

WHO WE ARE: A CHRONICLE OF RACISM IN AMERICA

EPISODE 3: A HOME AND A COUNTRY

CARVELL: This is Who We Are, a Chronicle of Racism in America, a podcast by Ben and Jerry's and produced by Vox Creative. I'm Carvell Wallace.

To be Black in America is to carry a very specific fear. As police brutality stalks our communities — as the police stalk *us* — the lingering question is always, “when will that viral video, that hashtag, show up at my door?”

MISKI: The day in which, uh, we all learned about, um, George Floyd's murder, uh, was a day in which, you know, I already had some body pain.

CARVELL: That's Miski Noor. They're co-director of Black Visions Collective, a Minneapolis-based queer- and trans-centering organization working towards Black liberation.

MISKI: I woke up, um, to like a flurry of messages, um, from comrades and people, um, locally and across the country who were like, “What do you need? Are you okay? Um, we're here for you.” And then to hear that or read that and to see, you know, a video going viral all over social media from my neighborhood, from the corner store where I often, you know, get candy.

Um, I, yeah, it was, it was a very surreal moment of like, I've been here before, right? Um, this is not the first time our city has murdered a Black person in the street.

CARVELL: But it was the first time in a century that this had happened during a global pandemic.¹ People had been separated from each other for months, but in times of collective grief, our instinct is to come together. How do you maintain social distancing at a time when you're aching for connection?

MISKI: That first day there was a rally called at the Memorial site where he was murdered. And so ended up there, you know, and was trying to socially distance, you know, trying to like—went around the block. And so we could hear, but just trying to, trying to social distance. Uh, and then just seeing that, that, wasn't a real thing.² I remember the moment in which, like, I saw like hundreds, thousands of people just like back-to-front, shoulder-to-shoulder marching down the street, like we weren't in a pandemic. And it just,

¹ Last time this happened was in 1919 with the Spanish flu. Racial strife was flaring across the United States. Black Americans were standing up to societal structures in unpredictable ways. People were enduring months of a deadly pandemic infecting millions worldwide, shuttering businesses and heightening fears of a lengthy economic downturn. That was 1919, during what would later be coined the “Red Summer,” when communities across America were reeling from white mobs inciting brutality against Black people and cities were still wrestling with a third wave of the so-called Spanish flu pandemic that emerged the previous year.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/racial-violence-pandemic-how-red-summer-1919-relates-2020-n1231499>

² Source: <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/29/21274364/george-floyd-minneapolis-uprising>

like, really clearly, like, landed on my body what people were willing to risk, uh, in this moment.

CARVELL: Racism and coronavirus have been called the twin pandemics.³ But the urgency of that protest echoes a long history. In America, Black people's bodies have always been on the line--from the auction blocks to the streets. And then as now, the country's violent attempts to impose "law and order" were meted out by the long arm of the law. In this episode, we'll look at the resistance of state violence: the way policing of Black bodies was written into the Constitution, and the ways throughout history that Black folks have resisted.

KELLIE: A lot of my students come to me and they have these ideas about the long freedom struggle or the Civil Rights Movement. That is very much like this sort of kumbaya moment where people came together, they locked arm-in-arm. They were, there was so much solidarity. Uh, King was so beloved. You know, we think that he's like, I don't know, like Jesus' little brother or something like the way that he sort of loved, honored and remembered. Um, and none of that could be further from the truth.

CARVELL: Dr. Kellie Carter Jackson is an assistant professor of history at Wellesley College. Her book *Force and Freedom* posits that Black resistance—protest—is the only way to liberation in America. You know, we, when we think of protests, now we typically think that protest looks like people standing in the streets with some placards and some sayings on it that are Instagrammable. But you actually, in your work, you cite slave—enslaved people running away as one of the earliest forms of protest. Why do you frame it that way? Say more about that.

KELLIE: So, yeah. So I think that again, when it comes to the abolitionist movement, we have these very romantic stories that we tell ourselves about the Underground Railroad and people sort of running away as though running away was very easy to do. Or as though running away did not require, violence or force, that when people stole themselves away—because Black people were considered property—it was a dangerous endeavor and that people armed themselves, and they did everything that they could to flee. And when we think about Harriet Tubman, you know, oftentimes we don't talk about the fact that she's strapped⁴! You know, she's armed for every single trip. You know, she has a pistol or some sort of firearm or Dirk knife on her to protect herself, to protect the people that she's bringing out of slavery.

And so this was a very violent endeavor. It is both flight and fight. I think both are required. That oftentimes fleeing required fighting. And so when we think of the, the ultimate protest of, of how do we undermine the institution of slavery? Well, I steal your property. I steal your ability to declare me as your property, and I run away from you, you know, it's, it does violence to the system of slavery itself, but also it's a violent act in that a lot of slave catchers

³ Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/07/double-pandemic-covid-flu/614152/>

⁴ "Fact: Harriet Tubman carried a small pistol with her on her rescue missions, mostly for protection from slave catchers, but also to encourage weak-hearted runaways from turning back and risking the safety of the rest of the group. Tubman carried a sharpshooter's rifle during the Civil War." Source: https://www.nps.gov/hatu/planyourvisit/upload/MD_TubmanFactSheet_MythsFacts_2.pdf

lost their lives, you know, catching slaves.⁵ That was the deadliest catch is, is trying to retrieve slaves because they knew what they were going back to. And, so, it was literally give me liberty or give me death.

CARVELL: That tension between Black people's desire for liberty and the country's desire for our subjugation goes back a long way. It's built into the Constitution—and we'll get to that in a second. But as Deputy Legal Director of the ACLU, Jeffery Robinson, reminded me: it's also built into something you might have sung as a child, with your hand over your heart, over and over again.

I remember being a very young kid and my cousin went to a school called Francis Scott Key Elementary, and like being eight, I was like “Who is this Francis Scott Key?” And then I was told the story that he was this wonderful person who fought for freedom. And then one beautiful day, he looked out and he saw the bombs bursting in air and he was so inspired, he wrote this beautiful poem and that's what our story is about. And, uh, not knowing any better, I internalized that. So, imagine my surprise when I learned that there were more verses to this thing than just like, “I saw some beautiful stuff outside and it made me emotional about freedom.” So, what—when was that poem written and, and what do we leave out of that poem when we talk about it today?

JEFFERY: Well, I can just say that I had much the same reaction to what I was taught as a youngster about, you know, it says it in the first verse, bombs bursting in the air and the flags still being there. And, and, and so, you are so right that the stories that we tell about ourselves define who we are as a nation. Francis Scott Key wrote the national anthem after sitting in Baltimore Harbor and watching essentially a 25 hour bombardment of Fort McHenry by the British.⁶ And this is during the war of 1812. And after 25 hours of bombardment, and that flag still waving, he was overcome with patriotism and he wrote the poem that became our national anthem. People know the first verse, but they don't know about the second, third and fourth verses. And the third verse in particular tells a very different story. Because what I found out in doing my research is that three weeks, about three weeks, before Francis Scott Key was in Baltimore Harbor, he was in Washington DC, and he was watching a group of British troops supplemented by a group called the Colonial

⁵ Edward Gorsuch, a wealthy slaveholder, led a party of slave catchers into Lancaster County. Hearing that they were on the farm of William Parker, a free African American, they, with the help of US Marshals, attempted to forcefully enact the arrest warrants. When Gorsuch and his men arrived, Eliza, Parker's wife, blew a horn which summoned sympathetic neighbors. Armed neighbors including former slaves as well as free Black and white abolitionists converged on the Parker farm and confronted the Gorsuch party. Fighting broke out and the elder Gorsuch was killed and his son wounded. The US Marshals and the slave catchers retreated. Source: <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/christiana-riot-1851/>

Deeper account here: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1866/03/the-freedmans-story-continued/308738/>

⁶ Source: <https://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/baltimore-in-the-balance.aspx>

Marines, drive Americans back into Washington DC and set the White House on fire.⁷ Now who were the Colonial Marines?

JEFFERY: I had no idea until I did this research. They were escaped, enslaved Black men who fought with the British during the war of 1812. And I thought to myself, "Why would they have fought with the British?" And of course the answer was very simple. Because the British said, "If we win, you get your freedom." And they were vicious. When you're fighting a war in a foreign country, if you have troops that know the trails and know the rivers and know where you can cross and know how you can approach a town and not be seen--so, the Colonial Marines were incredibly valuable. And the third verse of the national anthem literally ends by saying:

*No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave
And the star spangled banner in triumph, doth wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*

Francis Scott Key was saying, if you fight against America for your freedom, we will hunt you down. 'Cause no refuge is gonna save you. And we will put you in the dirt because we will bury you for fighting against us. That is our national anthem. And the fact that we don't sing the third verse doesn't mean that it's not there.

MISKI: The police, which are just, um, the enforcement arm of white supremacy, right? Um, and, and really are rooted in both slave catching and union busting.⁸ And it's important for us to understand both of those things, uh, because, that goes to show how the police are here to protect property and profit, um, over people.⁹

⁷ "One by one, the buildings at the heart of the American government went up in flames. On the evening of August 24, 1814, British troops torched the Capitol, the Treasury, the President's House (not yet called the White House). ... Despite such forebodings, the burning of Washington did not herald disaster for the floundering American cause. Instead, it turned out to be the prelude to one of the most celebrated expressions of patriotic fervor in the young country's history: Francis Scott Key's composition of "The Star-Spangled Banner," written following the British attack on Baltimore Harbor three weeks after the assault on the capital." Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/francis-scott-key-the-reluctant-patriot-180937178/>

"In fact, just weeks before, on Aug. 24, 1814, the Colonial Marines had participated in the Battle of Bladensburg outside Washington, D.C. The Bladensburg fight was a quick, embarrassing defeat for American troops — something Key knew because he'd witnessed it up close as a volunteer aide to a U.S. general. The British forces, including the Colonial Marines, had then continued to Washington the same day, infamously occupying and torching the White House." Source: <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/13/more-proof-the-u-s-national-anthem-has-always-been-tainted-with-racism>

"Admiral Sir George Cockburn of the Royal Navy. Two hundred years ago this August, he fought his way to the White House at the head of an army partly composed of slaves he had freed, armed, and trained and torched the place, along with the Capitol and much of official Washington. In the course of a two-year campaign, he rescued as many as 6,000 slaves, and despite Key's hopeful verse, not to mention angry demands from the U.S. government, he sailed them away to freedom." Source: <https://harpers.org/archive/2014/09/washington-is-burning/3/>

⁸ On the historical deployment of law enforcement in union-busting to the benefit of the deepening of their institutional and municipal roots and history of deployment on behalf of corporations. See: "The Strange Career of A.A. Ahner" by Rosemary Feurer in Pearson, Chad. *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism*. University of Illinois Press, 2017.

⁹ "As African slaves arrived at the British colony of Carolina in the 17th century, keeping them in line was seen as an essential community function. The local government at first gave white citizens the right to apprehend, "chastise" and send home a slave who had left their master's property without permission, according to The Police Control of the Slave in South Carolina, by Howell Meadoes Henry. Then the government mandated that other citizens capture such wayward slaves or else risk being fined. Neither law was terribly effective. So, in 1704, government leaders in Charleston decided to create the Colonies' first slave patrol — the forefathers to today's police forces. 'The similarities between the slave patrols and modern American policing are too salient to dismiss or ignore. Hence, the slave patrol should be considered a forerunner of modern American law enforcement,' write K.B. Turner, David Giacomassi and Margaret Vandiver in "Ignoring

CARVELL: That's Miski Noor.

MISKI: There is privilege in being the enforcement arm of white supremacy, right? There is privilege in, uh, being the ones to enforce law and order on the behalf of rich corporations, right? There is, there is, benefit to exploitation. And so, um, there, they aren't a neutral party and I think that's a part of what our work has been trying to show really clearly.

I think there is definitely, uh, the culture being impacted by this "Minnesota Nice," right? That—or "Midwest Nice" even, cause I know it's not just in Minnesota. But this idea, I feel like the police and, and white folks here have really internalized that they are the progressive whites, you know? And there isn't really this acknowledgement or this owning of how folks participate in and perpetuate violence against Black folks. The police department here in Minneapolis is a poster child for reform. And still that reform hasn't made it possible for them to stop killing us in the streets.¹⁰

CARVELL: There are so many names I wish I didn't know.

Breonna Taylor. Sandra Bland. Philando Castile. Tamir Rice. Eric Garner. Michael Brown. I wish i'd never heard of them, because they continued to live quietly remarkable lives that never came to international attention, that never made the evening news.

Sometimes I dream of Black anonymity. I dream that we don't become hashtags. That we don't become chants at marches. That no one has to say our name but those who love us, as we move through our communities, carefree and whole and alive.

And I'm not the first person to wish for this, and I won't be the last. But how can you reform an institution that's working exactly the way it was designed to work?

JEFFERY: When you go deeper into the history, you find out that slave patrols existed in the South. One of the best examples is in South Carolina and they existed because when an enslaved person would escape, they had to be hunted down and brought back¹¹. And so when the Colonial America became the constitutional America, we had a choice to make:

the Past: Coverage of Slavery and Slave Patrols in Criminal Justice Texts," published in 2006, in the Journal of Criminal Justice Education." Source:

<https://www.ozy.com/true-and-stories/how-american-policing-started-with-south-carolina-slave-catchers/333704/>

¹⁰ "Years of dialogue about police and criminal justice reforms in Minneapolis had improved the relationship between the African American community and law enforcement, activists say — before the police killing this week of George Floyd, a handcuffed Black man who died after a white officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes as he pleaded for air. ...'Progress and change can ebb and flow,' said Jeremiah Ellison, who won a City Council seat after participating in past protests against police killings of African Americans in Minnesota. The four nights of unrest this week — including the torching of a police station that officers abandoned — 'proved to me that we've regressed to the point of 2015,' Ellison said, referring to the year that also saw protests after the death of Jamar Clark, a Black man killed by police. Source: <https://www.twincities.com/2020/05/30/before-george-floyds-death-minneapolis-Black-activists-saw-progress-on-police-reforms/>

"Minneapolis is a case study in a city that embraced the pillars of the final report from the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, a signature blueprint from the Obama era on how to reform American law enforcement. After five years, the city is no closer to achieving the primary objective of creating trust between police and the communities they serve." Source: <https://www.startribune.com/killing-of-george-floyd-shows-that-years-of-police-reform-fall-far-short/571373582/>

¹¹ "Slave patrols were a crucial mechanism of slave control in Colonial and antebellum South Carolina. Like the state's earliest slave codes, the earliest slave patrol systems were based on Barbadian models. Following the Stono Rebellion in 1739, the Assembly passed the Negro Act of 1740, which provided for regular, constant patrols. In South Carolina all plantation owners were called upon to serve in patrols." Source: <https://www.southcarolinapublicradio.org/post/s-slave-patrols>

are we going to continue to enslave people? And if we are, how are we going to enforce that? And in the Constitution, Article Four¹², what you see is every enslaved person who escapes must be returned. And what that means is federal law enforcement is involved.

So, the Constitution of the United States—literally the document that formed our country—gave law enforcement the obligation to suppress, control, and eliminate any attempts by Black people to be free. That is the legacy of how policing Black bodies in America started. And the slave patrols in the South morphed into local police departments in the South.¹³ And when you just think about it, bringing it up to the present people talk about, “Oh my God, there were those horrible times where there were Black Codes and Jim Crow laws.” Who do you think enforced those laws?

It was the police who enforced those laws. The concept of the badge and the gun has always had a different meaning in Black America than it has in white America.

CARVELL: And while it's easy to see this as a uniquely Southern origin story, that would be ahistorical too, says Dr. Carter Jackson.

KELLIE: Even think about the history of the police in the North. The police in the North, are a direct response to Black migration and Black Southerners moving out of the South into cities like Chicago and Detroit and Boston and New York.¹⁴ And all these white Northerners are like, “What are we going to do with all these Black people? Send in the cops. We've got to protect our homes. We have to protect our job opportunities. We have to protect our capital from Black people.” Um, so all of that is related. And I think we're really sort of being naive if we don't think that the police are there to enforce those ideas in 2020.

CARVELL: And nowhere is the historical use of police to deny Black freedom so poetically echoed than in one charge.

One of the things I always trip up on is this notion of resisting arrest, the fact that that in and of itself is a crime. And that strikes me as part of a very long legacy of finding ways to criminalize Black folks for being human beings. Because if someone rolls up on me and tries to restrain me, my urge is going to be to fight.

JEFFERY: Exactly.

Especially if it's this force that I know probably doesn't have my personal safety or best interests at heart.

¹² Article 4, Section 2. The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States. A Person charged in any State with Treason, Felony, or other Crime, who shall flee from Justice, and be found in another State, shall on Demand of the executive Authority of the State from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the State having Jurisdiction of the Crime. No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due. Source: <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/article/article-iv>

¹³ “A broader picture, including the roles and development of policing bodies in both rural and urban areas, offers some more insight. Officially designated by authorities as ‘slave patrols,’ ‘alarm men,’ or ‘searchers,’ and nicknamed ‘paddyrollers’ or ‘paterolers’ by those they policed, these emerging institutions changed during the 18th and 19th centuries in ways that directly foreshadowed the institutional and structural character of modern police forces.[4] Source: <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2016/09/where-do-police-come-from/>

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/6/21280643/police-brutality-violence-protests-racism-khalil-muhammad>

JEFFERY: And let's be clear, it's not "fight." It's someone grabs your arm and you jerk your arm away, saying, "Hey, what are you doing?" You've just resisted arrest. You've just assaulted a police officer.

CARVELL: Right? And in that very simple act, I've now committed a crime.

JEFFERY: A crime!

Even if I didn't have, even if I hadn't committed a crime before, now I've committed a crime because someone grabbed my arm and I jerked it away instinctively after I didn't commit a crime. And now I'm just like suddenly thrown into this thing. And so--

JEFFERY: I can't tell you how many times as a criminal defense lawyer, I represented people who were charged with obstructing a police officer and resisting arrest. As soon as you see those two charges, the first thing that came into my head is "attitude ticket." Somebody didn't say, "yes, sir," "no, sir." And somebody said, "Don't put your hands on me." And this is what happened.

CARVELL: Wasn't there a law also on the books that said if a slave encountered some kind of harm or death as a result of resisting--tell us a little bit about this Virginia law from 1669.¹⁵

JEFFERY: Virginia passed a law that said if an enslaved person is killed while resisting a master, the master has not committed a felony. Now, if you step back for a minute, you would say, well, there aren't any enslaved people anymore, and there aren't any masters. And so that law is a vestige of a time long gone in America. But when you think about what racism and white supremacy has meant in America—that law isn't on the book in any state in America. But I'll tell you this: go back 10 years and get the name of every Black person in America, every unarmed Black person in America that was killed by police, and then compare that number to the number of police officers who were prosecuted for that killing. And then compare *that* number to the number of police officers who were convicted of anything. The law may not be on the books, but the concept is alive and well.

CARVELL: The bitter irony is, that as this country has fought so hard against us, we have fought equally hard for the soul of the country. Our struggle for our own freedom and determination is also a struggle for this country to live up to its actual ideals.

It strikes me, too, that — it, the fact that it's necessary for us to put our bodies on the line in order to protect democracy as a whole, which in a large sense is what, you know, I think of like the 1619 Project, kind of the main thesis of that, of that essay is the idea that like Black people and our struggle and death has been not only to protect our communities and

¹⁵ "An act about the casual killing of slaves. WHEREAS the only law in force for the punishment of refractory [sic] servants (a) resisting their master, mistris [sic] or overseer cannot be inflicted upon negroes, nor the obstinacy of many of them by other then violent meanes [sic] suppress [sic], Be it enacted and declared by this grand assembly, if any slave resist his master (or othe by his masters order correcting him) and by the extremity of the correction should chance to die, that his death shall not be accompted [sic] ffelony [sic], but the master (or that other person appointed by the master to punish him) be acquit from molestation, since it cannot be presumed that prepensed malice (which alone makes murder ffelony [sic]) should induce any man to destroy his owne estate." Source: <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/living/docs1.html>

ourselves, but also to protect the actual, or create, or engender, the democracy that is spoken of.

But to that end, we have always been on the line in America. We've always been the front, the first people — I think of Crispus Attucks being the first person killed, you know.¹⁶ You know, like someone — our producer said, “That's just like the Black person being the first person killed in the horror movie.” Um, but, uh, I, yeah. How does that shape the way this country views Black resistance?

KELLIE: There's no form of resistance, there's no form of protest that white supremacy is going to approve of or accept. So, we've run the gamut. We have done the peaceful protest. We've done the taking of the knee and, you know, like the, the raising of the Black power fist, but also much more stances as well, and everything in between. And, um, none of it is going to be sanctioned by supremacy. Like, I feel like if you are ever at a demonstration and white supremacy is like, “You know what? I'm okay with that.” Then you're not really doing anything. You are not pushing the dial. You know what I mean? So, um, we have—but I think that's, what's so, um, beautiful about our history is that we have engaged in every single form of resistance possible to prove and assert our humanity and our entitlement to our being. And that's, so that's so important to me. I just feel like I want, I want my students and my children and those around me to know that no one has ever taken this brutality lying down.

CARVELL: Now we find ourselves in a singular moment: it's not just Black bodies on the line anymore. Singular, but not unique — like everything, good and bad, it is rooted in this country's past.

KELLIE: Even when I think about John Brown, who's a white, uh, radical abolitionists who takes up arms against the state to sort of end the institution of slavery and how people call John Brown “crazy.”¹⁷ “Oh my god he's a fanatic, he's all of these different things.” And I'm like, the reason why we, we look at him as, as crazy to me was always problematic because I was like, “What he's doing seems rational to me.” Slavery starts in violence. It's sustained by violence. It should probably only be overthrown by violence. Like, you know like, I think what people saw was crazy is how, as a white person, would he want to forfeit his privilege. But I'm encouraged because today, I feel like I'm seeing a lot more white people putting their bodies on the line and in ways that I have not seen before. In ways that a lot of us have not seen before. And that's really encouraging to me. That's the one thing that I think is different throughout history, is that if we think of continuity, that's the difference. I have not seen white people enacting violence on other white people who find themselves in solidarity with Black people.

CARVELL: Where does protest fall short?

¹⁶ "Source: <https://www.pbs.org/wqbh/aia/part2/2p24.html>

¹⁷ John Brown, Dismissed at Our Own Peril Historian David Blight of The History News Network says writing off Brown as just a fanatic keeps us “comfortable with our prejudices and our desires” about the history of race in America. He says Brown should unsettle us. “John Brown should confound and trouble us. Martyrs are made by history; people choose their martyrs just as we choose to define good and evil. And we will be forever making and unmaking John Brown as Americans face not only their own racial past, but the ever changing reputation of violence in the present.” Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2009/12/john-brown-domestic-terrorist-or-national-hero/347401/>

KELLIE: Mm Hmm. Well, one when it's performative. And I think for a lot of people, it has been that. Like, you know, people want to show up, take a selfie, post it and then bounce, you know? And I'm just like, "What? What did you do? What did you do?" So, um, I think the moment, you know, you see the cops take a knee and then stand up and start pushing back the crowd, you're like, "Well, wait, what is this?" Like, you know, to me, protest is a start, but it's not how you end it. So, the best example I can think of is the Montgomery bus boycott in which it's more than just a protest. Like they literally boycott using the buses and so much to the point that they created a new lifestyle for themselves. Like if you go—and a lot of them did—went for over a year without taking the bus, you either relied on a friend, you walked,

you know, you had somebody pick you up, you carpooled, whatever it was.¹⁸

But the time that people could start riding the buses again, they had such fatigue from the boycott that it was almost kind of like, "Okay, well, I guess I can get back on the bus, but I really appreciated this carpool that I had with such and such," or "I really appreciated the benefit that I got from walking" or whatever. Like you've created a whole new lifestyle for yourself. And so I feel like we have to be able to think about the long term effects of, of boycotts, of protests—of how long it will take, of what will be sacrificed, of what will be required. Like, there are so many things that go into that.

CARVELL: Yeah. It also strikes me too. I mean, that thing about someone showing up and taking a selfie and then leaving, which is a thing that I've literally seen happen on Instagram and on TikTok. Literally, like, a video of someone hopping out of a car, taking a picture, then hopping in the car and driving away. That strikes me as, um, in some ways a perfect visual metaphor for how we currently think of protest, which is: a thing that you do and then announce that you're doing, and then you go back to your regularly scheduled life and everything changes as a result. But what I hear you talking about is that to resist via protest means a change in your way of life.

KELLIE: So, it absolutely has to be a lifestyle. It absolutely has to be a, not a daily, but a moment by moment renewing of your mind to reorient yourself away from a racist framework into something that is anti-racist. This is why, you know, Ibram Kendi says, listen, you can't be Switzerland. You can't say like my name's Bennett, I'm not in it.

CARVELL: I'm not in it.

KELLIE: You have to actively, daily, like, make that choice.

CARVELL: We're talking about things that are, uh, for some people scary, intense, very depressing, sad—this country's history of violence against you and me and our families and our people and how we seek to resist that. And yet in this conversation, you have smiled and made jokes and laughed and—as have I. And I want to ask you about your own personal

¹⁸ "Originally, the bus boycott was to last for a single day, coinciding with Ms. Parks's civil court appearance. But the boycott turned out to be much more successful than organizers anticipated, with an estimated 17,000 African Americans refusing to ride the buses. Inspired by the community's enthusiastic response, organizers decided to extend the boycott, and a young Montgomery minister named Martin Luther King Jr. was appointed as spokesman." Source: <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/dec/21>

"The MIA established a carpool for African Americans. Over 200 people volunteered their car for a car pool and roughly 100 pickup stations operated within the city. To help fund the car pool, the MIA held mass gatherings at various African American churches where donations were collected and members heard news about the success of the boycott." Source: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/montgomery-bus-boycott.htm>

process of keeping joy and love and this sort of like lightness—if that's the right word, and maybe it's not—as you spend your actual working life working through these issues.

KELLIE: I want my son and my daughters to understand that we are not the history of, you know, oppression by white people. Like there is so much about being Black that is wonderful and beautiful and, you know, our music and the food we consume and dance and how we think and how we, you know, create and invent. And there's so much richness there. And, so that's a form of resistance too, you know? Teaching, teaching children to have joy is a form of resistance as well.

CARVELL: Like Dr. Carter Jackson, like most Black parents in America, I am trying to shepherd my own growing children through a time in which they are learning just how insidious, continuous, and repetitive the violence towards us—towards them—is. And also like Dr. Carter Jackson, I'm trying to keep myself and my family afloat by connecting all of us to the joy and beauty and power of our Blackness. It is a one-day-at-a-time proposition. We laugh and dance and crack jokes on one another one minute; and we consider the violent deaths of our brothers and sisters the next. It's how I grew up. It's how parents grew up. And it's how my children are growing up. Fighting for our humanity and holding onto our joy even when everything seems to be stacked against it, even when the goal posts for joy are moved. Because as Mos Def aka Yasiin Bey once said. "We start keeping pace, they start changing up the tempo."¹⁹

PROFESSOR BARANDARAN: So, even if you're a Black doctor versus a white doctor, the wealth gap is massive. And it gets higher, actually, the gap between white and Black at the higher you go in income. So it isn't—it's not a matter of personal responsibility and personal savings. Wealth is, it's a generational phenomenon.

Next episode, we'll look into just how this country has moved the goalposts on us, and how the wealth gap between Black and white families is not an accident, and has absolutely nothing to do with hard work.

I'm Carvell Wallace. And This is Who We Are.

[The third verse of the Star Spangled Banner, sung by Sandra Lawson-Ndu]

CARVELL: For more information on the topics and ideas explored in this episode, go to our show notes and our show page.

The production team at Cosmic Standard is:
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And The third verse of the Star Spangled Banner was performed by Sandra Lawson-Ndu

¹⁹ Mos Def. "Mr. Nigga". *Black on Both Sides*. Source: <https://www.discogs.com/Mos-Def-Black-On-Both-Sides/release/119094>

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I'm Carvell Wallace and this is Who We Are.