and so and so forth, but due process of law. And I imagine you got a lot of heat for that? So, how do you see that? I guess the issue of the corporate media would be one way of focusing it. And you've had your dealings with that over the years, [laughs] to say the least.

[1:33:50] GREENWALD:

Yes, well, you know, growing up, my heroes, kind of political heroes, were Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon papers and was widely vilified as being a Soviet agent. And then the Jewish leftist lawyers of the ACLU, who, with the support of civil rights leaders at the time, a lot of people have forgotten about that, had decided to defend the right of actual Nazis, like Nazis wearing Swastika-armbands to march through Skokie, Illinois, a town not ... just overwhelmingly filled with Jews, but survivors of the Holocaust, people who had actually been in the camps 25-30 years before, and to me, that ... both of those episodes represented a principle that I believe continues to drive what I do, which is that institutions can't be trusted. Human institutions can't be trusted to constrain what we think, how we speak, who gets imprisoned, who gets ostracized without all kinds of checks and all kinds of safeguards, because humans are so susceptible to, once they get power in their hands, abusing it, for improper ends.

And I thought the Kyle Rittenhouse-case was just a very vivid window into how we talk about so many of these issues. I personally never talked about the Kyle Rittenhouse-case because, and this might be the lawyer in me, I just know that when things are getting litigated on social media or on the internet or through the media, so often there's no way to know what the truth is, until you actually sit down and watch the trial, and that's something I did from start to finish.

And my ideas of what had happened were so radically disparate from the media presentation of it. And I was disturbed that a lot of people seemed to kind of have a blood lust to put this person in prison, who didn't actually watch the trial, but they sort of saw him as a symbol. I don't think that's what the justice system is for. And the thing that bothered me the most, is there were ... here in Brazil, for example, the leading media outlets, I don't mean small ones or blogs, I mean the biggest and most prestigious media outlets, *The New York Times* of Brazil, which is *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Globo*, along with media outlets around the world, all have the same false view of the Rittenhouse-case, not right after it happened, but during the trial, as they were writing articles reporting about what was taking place, which is ... many of them went with headlines that said: "Young, white man who shot three black men waits for verdict."

They had thought that the people Kyle Rittenhouse had shot, were

black, when in fact they were all white, because they obviously had gotten this impression from somewhere, and that somewhere came from the corporate media, which had created a kind of narrative about this case that was, when you sit down and watch the trial, in my view, widely disparate from the reality. And so, you know, maybe ... that's probably just the lawyer in me, the civil libertarian in me, which always wants ... is always going to side with due process, safeguards on the ability for the government to put people in cages, demand that they show a high level of proof, because my politics is steeped in a suspicion of the ability of corrupt institutions of authority to abuse their power, if they're not heavily scrutinized. So, I think that's where a lot of that came from.

- [1:37:26] WEST: Absolutely. But I just want to say this, that ...
- [1:37:26] CRITCHLEY: Thank you for that. No, I got ... is this time ... this says 1:51, is this how long we've been going for?
- [1:37:32] UNKNOWN: No, that's what we've got left.
- [1:37:33] CRITCHLEY: Oh. How much time have we have got left? No? Just want to get clear, I'm looking at this clock here, and ... that ... well, now. Okay. Cornel?
- [1:37:46] WEST: No, I was just going to say that, I mean, one, I resonate brother Glenn's libertarian sensibility, because in the face of dogma, you always have to have Socratic dialogue that is robust. But there is a difference between talking about due process and rule of law. And I believe in fair trials, but there is a moral dimension that also needs to be noted, because you know, and I know, you know, they had the law on the slavery, they had the law on the Jim Crow, law on the Jane Crow, law on the Nazis, law on the Apartheid, so law in and of itself is still weak and feeble, if you don't have a moral critique of it, you see.
- [1:38:19] CRITCHLEY: Putin's very fond of law. [laughs]
- [1:38:23] WEST: And so, you have to be able to keep track of both, so that the rights of Rittenhouse must be protected, there's no doubt about that, the liberties must be protected. Right. But at the same time, people have a right to say: "The due process is ..." There's such a truncated procedure, that you can't even get out some of the truth that's going on. And you have to have levels of discourse, to keep that in mind. But

in addition to journalism, I want to say one thing. I want to talk about my dear brother Chris Hedges.

You know, I think Chris Hedges is one of the powerful intellectuals who had to leave journalism, because he said: "It's dead for the most part. You've got you and a few others. You and Amy, and a few others." You can almost count them on your hands, because the levels of conformity and complacency of a market-driven journalism is so overwhelming, you can't even call it journalism anymore. And if that's the case, you're going to become like Chris Hedges, you become a historian, you become something else, to be a truth-teller. And one can say the same thing about philosophy. Become something else, where you build on philosophy, but you're doing something else. Was Adorno a philosopher?

[1:39:34] BUTLER: [laughs]

[1:39:34] WEST: He was Adorno. Period. You know what I mean?

[1:39:39] CRITCHLEY: He was a great pianoplayer.

[1:39:41] WEST: Yes, he did that too. Not as good as Edward Said, though.

[1:39:43] CRITCHLEY: I got a ... Judith, sorry.

[1:39:45] BUTLER: Yes, I just think to address something that I feel maybe links Glenn's remarks with Cornel's. Because Glenn, I think that you have suggested to us that corporate powers and their dissemination of basic liberties is a really key framework, and that that gets lost when we start engaging in multicultural debates of a certain kind. And then you also suggested to us, suggesting you might be a, I guess, a left-libertarian, maybe you wouldn't disagree with that, but you've also suggested to us that class remains unscrutinized in many of the debates on inclusion. And that it's extremely important to remember that.

And class now, I guess a third point would be, class now has to be understood in terms now of neoliberal elites and the production of and circulation of neoliberal elites within universities and within the media, suggesting that the diversity problem is a... is not the one that we've identified, and may need to be thought about differently. At the same time, you know, I think one of the things neoliberalism has done, is

evacuated the ideals of social democracy or democratic socialism, it has decimated social services, and it has also decimated protections for the environment, so the sense of destruction, the fear of destruction that people are living with, and that Cornel has identified so powerfully, that sense of destruction takes a lot of different forms.

And we could say that racism and anti-immigrant politics and anti-trans politics and antifeminism, are just expressions of ... secondary expressions, of a primary sense of fear of destruction. You know, where does the fear of destruction go? Are people misidentifying the gay families as the force of destruction, are they misidentifying gender as a source of destruction, are they misidentifying Black Lives Matter, or trans-rights? I mean, or migrant rights? You know, and we could say all that is secondary or even epiphenomenal, but I think that might be too quick, because it is true that the ... we are all living with the fear of planetary destruction, there's just no question about it, and what are the forms that takes?

We could say that our ... that the racism we see is an expression of that, but maybe we have to think more carefully about that conjunction? Right? That anti-migrant, anti-gay, lesbian, anti-feminist movement, as it coincides with, or interlocks with a neoliberal economic form of governance, that has decimated social services and put a huge amount on the family, and put a huge amount on local communities, and put a huge amount on local churches. Right? So, it gets generated within the evangelical church as truth?

You know, it's sometimes like all one has to grasp for, in a time in which people are fearing destruction, where it's like: "Oh, this import from America, gender, that's what's destroying us. That's destroying our lives." But really, but how do we think about that intersection? And I think we need a more textured analysis, I don't think we can go back to: "This is the real oppression and all this is secondary." It's like, no, no, we've got to have like Gramsci in mind, here. You know? What's the articulation? How do we describe it?

[1:43:58] WEST:

Absolutely. And the left has failed, because we on the left have been unable to put forward a vision that ceases the imagination and hearts, minds and souls of people.

[1:44:10] BUTLER: I agree.

[1:44:10] WEST: Unable to have institutional capacity for that vision that we deliver.

[1:44:14] BUTLER: Yes. Well, you do it. You're the one we look to, Cornel, you do it.

[1:44:19] WEST: [laughs]

[1:44:21] CRITCHLEY: Yes, but listen, Gramsci says: "The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organized and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favorable (and it can be favorable only in so far as such a force exists and is full of fighting spirit). Therefore, the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogenous, compact and self-aware." He's talking there about articulation. Alliance, where you would ...

[1:44:54] BUTLER: Yes.

[1:44:54] WEST: Absolutely. Elaboration.

[1:44:58] CRITCHLEY: And that's [...].

[1:45:00] WEST: That's exactly right. I mean, this is translated by Pete Buttigieg's father, my dear brother Joseph, the great translator of Gramsci.

[1:45:05] BUTLER: Yes. It's incredible.

[1:45:08] WEST: The Gramscian student [...], we used to go together. And brother Pete, you know, he's neoliberal-center, but I love him, he's part of the family, he's just wrong on a lot of some of these issues.

[1:45:16] BUTLER: [laughs]

[1:45:17] WEST: But I love him like a son. But the thing is, is that for Gramsci, he's presupposing a party in place, even though he's in prison, he's in a fascist prison. They've got institutions of capacity, in Italy at that time. You see. We're lucky to have journals. They had a communist party, there's a qualitative difference in terms of the ability to have a robust conversation within an institution that has the capacity to bring people together, mobilize, galvanize, not just for demonstrations, but to sustain the structures over time. That's what we lack on the board.

[1:45:53] CRITCHLEY: A moral position.

[1:45:54] WEST: Yes. Absolutely. And Gramsci understood that.

[1:45:57] CRITCHLEY: Okay. Well, this clock keeps saying different things. I just ...

[1:46:03] WEST: [laughs]

[1:46:06] CRITCHLEY: I want to expand the focus a little bit.

[1:46:08] WEST: Sure.

[1:46:09] CRITCHLEY: A little bit. Because some of the questions that came in, actually very recently ... I got these from Ole on Thursday. Really good. And I want to put the cat among the pigeons, a little bit, here.

[1:46:22] WEST: Cat among the pigeons, good God of mine.

[1:46:25] CRITCHLEY: Although I don't know who the cat, or who the pigeons are, the cat ...

[1:46:27] BUTLER: We're pigeons.

[1:46:28] CRITCHLEY: You're pigeons.

[laughter]

[1:46:31] CRITCHLEY: But look ...

[1:46:32] BUTLER: That's your identity politics, pigeon rights.

[1:46:34] WEST: Pigeon rights. [laughs]

[1:46:36] CRITCHLEY: Question 39. So, thank you, questioner 39: "Cornel West wrote in *The Washington Post* regarding Harvard University's closure of its Classics department: 'This is a spiritual catastrophe.'" And the questioner asks: "In which way could the engagement with the old frequently shared texts, be said to be a spiritual exercise? What type of spirituality does the Classical canon or the engagement with it, engender? Is it a problem for classics, as a spiritual exercise, that classics are currently weaponized by the far-right?" I thought it was interesting, because here we have ... [laughs] Judith and I taught a class together on Greek tragedy.

[1:47:24] WEST: Yes, I wish I could have been in that class, actually.

- [1:47:26] CRITCHLEY: And it was not a conventional class on Greek tragedy, [laughs] but it was about Greek tragedy.
- [1:47:27] WEST: A lot to learn there. Yes.
- [1:47:31] CRITCHLEY: And, I know, Cornel's got, you know, very interesting views on Sophocles and many others, so how do you see that ... because in a way this is kind of a symptom of where we are, and ...
- [1:47:46] WEST: Well, one is, dear brother ...
- [1:47:47] CRITCHLEY: How do you defend, you know ... how ... okay.
- [1:47:48] WEST: The catastrophes are just so overwhelming. We need every source and resource to be mobilized, intellectual, moral, political, spiritual, and there is no doubt that the best of Socratic legacy of Athens and the best of the Prophetic legacy of Jerusalem, are crucial sources that can be mobilized to bring critique to bear on structures of domination, on forms of dogma, on how we come to terms with forms of death. But that doesn't mean there aren't rich resources among indigenous peoples, and in Africa, in Timbuktu, university in Asia, of course.

But the notion that somehow, we in this particular historical moment, that has been disproportionately shaped by Europe at its worst and at its best, the European ideals and the European crimes. Every civilization has got ideals and crimes. Right? So, that a place like Howard University, which is where the black bourgeoisies come from, you see, they historically have always been pulling from the Socratic legacy. Benjamin Mays, and we could go on and on. Mordecai Johnson, Toni Morrison, we go on and on and on. And the Socratic legacy too.

But, yes, you've got the rich black intellectual tradition, that are conversant, but also voices, not just extensions of Socrates, extensions of Hebrew scripture and so forth, the creative appropriations and interpretations. So, then to make that less and less available to a younger generation, that is already dealing with a dumbed-down market-driven education. And that's not true just for Howard, it's for Harvard, Yale, Princeton, USC Berkely, you can see the commodification and the bureaucratization of the university, in which the dumbing-down takes place. That's not right-wing discourse. It's the truth. Because the careerism and the opportunism generate a myopic

vision and short-term calculation. That's just the truth. That's the situation. So, I had to [...]: "Well, the right-wing is in love with Plato, just like you. So what?" [laughs]

[1:49:57] BUTLER: We're fighting about that.

[1:49:57] WEST: When I was in Charlottesville, these sick brothers of the Klan, and the neo-Nazis, they were listening to Motown.

[1:50:05] BUTLER: Yes. [laughs]

[1:50:06] WEST: Okay. You're going to kill me, and ... but want to listen to my music. That's a human thing, contradictory all the way down. Right? So that, the sense of ... this is neo... since when does the right-wing have a monopoly on the great classical works of any civilization, let alone the West's? It's sad that we even have to debate that. You know what I mean? It's sad ... Dante under exile with a bounty on his head, he becomes the right-wing... a right-wing object that's theirs? No. Dante's mine. And that's just the beginning. Do you see what I ...

[1:50:41] BUTLER: Yes, I'm with you.

[1:50:42] WEST: Absolutely.

[1:50:43] BUTLER: I mean, not all Classics courses are taught to communicate the message that the great ideals of our civilization are to be found in these texts. In fact, many, you know, people teach Classics in order to think about war or to think about slavery. I mean, the great work of Moses Finley on ancient slavery was part of a Classics class that I took, early on. The whole question of, how can you constitute democracy where women are not part of it? And foreigners are not, and they're the so-called barbarians, who don't speak proper language, because they're speaking another language. [laughs]

You know, that gives us a condensed framework for thinking about very fundamental questions, including grief, rage, murder, forgiveness, the relationship between law and justice. But also, let's remember that, you know, *Antigone*, a play that's important to all of us really, now is restaged on the rubble in Palestine, where homes used to be. Like, it's ... we get to reappropriate those, and let them speak to another audience. There's a Kurdish appropriation of *Antigone*. There are

several Latin American, there's one in ... there was one in Mexico that was lamenting the killing of women. Like, these ...

[1:52:08] CRITCHLEY: Nelson Mandela was involved in a production on Robben Island.

[1:52:11] BUTLER: There you go. I mean, but these texts don't belong to the left or the right. We need to actually appropriate them and let them speak for what we need them to speak for. And to let those histories resonate. So, I mean, I am all against the idea that: "Oh, these are the great texts of the Western civilization, and they contain the values." No. But they do produce condensed seams of strife and conflict, that allows us to have broader conversations. They're one of many. The ... people like Otto Kuusinen have written whole books on the postcolonial and colonial appropriations of tragedy, of ... for revolutionary purposes. So, we need to remember that these are resources among many, right? Not the only one. Not the most important, but they are resources among many, upon which we have to draw. And people have drawn, for really important purposes.

[1:53:12] CRITCHLEY: And each of them are marked by internal contradiction and strife. There used to be, at the University of Essex, when I was a student, and then a teacher, and this was a, you know, subsequently scrapped. It was a course called The Enlightenment, that was a critique of the Enlightenment. [laughs] It was called The Enlightenment, and through the lens of, you know, Western Marxism and Adorno, and you see how every Enlightenment text is a shadow text, right? Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Rousseau, you pick ... Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, everything is split, everything is divided. Here we have a picture of what Hegel were called, *Self-Alienated Spirit*, and it's ... you learn that ... you see that wall taking place historically, and that is empowering, is it not? It gives you ... I mean, this, it gives you stuff you can use.

[1:54:00] WEST: Absolutely. Very much so. I know, in my own intellectual formation, the great Raymond Williams' book on modern tragedy, and then Terry Eagleton in so many ways. That meant a lot, because, you know, I started reading Kierkegaard, so I already had a deep, deep sensitivity of the unlighted side of the human condition. And to have a leftist discourse that was tied ... that was secular, but was critical of some of the more sunny sides ... that was critical, that that was tied to the sunny sides, and critical of many tragic sensibility, Williams opened that up for me. And so did Eagleton, and by the time you get to your

work on ... take it to your powerful work on the tragic. Now I'm with the tragic comics, so that I'm with Chekhov. You all know that.

[1:54:50] BUTLER: [laughs] Yes.

[1:54:51] CRITCHLEY: Yes, I know that. Chekov [inaudible 1:54:52].

[1:54:52] WEST: Chekov. Deeper than all of them, but we don't have time to get into that right now. I know brother Glenn, we don't want to exclude you, brother, on this now.

[1:54:59] BUTLER: Yes, talk to us.

[1:54:59] WEST: Do you want to jump on in on some of this?

[1:55:01] BUTLER: [laughs]

[1:55:03] GREENWALD: Yes, no, it's funny that, you know, it's bringing back a lot of old memories of academia. We all shared with you what we discovered before we came on stage, which was ... I was feeling some sort of trauma about this event, right as I was about to do it, and then I remembered, I'm pretty sure that I had professor Butler as a professor in Philosophy, I think, in my freshman year of college, when I arrived onto campus, extremely arrogant, believing I knew everything, and I walked into Philosophy class, it might have been sophomore year, I believe it was Philosophy of Existentialism, and we were talking about Sartre and his views on gender, and I think there was ... the text was Simone de Beauvoir, and we were debating that, and I raised my hand to challenge Professor Butler, thinking I had a great argument, and she obliterated it.

And I think it was the first time ever, up until then, and maybe after, where I was kind of left speechless. But I ... you know, and it took me a few decades, I guess, to get over that trauma and be able to reenter a conversation with Judith, but I think that the reason I look back on those ... that experience so positively, despite those kinds of experiences, is because one of the things that academia does, is that it fosters a discourse where everything can be challenged. I found that idea super interesting, that, you know, you look at the Western canon, and instead of saying: "We need to get rid of it, because there are other things that matter, that have been excluded for too long", you can look

at it and say: “No, it can provide a window into questioning pieties and orthodoxies.”

And this is the thing that Cornel said, after I talked about Kyle Rittenhouse, that I found so important, was this idea that in so many of our societal sectors, certainly journalism, I think academia, although I don't want to speak authoritatively about it on a panel of two people who work in academia, when I don't, but it's certainly my impression in lots of other places, there has been a lessening of the ability to engage in dissent, engage in this kind of discourse, in a way that's constructive.

And I, you know, have loved the last couple of hours of being able to have this conversation about fraught topics, with three people who in our careers have often spawned a lot of controversy with our views, who think differently about a lot of different things, who nonetheless can have this conversation without personal strife, and I wish so much that this was the prevailing ethos in so many of our key institutional sectors, because, to me, this is where constructive dialogue happens, where thought happens. I've spent, as I said, the last two hours thinking and listening as much as I have been speaking, and I wish there was a lot more of that. Where there's less coercive pressure to embrace orthodoxy, and more of an attempt to convince and persuade, and include divergent views.

- [1:58:09] CRITCHLEY: But let me mess up this happy agreement.
- [1:58:13] WEST: That was a quote from sister Judith, wasn't it?
- [1:58:15] CRITCHLEY: Yes, that was a quote from Judith.
- [1:58:16] WEST: We just want the footnotes in here.
- [1:58:17] BUTLER: [laughs]
- [1:58:19] CRITCHLEY: There will be full footnotes afterwards. Now, the last question I've got here, which I just thought ... because this will ... could spice things up, it's question 40, and the last question that was sent in. It's to Judith, but I'd like it for all of us, to think about this: “Judith, you spoke in a recent lecture about a mandate and the need for a mandate.” Relation to vaccine. “If the mandate is for the necessary structural changes, in order to remedy harms carried out against bodies that matter, is it

possible that this mandate could not be a vaccine mandate? Isn't it to practice population-level bio-, or necro-politics with vaccines, exactly to say: "There are bodies that do not matter to us"? I.e., those bodies and lives which may be destroyed by a vaccine mandate."

And I wanted to just see where we are with that. Because it's interesting, because it is a culture war in terms of social division, the inflammation of social division. Here we are, in whatever stage of the pandemic this turns out to be, with a very strange situation, where legislation is being proposed in countries like Germany, with regard to the unvaccinated. And this does raise issues around, I don't know, who counts, who doesn't count, who's in, who's out, what one is free to do and not to do. I wondered whether we thought any of these issues, identity politics and culture wars, we could think about that through the lens of the pandemic, debates about vaccines and mandates and such like. Anything comes to mind?

[2:00:07] BUTLER: Well, I have to say that I don't remember using the word mandate, so I don't know in what context I apparently used it.

[2:00:13] CRITCHLEY: I don't have a footnote for that, no.

[2:00:14] BUTLER: Okay, because that would help me respond more thoughtfully to the question. I understand that on the left and the right, and perhaps in the spectrum between, that there are many people who worry that the health crisis is augmenting state powers, and in particular forms of state surveillance.

[2:00:40] CRITCHLEY: [...].

[2:00:42] BUTLER: Yes, and also the circumscription of personal liberties. But I also ... on the other hand, I think that this is a chance for us to rethink our commitment to individualism, as part of the spirit of capitalism. And that it's ... when I wear a mask in a situation where I'm bound to be close to other people, I'm not just protecting my life, or even expressing my personal choice, I'm also indicating that I'm bound to the person I am near, and that person can be another stranger. That my life is tied to that life, and in some sense, [laughs] the mask gives a kind of provisional material form to that social bond.

So, I'm obligated to care for others, and I would hope that they would

care for me, even if we don't know each other's names, or don't speak each other's language, precisely because our bodies are such, and our ... the way in which we live together, we are constantly taking in bits of each other. We share the air, we share surfaces, we sometimes share food, we ... you know it's a Lucretian problem, [laughs] bits of the other getting into me, and bits of me getting into the other. I mean, in a way, we are constantly ingesting other people's worlds, and they are ingesting ours. And that's part of what it is to be a body in the world. We're not just these closed entities, we have a lot of porosity, and that each angle of porosity is a social relation.

So, when I talk about vulnerability, as not just my personal attribute or my individual condition, but my relation to others, or my relation to infrastructure, or my relation to the environment, something about who I am and the relations that sustain me, and that ought to sustain me and you, is being articulated in that way. So, I am hoping that we can, from this pandemic, elaborate a deeper sense of interdependency, Dr. King talked about that, as a crucial dimension. Robin Kelley talks about that. I'm hoping that we can have a way of rethinking our embodied sociality, if I may speak that way, and the ways in which our lives are implicated in each other's lives.

So, I do I want governments to embrace that principle, and to represent that principle, but I also understand the other position, that if this state of exception increases the powers of the state to survey, to regulate, to invade lives, we're in trouble. But I want a different kind of government. You know, I'm not against government. I want ... I'm still in favor of good government, [laughs] and good health care, right? Affordable health care. Right? Accessible health care. I'm a left-liberal in this way. I'm not ... I don't want to call down all government services because I'm afraid of terrifying forms of state sovereignty. I want to struggle to separate those things. And that's what I think a responsible democratic socialism can do. So, that's where I stand.

[2:04:19] WEST:

Yes, I think there's always a tension between civic virtue and personal liberty, and that tension will always be there. The question is whether it is going to be creative or destructive. I tend to have a tilt for the personal liberty, because I'm always concerned about the rights of the dissenting voices, and I come from a people who has been incarcerated, assassinated, marginalized, when the voices are raised in

the name of white supremacist civic virtue. You see. And yet, civic virtue is crucial, when you have such a weakened feeble civic soul craft.

And so, personal liberty becomes licentiousness, selfishness: “I don’t care about public life, I don’t care about common good, I just care about myself”, then you’ve got something else going on. And the question becomes, through use of practical wisdom and phronesis: “How do you stay on the tightrope with the best of civic and the best of personal liberties, such that public health is addressed, and yet people don’t feel coerced and forced?” You see, the coercive civic virtue is an oxymoron in a certain sense. And even the founding fathers at their best, the Madisons and others, and I have strong critiques of the Madisons, but they were wrestling with this tension, within a very truncated American democracy. And so ...

[2:05:48] BUTLER: Yes. But isn’t the point to cultivate ... I mean, you talk about soul craft, which is beautiful, but to cultivate an ethos of care, right, that goes beyond the family, that goes beyond the local community, the local religion, like: “I’m not just looking out for my own, I’m looking out for people I don’t know, and people I don’t know are looking out for me.” And I think that we need to build that ethos somehow, precisely so that a simple request like, you know, acting in such a way that you do not imperil the life of another human, does not feel like coercion, but feels like a love of life, a way of being together, a way of being in the world, a way of expanding care networks.

[2:06:26] WEST: Absolutely. A way of being in the world, together in soc... absolutely. And that’s where civic education is supposed to play a role, right?

[2:06:31] BUTLER: Yes.

[2:06:32] WEST: To cultivate a critical sensibility and the maturation of a loving soul, caring, concerned about other than my beloved wife. And Annahita, you know, she has a deep suspicion of mandate, she comes from Iran. They have got all kinds of mandates in that fascist state. That kind of mandate slides down slippery slopes, keeping track of people, and so forth and so on, so I understand the source of her suspicion. I’ve got similar suspicion in terms of coming from a country that was democratic, but enslaved and Jim Crowed and Jane Crowed, and lynched and terrorized and traumatized, up until George Floyd and up until the present moment.

So, that kind of libertarian impulse, balanced with the civic virtue, balanced with the kind of, you know, rich socio-democratic, democratic socialist, even council-communists of Gorter, Anton Pannekoek and Rosa Luxemburg, Soviet without Bolsheviks, workers' organizations. That's part of my tradition too, you see. That's what makes me look different to brother Bernie. Bernie is the kind of New Deal-liberal social-democratic, that's revolutionary in America, we know that. But in terms of the larger spectrum, we want workers' organization with the rights, and the liberties, with democratic forms across the board.

[2:07:48] CRITCHLEY: Glenn Greenwald, what is your view on this?

[2:07:56] GREENWALD: Yes, I think covid is a great way to end the conversation, because I think it's going to be the defining event of our time, comparable probably to only ... to the 9/11-attack, in terms of at least political and cultural debates in the West, in the United States and in the western part of the world. For me, 9/11 was my entry-point into politics, and the framework that caused me to do that, was a fear had emerged about a threat that was very real, and that fear was being exploited, and in my view exaggerated, on purpose, in order to vest further power in the hands of the state, and to place the population in greater levels of fear, in order to breed an acquiescence or a conformity, and inability to question the state, which had postured itself as the protective wall that was going to keep us all safe from this threat.

And I see covid, and the pattern of covid, in a very similar way, in that ... you know, Judith referenced this, and I think it's worth emphasizing, that the power, to do things like order people to stay in their homes, and to shut down businesses, and to quarantine and to close borders, these are incredibly dangerous powers. They prevent citizens from organizing with one another, to protest people in power, to go out on the streets and organize, they prevent people from engaging in the most basic movement, and the fact that almost two years later, we're still accepting these kinds of extraordinarily draconian powers, even with the arrival of a vaccine, that is essentially safe and effective, is alarming to me.

As is the intolerance of descent that has become part of this fabric,

whereby, even though health authorities have been repeatedly wrong about things, and May ... in March of 2020, if you went on to YouTube and encouraged people to wear masks, you would have been in contravention to the consensus of health authorities, the World Health Organization, Dr. Fauci, who wear saying that masks are not only unnecessary, but potentially dangerous. And this kind of framework emerged, that no questioning of scientific consensus or the consensuses of authorities was permissible, people were removed from social media platforms if they questioned the origins of covid, even though there's now an open debate about it. And those kinds of things are alarming to me: The fact that a population over two years has been trained to never question the pronouncements of authorities that are often wrong, to accept the assertion of draconian powers, even if well-intentioned, without sometimes asking whether these powers are excessive.

And I think the vision that Judith drew, is one that I really am genuinely inspired by, the idea that we all need to overcome our sense that we're all kind of individualized, that we don't care for one another, that we have no responsibility to anybody else. But as Cornel said, I find it very difficult to see how that vision can be fulfilled, by threatening and coercing and forcing people upon pain of losing their jobs in the middle of a pandemic, if they don't comply with what they're told to do.

That doesn't seem like it's going to foster social cohesion to me, or the idea that we're all in this together. I think it's going kind of do the opposite. It's going to breed mistrust on the part of institutions, that if they're trying to tell me that I don't have the right to choose for myself what things I put into my body or my children's body, I think it's going to breed a lot of resentment, and I worry that instead of trying to use persuasion, trying to use an appeal to people's common humanity, to restore trust in our common fate, where we are all tied together, that there is kind of a punitive strain that has emerged, whereby we're telling people: "We don't know how effective cough-masks are, but if you don't wear them, you're going to be banned from all sorts of involvement in public life. And even though I am vaccinated and protected I still demand that you do, to the point that I want you to lose your job if you're not yet convinced that it's safe for you and your children and you don't obey."

And I just ... I'm concerned about some of the enduring political, cultural and social outcomes, from the way in which the pandemic has been discussed and managed, and it centralized power even more, in the biggest corporations. Amazon, Facebook, Google, have all gotten much wealthier, much more powerful. Small businesses have gone out of business because of lockdowns, and governments around the world have much greater power in their hands too, to sensor and to keep citizens locked down or quarantined, and in obedience. And I definitely worry about the long-term implications of that, while obviously acknowledging that covid is a serious health crisis.

[2:13:14] BUTLER:

Interesting. I think maybe this ... we do have a disagreement. I am a little bit more a skeptical of personal liberty these days. I think I was always on the side of personal liberty, I am not so sure what the personhood of personal liberty is, and if that's a form of individualism that actually is governed by kind of death-drive. You know, Glenn, you're in Brazil, and as you know, Bolsonaro has been accused in the International Criminal Court, if I'm not mistaken, of crimes against humanity, because he has failed to implement health policies that would have saved many people's lives.

And the lives that are gone are very often lives of people who are ... who have been living in tentative shelters or who are poor, and don't have the same kinds of protections as others who are more safely housed. I think that we have to look at people like Trump or Bolsonaro as appealing to this sense of personal liberty. Like: "I don't have to do anything to save anyone else. I don't have to change anything about my life. I refuse all regulations in the name of my personal liberty, because that's my personhood and that's my individualism." And it encourages a form of egoism, that doesn't recognize the deep ways in which we are connected to each other.

And either we are going to recognize those ways, and save some lives, or we're going to fail du recognize those ways and go down, killing or dying, with the flag of personal liberty. It's like, I think we've got a death-drive issue that uses the idea of personal liberty. Like I ... you know, people who are just ... you know, they don't care: "I'm not vaxed, I don't wear a mask, I'm up against you, I'm near you on the Subway. You die, I don't care, because I'm expressing my civil liberty." Now, I think as well, that we have to ask: "Who is dying?" Right? In the

US, we see it's black and brown people, at very high rates, it's the elderly, it's people who are most vulnerable, people who are unhoused.

We could say: "I don't want to obey a mandate, or for there to be a mandate, because I want my personal freedom, my ability to work", I understand that, but if your personal freedom and your ability to work comes at the expense of other people's lives, then you've got quandary, and we should be putting that quandary out front and center, because of course it's good to have freedom of movement, of course we need to work, but of course we need to save lives. And my fear, is when it's personal liberty versus the intensification of state powers, and their surveillance mechanisms in particular, that we are no longer able to have that conversation. Right? Put both values on the table.

- [2:16:30] WEST: That's true. But see, that's exactly what I mean by licentiousness, in terms of the ways in which personal liberty languages mobilize for licentiousness, because even in John Stuart Mill, you've got a harm principle.
- [2:16:40] BUTLER: [laughs] Yes, you do have a harm principle.
- [2:16:41] WEST: There's no liberty without constraint. There's no freedom without constraint, right?
- [2:16:45] BUTLER: Yes, but it's not just ...
- [2:16:47] WEST: So, there has to be some accountability. If we talk about impunity, the way Trump and the others talk about it, that has nothing to do with liberty. That's licentiousness there.
- [2:16:54] BUTLER: I understand that. But ... So, it's one thing for me to say: "I must constrain myself in order not to do harm, and then I am still here in the position of the individual, calculating what's harm and what's not, and he taught us how to calculate", but there might be an ethics that's beyond calculation. In other words: "I am thinking about my life, which means others are thinking about it in the same way, and we are linked in this living world, on this planet." Right? Which is why the interdependency that we need to understand to fight covid, is also the interdependency we need to understand to fight climate destruction.

[2:17:29] WEST: I agree.

[2:17:30] BUTLER: And so, we need a, I would call it a communist ontology, quite frankly.

[2:17:33] WEST: But there's a solidarity, that's thickened in any sense of personal liberty.

[2:17:36] BUTLER: No, I think we need a radical social ontology. We need to rethink selfhood, its boundaries, its openings, to have a completely different ethics and a politics of care. Of ... so I'm pushing against the personal liberty folk right now. Sorry, I know that's extreme.

[2:17:55] WEST: Yes, no, I understand, sister. I un...

[2:17:56] GREENWALD: Can I just interject one ...

[2:17:58] BUTLER: Yes. Who is ...

[2:18:00] CRITCHLEY: Yes. Please.

[2:18:01] GREENWALD: No, no, I didn't mean to interrupt, I just ...

[2:18:02] CRITCHLEY: No, go on.

[2:18:05] GREENWALD: I have one point about Brazil that I find so interesting, and I act... no, I think you illustrates your point really well, that in Brazil you have Jair Bolsonaro, who, as you absolutely correctly explained, has been incredibly reckless, at best, in terms of the mismanagement of the covid-pandemic, clearly causing all kinds of deaths that were avoidable. And he has as well engaged in the discourse that vaccines, for him, are something he doesn't think he needs, because he has natural immunity, he has encouraging people from the beginning to go out without masks and the like, and yet, at the same time, in Brazil there's almost no vaccine hesitancy that there is in the United States. It's something like 95, 97 percent of the adult population has been voluntarily going to get vaccinated.

And the reason for that, is because they have a faith and trust in the Brazilian health care system, that goes all the way back to when Lula broke the patent on HIV-medication, saying he refuses to watch people die of a preventable disease because they can't afford the medication. Brazil has made huge strides in vaccinating people, and providing an

amazingly robust public health service, and so instead of forcing people to go and do it, you've convinced them to trust the system, that they have their best interest in mind, so you have almost no vaccine hesitancy in Brazil, despite having a president telling them they shouldn't get the vaccine or don't need it.

Whereas in the United States, a lot of the people who have been vaccine hesitant ... some of them have been, obviously, conservatives, who have bought into this, what you might want to call death-wish personal liberty, if you want, but a lot of them as well have been overwhelmingly black and brown communities, poor people who have come not to trust, you know, health authorities. They remember experiments from the 20th century, and the malicious intent behind them. And that's why I say, I think this vision of bringing us together is going to have to be about restoring people's faith and trust in the institutions we want them to listen to, instead of threatening and coercing them and forcing them to, upon pain and punishment, to obey. I think that's a much more kind of cohesive framework, for getting people to think differently about the world.

- [2:20:30] CRITCHLEY: We're kind of approaching the closing statement time. Nine minutes to go, right? Okay. Who was it that said that: "Freedom is a good horse to ride, but you have got to ride it somewhere"?
- [2:20:41] BUTLER: [laughs]
- [2:20:42] CRITCHLEY: [...], maybe?
- [2:20:43] WEST: Yes. That's the first time I've heard that's horse being ridden ... that's ...
- [2:20:44] CRITCHLEY: Freedom is a good horse to ride ... but you've got to ride it ... freedom itself, is ... You know, I'm with Judith on this, that ... you know, I mean [...] is freedom is the problem. [laughs] It's how you even rethink what it means to be a person, a moral person, apart from individualism, but that will take us somewhere else.
- [2:21:05] WEST: That's ... it raises the deep issue of Dostoyevsky: "How many people really want to be free? Are they willing to follow a Pied Piper to evade the serious weight and gravitas of what freedom is all about?" And that cuts across class, color, culture, sexual orientation. That's where

authoritarianism comes in, you see, so you have to have courage, you have to talk about the enabling virtue of courage. And that's got to be part of your conception of who you are in your movements, in your mosques, your churches, your synagogues, your educational institutions, across the board. And what we love about the tragic is what? Those agents had courage. Hitting up against the non-gay, hitting up against a constraint. We don't live within a moment in which courage is widely spread.

[2:21:54] BUTLER: Oh.

[2:21:54] CRITCHLEY: What we love about the ancients is that ...

[2:21:56] WEST: A lot of cowardly is out there, I'm telling you, [laughs] it comes in different colors too.

[2:22:01] CRITCHLEY: No... yes, what we know about tragic figures, is that they ... that there's courage, but there's also that there were not full agents. [laughs] Their agency was partial, and they knew their agency was partial.

[2:22:14] WEST: But what does that mean? They weren't full agents.

[2:22:15] CRITCHLEY: When they were acting, they were being acted through, by the past. Antigone, Oedipus, they were being ... something was being channeled through them, and somehow, the miracle of Greek tragedies, we see that, we see individuals ravaged by the death-drive, actually.

[2:22:32] BUTLER: Yes, well, it's the structure of the curse, right? But sometimes people are able to evade the curse or disempower it. But it's true, we all act in ways ... we think we are the ground of our own action, but many historical forces act through us, and we are formed. We are formed and disposed in certain ways. We're not determined, we're still free, but it's a struggle.

[2:22:54] CRITCHLEY: Yes.

[2:22:54] WEST: Right. But the best of traditions can work through us. I mean, my mother works through me every day. I mean, I'm trying to keep track of the best. She had the worst too. But that's Gadamer's point though, isn't it? That we're constituted by antecedent practices, figures, discourses, stories, symbols and so forth.

[2:23:14] CRITCHLEY: My mother never shuts up [...].

[2:23:15] BUTLER: [laughs]

[2:23:15] WEST: No, but she loves you to death, and she's proud of you. And I think she has got good grounds for being proud of you, brother.

[2:23:22] BUTLER: [...]

[2:23:22] CRITCHLEY: [laughs] Anyway. So, let's move to our closing statements. We're all taking in [...], maybe we should give the floor firstly to Glenn Greenwald?

[2:23:31] BUTLER: Yes.

[2:23:32] CRITCHLEY: So, Glenn, how would you like to close things out, in whichever way you would like?

[2:23:42] GREENWALD: Well, first of all I just want to again emphasize how thoroughly I've enjoyed this discussion. It is rare to be able to sit and take the time and to examine these kinds of complex issues in a deliberative way, with people who you have enough in common with to have an constructive discussion, and enough that you see things differently with and that you bring a different life experience to, to be able to examine some of the clashes as well, and in a way that is constructive. And I'm always really grateful when I can participate in a discussion that is civil and thoughtful and constructive, and yet still has the integrity of everybody kind of advocating for their ideas in the best way that they can, and so I want to thank the organizers again, for such a great event, and for my fellow panellists, for making such a discussion, great discussion.

You know, I think that one of the things that has emerged most from everything we've all been saying, is that we think that there is a social pathology that is overarching, in which ... in whatever ways we all kind of are being far too hostile with one another, thinking about one another over here in our camps, incapable of forming dialogue, incapable of forming spiritual connections, incapable of creating a society that's based on the idea that even though we are individuals, we also are going back to our roots, social and political animals, and part of a society, and inevitably that's going to be the case.

And there's always going to be this conflict between, on the one hand, our craving to be part of a society and our need to be part of a society, and on the other, our desire to be free individuals. And those conflicts are often going to be irresolvable in a clear way. I think that one of the things that for me is exacerbating this problem, is that so much of our discourse as designed on its face to bring us together, is instead having the opposite effect of tearing us apart. And I am particularly worried about the discourse that emphasizes our differences in a way that obfuscates our commonality.

And we began by talking about the various ways that identity politics can be used and deployed, and the understanding of what it means, based on how it's used. And, you know, I think that there has been enormous strides made in the best parts of identity politics, which is the idea that in our society, every time a privilege, or a right, or an opportunity is determined, based upon our immutable characteristics, or who we are as a person as opposed to our actions, that is something pernicious and toxic, and that we want to fight against. And that is the kind of thing that to me has fostered a greater social cohesion.

What I see working in the opposite direction is the kind of politics, the kind of discourse, the kind of cultural framework that encourages us to see one another not as fellow human beings interlinked with one another, but that forces us to see ourselves first and foremost as members of separate groups, and is constantly reinforcing the idea that the way in which we ought to be understood, the way in which we ought to be treated, the way in which we ought to be talked to, and about, is based on memberships in those groups.

And so, you know, I think it's great when everyone can first agree on the goal, and I think we did have a clear common vision of how society can be better. Once that happens, then it's just a question of figuring out how best to construct a politics that fosters that ultimate vision. And I think thinking about the ways identity politics as we talked about it can foster that, in ways that it can impede that, is a really important project, so I'm glad we spent the last couple of hours exploring that.

[2:27:57] CRITCHLEY:

Thank you, Glenn Greenwald. Cornel West?

- [2:28:01] WEST: Well, I agree with brother Glenn, this has been a wonderful conversation, We thank our brothers and sisters at the Holberg cCommittee, for bringing us together.
- [2:28:08] CRITCHLEY: I think the moderation has been particularly good.
- [2:28:09] BUTLER: [laughs] Yes, thank you, Simon.
- [2:28:13] WEST: I think [...] the MC, because we know brother Simon is a musician too. But I think of that wonderful line in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Examples of a go-kart of judgment." Examples. How do we attend to exemplary movements? Exemplary institutions? Exemplary practices? Exemplary human beings? Because, again, I come back ... most of human history, is a history of organized greed, institutional hatred, and [...] resentment and deceit. That's what it is. You can't get around it. Whatever *-ism* you want to call it. Right?

And so, the question becomes: "What are the countervailing figures, voices, institutions against those hounds of hell?" Now, when I was coming along the Charlotte Baptist Church, we were told: "If the Kingdom of God is within you, then everywhere you go, you ought to [...] leave a little Heaven behind." And the question becomes, as intellectuals: "What kind of heaven are we leaving behind, in terms of our critiques, our witnesses, our compassion, our willingness to live and die, our willingness to be nonconformist, our willingness to bear witness against the crowd?" That's the *in*, but not *of* quality. That's right. Not just a prophetic legacies of Jerusalem, but of any serious thinker, who has a deep vocation, and that's what all three of you, all exemplify, in your own practices.

And every practice is going to be, you know, fallen, and finite in that sense, you see. So that, in the end, you know, there's going to be a question of: "Can we pass on these various kinds of examples, tied to a joy?" Not the joyless quest for insatiable pleasure of late capitalist culture, but a genuine joy. We started with Curtis Mayfield. He's playing his guitar and he's singing some truth. Because he's got a deep joy. David Bowie is the same way. Aretha Franklin is the same way. Our young folk need to find joy in quest for truth, beauty, goodness and, for someone religious like me, of the holy. But we're always up against the grain. Always.

[2:30:32] CRITCHLEY: Last word goes to Judith Butler.

[2:30:34] BUTLER: Oh, well, thank you all for being here, and what an honor to be in conversation, again, with you, Simon, and you, Cornel, and Glenn, to see you again. I just so apologize that I destroyed your young aspirations to have your point of view on Sartre and de Beauvoir. I'm afraid I do have strong views on that issue, and probably was less open-minded than I should have been.

[laughter]

[2:31:06] BUTLER: I guess, I still want to just come back to where I began, with the question of caricature. You know, like wokeness or cancel-culture, or being so rooted in your identity you can only talk to people, or countenance the views of people, who are just like you. And sometimes I ... I mean, certainly, we all see bits of that in our world. We see most of it, I think, on social media, occasionally in the classroom, but most of my classrooms are actually more openminded than that. There's not a lot of cancelling and calling out.

There might be some hard questions, there might be a demand to be heard. But even people who speak from their location and their history is saying: "Listen, you need to hear from me. I come from this history. I come from this colonized region of the world. I come from this history of violence." They are addressing someone who is not themselves, and not like them. They actually want to be heard, and that mode of address might be the Levinasian moment. It's an ethical demand on the other to listen up, to allow your frameworks to be challenged, to live with the discomfort of a challenge, to hear the legitimate claim in somebody else's angry voice.

So, I think we need to give each other a little more space, and have a different kind of listening practice, so that we can revise the conceptual and political frameworks that haven't been working for a whole lot of people. We can't just clutch them, like: "Oh, they've worked for so long. Who are these people? They're fragmenting. They're deviating." It's like, no, maybe they're actually asking you to revise. And sometimes that's painful, especially from a position of privilege.

It does mean losing privilege, it means losing the presumption that

your way of looking at the world is the universal way of looking at the world, [laughs] but that's a grief, that's a loss, that has to be endured. Alright? I mean, I've always thought white supremacists have to endure a certain kind of loss. They are not superior, and must live through that loss and learn to live in a different world. Right. There's rage, but there's also grief. I'd say go in the way of grief, because that kind of grieving is going to open up the world to a more equal, more caring, more communicative, more joyful place of cohabitation, and of social transformation, moving forward. So ...

[2:33:48] CRITCHLEY: I think what you say about mourning and precarious life in relationship to that, and ... yes.

[2:33:54] BUTLER: Well, I'm aware ... you know, even in Brazil, people would say to me: "Look, if gay families are okay, if gay marriage is okay, then you're saying that the idea of the family, the heterosexual family, as stipulated by *The Bible* ...", I'd say: "Where did it stipulate that exactly? I'm not sure if you read *The Bible*, it's a certain reading of *The Bible*." Anyway, that idea of the family, that will lose its sense of being natural and universal. It's like: "Lose it? You can still have it. You could ... you like your heterosexual family? You can be right in there. You can have it. But you might be living next to somebody else, who has a different set of intimate associations, maybe gay marriage, maybe gay family, might be blended, might be any number of things, but all you've lost is your sense of universality, necessity and naturalness." And that's a good loss to endure. Because it will in the end, you know, connect you more broadly to the human community. So, I don't know, that's my view.

[2:34:55] CRITCHLEY: So, wherever you are in the world, I hope you enjoyed that as much as I enjoyed that, and ...

[2:35:03] WEST: Well, thank you, brother.

[2:35:04] BUTLER: Thank you, Simon.

[2:35:05] CRITCHLEY: Thank you, and, you know, listen to some Curtis Mayfield.

[2:35:09] WEST: Listen to some Curtis.

[2:35:10] CRITCHLEY: Listen to whatever music gives you joy, and feel some joy on a Saturday evening, wherever you are.

[2:35:16] BUTLER: Alright.

[2:35:18] CRITCHLEY: And thank you very much to the Holberg for making this happen.
Thank you very much.

[2:35:23] BUTLER: Thank you.

[2:35:25] GREENWALD: Thank you everybody.