

SAM HARRIS

THE BLOG

Racism and Violence in America

Podcast Transcript

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(Photo via the [Russ Rowland](#))

In this episode of the Waking Up podcast, Sam Harris talks to economist Glenn C. Loury about racism, police violence, the Black Lives Matter movement, and related topics.

Glenn C. Loury is the Merton P. Stoltz Professor of the Social Sciences and Professor of Economics at Brown University. He has taught previously at Boston, Harvard and Northwestern Universities, and the University of Michigan. He holds a B.A. in Mathematics (Northwestern University, 1972) and a Ph.D. in Economics (MIT, 1976).

Professor Loury has published mainly in the areas of applied microeconomic theory, game theory, industrial organization, natural resource economics, and the economics of race and inequality. He has been elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the Econometric Society, Member of the American Philosophical Society, Vice President of the American Economics Association, and President of the Eastern Economics Association. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Carnegie Scholarship to support his work.

As a prominent social critic and public intellectual, writing mainly on the themes of racial inequality and social policy, Professor Loury has published over 200 essays and reviews in journals of public affairs in the U.S. and abroad. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, is a contributing editor at *The Boston Review*, and was for many years a contributing editor at *The New Republic*. Professor Loury's books include [*One by One, From the Inside Out: Essays and Reviews on Race and Responsibility in America*](#) (The Free Press, 1995 – winner of the American Book Award and the Christianity Today Book Award); [*The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*](#) (Harvard University Press, 2002); *Ethnicity, Social Mobility and Public Policy: Comparing the US and the UK* (ed., Cambridge University Press, 2005); and, [*Race, Incarceration and American Values*](#) (M.I.T. Press, 2008).

Glenn Loury hosts [*The Glenn Show*](#) on Bloggingheads.tv, and he can be reached on Twitter at [@GlennLoury](#).

Books and articles discussed in this podcast:

Ta-Nehisi Coates. [“The Case for Reparations.”](#) *The Atlantic*. June, 2014.

Thomas Chatterton Williams. [“Loaded Dice.”](#) *The London Review of Books*. December, 2015.

Benjamin Wallace-Wells. [“The Hard Truths of Ta-Nehisi Coates.”](#) *New York Magazine*. July, 2015.

Jill Leovy. [*Ghettoside*](#). Spiegel & Grau. 2015.

Roland G. Fryer, Jr. [“An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force.”](#) National Bureau of Economic Research working paper. July, 2016.

Glenn C. Loury. [“Ferguson Won’t Change Anything. What Will?”](#) *The Boston Review*. January, 2015.

This is a lightly edited transcript of a [recorded conversation](#).

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Welcome to the Waking Up podcast. This is Sam Harris. Well, there are a variety of housekeeping issues I could engage at the start of this episode. ISIS just released a fairly amazing document titled “Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You.” This is bizarre. It’s as though they’ve been watching my skirmishes with obscurantists who deny the religious roots of jihadism, and they just thought, *Enough is enough. We’re just going to close every loophole that people like Scott Atran and Karen Armstrong and Robert Pape and Noam Chomsky and all these other confabulators on this issue seem to find in their desperate attempts to implicate everything other than our heartfelt religious beliefs.*

And that’s what they did: They spelled out, with utter clarity, their motivations for doing what they do. But I might just do [a separate podcast](#) on that, because I’d rather not delay the conversation we’re going to bring you today, which strikes me as

especially urgent. So I'm going to pivot directly to today's guest.

As always, if you like what I'm doing on the podcast, you can support this work at samharris.org/support. Your support is, in fact, what makes conversations like this possible. This podcast is ad-free, and I'm happy to keep it that way. But that makes you my only sponsor, and your support is much appreciated.

Today I'll be speaking with Glenn Loury. Glenn is the Merton P. Stoltz Professor of Social Sciences and a professor of economics at Brown University. He has taught previously at Boston and Harvard and Northwestern and the University of Michigan; he holds a BA in mathematics from Northwestern and a PhD in economics from MIT; he's a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a former Guggenheim Fellowship recipient; and he has published widely and has written several books that I will link to on my blog. I discovered Glenn through his bloggingheads.tv podcast, where he's been having some extraordinarily candid and clarifying conversations about race and racism with the linguist John McWhorter, from Columbia, and I highly recommend you check out that podcast.

Again, I'll provide [a link](#) to that on my website. The purpose of my conversation with Glenn today is to dive headlong into these controversial waters of race and racism and violence in America—as though my work weren't controversial enough already. But I've been wanting to do this for a while, because these issues are so consequential and politically divisive. I've been worried about doing this for obvious reasons. I raised the topic in my podcast with Neil deGrasse Tyson, you may recall, but he didn't want to touch it—which I understand. He didn't feel the time was right to weigh in on these issues personally.

But for some reason I've been feeling that the time is right for me. It's really been bothering me that so much of what I hear about race and violence in America doesn't make any sense, and the fact that I've been worried about speaking about these issues in public was also bothering me. In fact, the implications of speaking about race in particular caused me to cancel a book contract I had last year: It seemed too much of a liability. But I have since stiffened my spine, and I was left wondering who I could talk to about these things. My goal was to find an African-American intellectual who could really get into the details with me, but whom I also trusted to have a truly rational conversation that wouldn't be contaminated by identity politics.

As you probably intuit, I think identity politics are just poison—unless your identity at this point is *Homo sapiens*—but I found what I was looking for in Glenn. He's just so good on these topics. And as you'll hear, he spends a fair amount of time giving the counterpoint to his positions on each topic: steel-manning rather than straw-manning the views of his opponents. Anyway, I found this conversation extremely helpful. It felt like Glenn and I could have gone on for much longer—and many thanks to him for being so generous with his time.

If you find this conversation as useful as I did, I encourage you to spread it around and follow Glenn on Twitter, [@GlennLoury](#), and please tell him that you appreciate what he's doing. And again, check out his podcast on bloggingheads.tv.

Sam: Glenn, thanks for coming on the podcast.

Glenn:

Sam, my pleasure.

Sam: I've really been excited about having this conversation, probably irrationally so, because the topics we're going to cover—race and racism, and police violence—can't help but bring us some measure of grief. So thank you for doing this, and I think most of the grief will come my way, probably.

First, I want to say that your podcasts on Bloggingheads TV, especially the ones you've done with John McWhorter, whom I also greatly admire, have been fantastic. It's so rare to hear two people talk about these topics honestly.

Glenn: Great. Sam, can I tell your audience that you're referring to The Glenn Show, at bloggingheads.tv, and all viewers or listeners are welcome.

Sam: I'll put a link to your page on my blog so that people can find it.

What I'm noticing now, and it's really been in the past year or so, is that there's a culture of censorship and identity politics and a kind of addiction to being outraged—and a resort to outrage in place of reasoned argument, especially among young people—that is making it impossible to have productive conversations on important topics.

This is happening on topics other than race, of course—it happens on religion and terrorism and gender—but race is obviously one of those hot spots. You've been illuminating this topic on your show in a way that's really unusual—just cutting through confusion like a laser. So it really is great to be talking to you.

Glenn: I appreciate that. I think one of my motivations—and John McWhorter can speak for himself, but I think this would apply to him, too—is that in the face of this addiction to outrage (that's an artful way of putting it), and a kind of moral certitude and intolerance of argument that doesn't check the right boxes, because I care so much about these questions of race and equality and justice, I felt really compelled, in the face of pushback and vitriol and contempt, to keep challenging and keep raising questions. I don't think I'm due any kind of heroic celebration for doing it—it just seems like the right thing to do. But that's a big part of my motivation.

Sam: Before we dive into this topic, perhaps you can say a few words about your background and your areas of focus intellectually. How do you describe what you do in general?

Glenn: I'm a professor of economics here at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island. I've been here for 10 years. I've taught economics at a number of other universities: Harvard in the 1980s, Boston University in the 1990s. I'm a quantitative social scientist: I was trained at MIT in the 1970s, took a PhD in economics there, and for much of my early career focused on mathematic modeling of various economic processes in the labor market and industrial organizations. Competition, research and development, natural resource economics, economics of invention and exploration—things of this kind. Game theory. Information economics.

I became a professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and got very much interested in public policy after taking up that post. I began writing essays and reviews and commentaries on issues of race in the United States particularly, and was a Reagan conservative during the 1980s. Quite rare for an African-American. I moved away from that political

identity toward the center of the spectrum a bit, and I think of myself now as a centrist or maybe mildly right of center Democrat. Though that's not an identity that I cling to with any particular intensity.

Sam: Obviously your background, in mathematics, statistics, and social science, makes you perfectly well placed to have the kind of conversation we're going to have. Race and racism is a topic of such huge consequence, and it's a topic that attracts a fair amount of logical and moral confusion, which renders people unable to reason with each other.

This is not just a problem across racial lines and it's not just a problem in public. I have white friends whom I can't have this conversation with because they become so emotionally hijacked. From my point of view, they don't realize that almost everything that is coming out of their mouths makes no moral or logical or historical or psychological sense. This really worries me, because I view the maintenance of civilization and our moral progress as a species as a series of successful conversations.

I've said this many times before on my podcast and in writing. It seems to me that we live in perpetual choice between conversation and violence. So when I see conversations reliably fail like this, I start to get worried. I noticed the exchanges you've been having with John McWhorter, and I realized that I had met John at a TED conference. So I got in touch with him, and he suggested that I speak with you. So you are my Virgil who's going to guide me through this wilderness of error.

Glenn: Hope I'm up to the task here. It's a tall order, actually.

Sam: I guess as a final preliminary point, I feel the need to offer a disclaimer up front, because I think you and I are going to agree about many things, and I'm a little worried that my staking out some of these positions as a white guy is going to rub many of our listeners the wrong way. I don't want to be in a defensive crouch as we have this conversation, so I think I should acknowledge up front a couple of things that should be obvious. The first is that the history of racism in the U.S. has been horrific. No sane person could doubt that. And there's no doubt that racism remains a problem in our society today. Just how big a problem is something I want us to discuss. But I can check my privilege at the outset here. I have no doubt that I have reaped many advantages from being white, and I have no idea what it's like to grow up as a black man in our society. So I get that I don't get it. And if there's any way in which my not getting it seems relevant to the issues we're about to touch, I certainly hope you'll point that out to me.

But as we drive toward points that many of our listeners will find fairly incendiary, especially coming from a white guy, I just have to make it clear that it is obvious how horrible white racism and its consequences have been in the past. And I am fully prepared to believe that the shadow of slavery and Jim Crow still hangs over our society to a degree that I don't understand, certainly not from my first-person experience. But my goal in this conversation is to get an accurate picture of race and racism and police violence as it occurs now so that we can think about how to move forward.

I wanted to erect that bulwark—however ineffectual it may prove to be—because I have no doubt that we're about to say some things that will lend themselves to selective quotation. I've learned through cruel experience that some people listen to this podcast just for the pleasure of quoting me out of context in misleading ways. So I wanted to put forward that caveat, which may do me no good whatsoever, before we dive into the details.

Glenn: I think your caveat is well taken as far as it goes—and that speaks well of you, I would say—but it's such a pity that

it's necessary for you to make that kind of elaborate, preemptive move here. It speaks to how closed and tortured the environment is in which we're having the conversation. I mean, I'm black, all right? I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950s and the 1960s from a working-class background. I've had many a run-in with American racism, all across the board, and I descend from people who were slaves in the United States.

On the other hand, we sit here in the year 2016. 1863 is a century and a half in the past. Jim Crow segregation is a distant memory. Barack Hussein Obama is about to step down having served two terms, winning comfortable national elections to the highest office in the land. The commissioners of the police, in many of the cities in which police and black community relations are most troubled, are themselves African-American, as often are the administrative officers running the governments of those cities. We are 50 years past the advent of affirmative action. This is not 1910, 1950, or 1985; this is the year 2016, and the idea that white privilege is such a stain on the country that an otherwise rational and intelligent person who happens to be white needs to give an elaborate preamble to a conversation about race relations in this country... That the unwillingness to hear something that one doesn't agree with without imputing invidious motives to the person who's expressed that view is so rampant that a person like yourself needs to apologize in advance for having an opinion—that's awful, that's poisonous, that's... That's just Glenn Loury spouting off, and I don't know how that'll leave me in the minds of some of your listeners who might want to take what I've said out of context as well. But that's where I'm coming from here.

Sam: Needless to say, I agree with you. But unfortunately, I think it's still necessary, because again, even my conversations in private suggest that this topic is so radioactive that it's very difficult for people to even hear what is being said, much less trace the implications. So I want to start with a deceptively simple question: What is racism?

Glenn: All right, this is not necessarily a scientifically precise response; this is a more off-the-cuff response. I would say it is a contempt for or devaluation of the humanity of another by virtue of their presumed racial identity. Racism is the suspension of rational faculty and a disregard for and derogation of, a perception of unfitness for intimate relations, a presumption about intelligence, an imputation of bad character—this kind of thing—vis-à-vis another person or a group of people by virtue of what one understands to be their racial identity.

Sam: Okay, so given that definition—which I agree with—who is the evil genius who first convinced the world that being able to honestly say, “Some of my best friends are black” is not an adequate defense against the charge of racism toward black people? If the path forward toward some colorblind utopia doesn't entail having best friends or even a spouse who is from a different race, if that doesn't represent an adequate surmounting of the problem of racism—I'm speaking personally; we can leave aside institutional or structural racism for the moment—but if having one's closest, most intimate friends be of another race isn't an adequate defense against what you just described as racism, what is?

Glenn: Well, it's funny that you used this phrase “Some of my best friends are,” because I once wrote an article—it's been over 20 years now—called “Self-Censorship in Public Discourse: A Theory of Political Correctness.” It was published in the journal *Rationality and Society* in 1994, and in it I develop an account of political correctness, which I could go into in greater detail should you be interested, but I can say this much about political correctness:

A regime of political correctness is a moral signaling equilibrium in which people who don't want to be thought of as being on the wrong side of history will suppress an honest expression of what they believe about some controversial issue because

people who are known to be on the wrong side of history are prominently saying the same things. For example, if back during the day when the fight for independence of blacks in South Africa was going on, a person thought that boycotting South African businesses was not a good policy, and that constructive engagement with those businesses was a better policy for trying to help the blacks in South Africa.

If a person thought that, they might not be willing to say so in public because other people who were criticizing sanctions were basically supporting the apartheid government. The apartheid government itself was putting out the line that sanctions were not as helpful as constructive engagement with the South African society, so a person might not want to say that because they don't want to be thought to be on the wrong side of history. With that understanding of what political correctness might be thought to be, I was making the observation that once a regime of that kind comes into existence, it's very robust and difficult to dispel.

And in particular, declarations of "I'm not really racist. Some of my best friends are black" —the sincerity of such declarations is called into question because who's going to say such a thing except for somebody who has the positive view that is being sanctioned by common opinion, which they want to avoid being sanctioned for by making a declaration. Talk is cheap. Anybody can say it. So there was a time in American history, I think, and American cultural and social history—maybe the 1940s, 50s, maybe even into the 60s—when a person could say sincerely and be taken at face value, "Some of my best friends are gay, but I'm against gay marriage."

"Some of my best friends are black, but I think that affirmative action is really a very poor policy." And that would have some kind of weight. But once the convention of value signaling, in which correct positions on sensitive issues—in the case at hand, affirmative action or homosexual marriage—are a way of signaling moral virtue, the cover that one might have otherwise gotten from making this declaration, let's say it's verifiable, "Some of my best are..." no longer covers enough. What did Shakespeare say? "Methinks he doth protest too much."

The guy who's saying, "Some of my best friends are..." protesteth too much. That guy is seeking an exemption from the moral judgment of others for having what he knows the others know would be unacceptable positions, so he's declaring some kind of fig leaf here. But we see it for what it is, a fig leaf, and we don't take it seriously. Something like that.

Sam: In your definition of racism, I think we have to distinguish between the mere harboring of certain biases and a commitment to enshrine those biases, or a sense that those biases are good or shouldn't be corrected for. Racism can't merely be a matter of harboring biases, it can't be merely that you fail to be perfectly neutral on the Implicit Association Test, because if that's the standard, almost no one will escape hanging. Even many black people will be convicted of racism against blacks in that case.

Glenn: I think that Mazarin Banaji, the psychologist at Harvard, who was one of the founders of the implicit bias literature, would agree with that. I don't think she would claim an equivalency between implicit bias, as measured by one of her tests, and racism. Or in the case of gender differences, implicit bias about women's roles in society—which can be detected in almost every population of people who take these tests—and misogyny. I think she would want to draw a distinction between those two.

Many African-Americans will also score positive in terms of the detection of implicit bias about race in American society on

these tests. That doesn't make them racist; it just means that their cognitive processes implicitly incorporate certain presumptions or stereotypes about racial roles or racial behaviors that are a part of our culture and that are shared across racial lines. So I agree with what you just said.

Sam: I should briefly describe the Implicit Association Test (IAT) so that people know what we're talking about. Mazarin is one of the founders of this test, and she has used it probably for 20 years. The purpose of the test is to expose beliefs and biases that people hold that they're either unaware of, so can't report, or that they know to be socially undesirable, so won't report. It's been shown that, for instance, many white people will be faster at associating negative concepts with black faces than positive ones, and will show the opposite bias for white faces. And this is interpreted as meaning that they harbor a preference for white people over black people.

It's easy to see why people would view this as either a source or a consequence of racism. And, as you've pointed out, you can do this kind of test with other things: You can do it with cats and dogs, or flowers and insects—you can do it with anything, really. But let's stipulate that most people will show an in-group bias on the IAT, and we can even go further and accept that this underlying psychology has something to do with racism. Let's say it's the cause or the consequence, or both. But racism as a social problem to be condemned and eradicated has to be something else. Showing white bias on the IAT doesn't make you a racist; racism is the endorsement of norms that support that bias. It's a person's understanding that he's biased and his further claim that he's happy to be that way, because he believes that society shouldn't correct for such biases because white people really are better than black people. He wants society to be unfair based on the color of a person's skin because he thinks that skin color is a good way to determine the moral worth of human beings. That is something quite distinct from just harboring these biases, however they got there.

There's no question that such people exist, but they must be a tiny minority in our society at this point. The rest of us—people of goodwill and moral enlightenment who may or may not be biased to one or another degree—clearly support laws and policies that seek to cancel that kind of racism. As you say, we've elected our first black president, who's finishing his second term. This isn't tokenism. The people who voted for Obama with enthusiasm, whatever an IAT would have shown about them, are people who have canceled their personal racism in the form in which any real racist worthy of the name would practice it.

Glenn: I think that's true, although I know that many people, if they were to hear this conversation, would object to that. You've just more or less cleverly defined racism out of the picture, because there wouldn't be very many racists left if we were to have such a strict definition. So I'm challenging myself right now to think where the problem might be, and while I don't have an internal coherent development here, let me just make an observation.

Suppose someone observes that the homicide rate is very high in certain quarters of our society that can be distinguished by race. You know, so many people in Chicago have been killed in past years: A disproportionate number of both victims and apparent perpetrators are black, the homicide rate in terms of whites perpetrating the crime is much lower, and therefore there seems to be something going on in terms of black proclivity to resort to violence in settling disputes, or something like that. Suppose someone says that. Suppose someone says, "No wonder the police are so afraid when they encounter African-Americans on the street. Have you taken a look at the crime statistics?"

Somebody says, "Yes, it may be that blacks are more likely than whites to be shot by the police in terms of the rate per

number in the population. But after all, blacks are also overrepresented among violent criminals. So who can be surprised that they are overrepresented among the people who are shot by police officers?"

In all of these cases, these are statements that in some way or another could be consistent with a person who might have certain kinds of implicit biases but who wouldn't endorse the norm that those biases are justifiable in some sense, or are not a problem, or are in no way indicative of any kind of malady that needs to be addressed. They would still nevertheless be thought to be racist.

Someone who says, "The Asians are all over the sciences and the engineering departments in our best universities, and the blacks are as scarce as hens' teeth there" simply makes an observation about the facts. That would be thought by many people to be an act of racism, and yet it couldn't be so classified given the definition that we've just been developing.

Sam: But, hence my definition, because I would argue that while it's possible for racists—real racists—to make precisely those observations, those observations themselves are, to my ear, quite factual. I'm going to make observations of that sort with respect to crime in a minute. If that is the signature of racism—merely reporting statistics—then we can't even talk about the problem.

Glenn: Well, yeah. Again, I can imagine what a pushback might be—something like "Look, talking about this problem is not something that's going on in the abstract on the moon, unconnected to anything else. It's embedded within a structure, the legitimacy of which is up for debate. A casual conversation of that sort, merely a recitation of facts. You call that merely a recitation of facts without laboring to place those facts within a context and discipline our enunciation of those facts with a sort of deeper understanding of what history and contemporary social structure have wrought in terms of racial hierarchy, in terms of white supremacy? In terms of the comfort that we have in enunciating those facts, in terms of the political consequences of so many people enunciating those facts, not taking that on board abets, reproduces, reifies, legitimates, etches in more firmly hierarchical structures of racial domination. So the word *racist*, or *racism*, is entirely appropriate, no? Maybe it doesn't, in these cases I'm describing, identify a kind of classical antipathy on the basis of race, because we're no longer living in 1955, and yet the disparities and inequalities by race of wealth, power, privilege, opportunity, and comfort in this society are very, very great."

So it's laissez-faire racism, what Larry Bobo, the sociologist at Harvard, calls it. In opinion surveys of populations, if you ask people things like "Would you be willing to see your daughter or son married to someone of the opposite race?"—a black person, if the subject is white—they'll say yes at high rates; if you ask them, "Do you think blacks are inferior?" and they'll say no at high rates. Whereas old, classical racism would dictate the opposite response.

But if you say, "Are white people disadvantaged by affirmative action?" and they say, "Well, yeah, because my kid didn't get into Harvard, and some black kid with a lower score got in," well, some white kid with a lower score *also* got in, but you focused on the black kid. You see, you think you're not a racist because you're willing to see your son or daughter married to someone who's black; you're willing to stay in the same neighborhood if a black neighbor moves next door, but you interpret your son's rejection at Harvard as a consequence of racial affirmative action.

Well, Harvard accepts only 1 in 15 applicants, and a lot of people got in ahead of your son who are not black and who had lower scores. So maybe I'm trying to make the definition of racism more elastic than makes sense, but I think some of the

proponents of a more capacious definition would say, “In the 1950s, your definition was fine. In the year 2016, we need to have a more subtle and expansive understanding of how this American disease is currently functioning.”

Sam: Let’s make it as capacious as possible. I want you to define what is often called *structural* or *institutional* racism. It seems to me that people talk about this in a way that you were just doing, even in such a way that people can participate in a structure that is de facto racist, and perpetuating unfair treatment of people based on race, and yet the people operating in this structure may not, in fact, be racist at all. Let’s say everyone passes Mazarin’s test, nobody is harboring any bias, yet structures and institutions could still be deeply unfair.

Glenn: I want to say at the outset that I personally am not a big fan of the current fad to invoke “structural racism” as a meaningful category of social analysis. I often don’t know quite what people are talking about beyond observing that blacks come out on the short end of the stick by many measures of social achievement or status. Let me give incarceration as a case in point. Blacks are 12% or so of the American population, and 40% or so of the people who are behind bars.

Now, that’s a complicated, big social phenomenon, and you could do a very elaborate social scientific investigation of what all the sources of that disparity are. But simply put, the weight of the state, the violence of the state, where the police come and drag you away in handcuffs and lock you up... Where you’re guarded and surveilled, you’re pursued by agents of the state, you’re stigmatized, you’re civically excommunicated, you’re held in contempt, you’re treated badly... Such a large disparity exists in the society in incidents of that kind of treatment by race.

That is sort of ipso facto an indication of structural racism: The state stands up police forces, they build these cages, they corral people in them—and look at the impact this is having on the black community. In some cities, the proportion of young men who are incarcerated or have a criminal record who are black is a third, or 40%. It becomes a normal way of life. Young women go to the prison to try to find mates and pen pals. Kids see the role models of ex-cons with their tattoos and their buffed up bodies coming in and out of prison. It becomes normative in these communities.

We have a school-to-prison pipeline, because discipline of youngsters in schools seems to be somehow connected to their subsequent development into criminals. We have a prison-industrial complex, because indeed, there is money to be made in the provision of the services associated with incarceration, and it’s being made by private corporations and so on. I think many people would say this is a prime example of structural racism. The structures of law enforcement come down like a ton of bricks on people who are situated in the society at the margins because of our history of racism.

And by the way, if the same forces had been coming down with the same degree of severity on white people, the structure would be able to reform itself. Questions would arise. Three strikes and you’re out would look very different if most of the people suffering under that kind of punitive regime were white. But because they’re black and brown, we can write them off. We don’t question ourselves. Business as usual seems acceptable when the people who are bearing the cost of it are black. So I’m not sure I’m answering your question...

Sam: You are.

Glenn: This is one of the reasons why I think the term “structural racism” is so compelling to many people. But I, a social scientist, find the evocation of that kind of one-size-fits-all narrative—structural racism—inadequate to getting an account

of what's actually going on.

It's not as if there's a bunch of white people meeting somewhere deciding to make the laws in order to repress blacks. And it's not as if the outcomes that people are concerned about—in the example at hand, disparities in the incidence of incarceration—are independent of the free choices and decisions that are being made by people, in this case black people, who might end up finding themselves in prison. They made a decision to participate in criminal activities that were clearly known to be illicit and perhaps carried the consequences that they are now suffering, didn't they?

Sometimes the decisions they make have enormous negative consequences for other black people. Do we want to inquire about what's going on in the homes and communities and backgrounds from which people are coming who are the subjects of this racial inequality? Or are we to assume that any such deficits or disadvantages that are causally associated with their involvement in lawbreaking, and that are related to their own community organization, structures of family, attentiveness of parenting, and so forth, are nevertheless themselves the consequence of white racism? Black people wouldn't be acting that way if it weren't for white racism. If there were greater opportunity, if the schools were better funded, if it hadn't been for slavery, the black family wouldn't have... So forth, and so on.

If that's what you mean by structural racism, which is to say, every racial disparity is almost by definition a consequence of racism, either because it reflects contempt for the value of black life, and the neglect of the development of black people, or because to the extent that it is a consequence of choices that black people are making themselves, they are making such choices only because of the despair, the neglect, the lack of opportunity, etc., that they have experienced, then it seems to me that that's a kind of tautology that says, "Any disparity by race is, by definition, a reflection of structural racism."

That's a tautology that, as a social scientist, I don't want to embrace. And as an African-American, I'm profoundly skeptical of it because at some level, it kind of surrenders the possibility of African-American agency, saying that everything that is of a negative character, that is a reflection of inequality, of disparity, in which blacks are on the short end of everything, is a consequence of this history. How is it that blacks are unable to make our own lives notwithstanding whatever the history may have been?

Are there not variations and differentiations within the black population that one could identify and extol the virtue of—certain patterns of behavior and reactions to environmental conditions that seem to be effective and more life-affirming, more successful, than others? I don't like structural racism because it's imprecise, because it's a kind of dead end. It leaves us, I mean African-Americans, dependent upon a kind of dispensation to be bestowed by powerful whites, who actually are moral agents, who actually do have the ability to choose or not various ways of life, including responding affirmatively to our demands for redress of our subordination.

Whites are powerful; whites are agents; whites can do the right thing or the wrong thing. Blacks are merely historical chips. We're merely cogs, being driven by the fact of slavery, by the fact of Jim Crow segregation, and so on, and ultimately not responsible for our own and our children's lives.

Sam: It's a very complex picture. One thing I just got from what you said is that even if it's true—even if you could draw a straight line from slavery and Jim Crow to the state of inequality and social dysfunction in the black community, as a matter of history and a matter of causality through time—that's not to say that in the year 2016 the ambient level of white racism is

the ongoing cause of these problems, and that if you could just get white people to be less racist, if you could wave a magic wand and literally dissect out all the racism harbored by white people on any level, that would magically correct for all the problems you just articulated.

If you really can trace that line—that 200-year-old line to the present—where does that leave you? It seems to leave you with something like Ta-Nehisi Coates’s picture of reality, where what we should be talking about now is paying reparations for slavery. I don’t know what I think about that remedy—but I know what I think about Coates’s style of talking about this issue, and the fact that I’m talking to you and not to him suggests where I think the more profitable and civil and rational conversation is going to be had.

At one point, someone recommended that I have Coates on the podcast, and honestly, I feel like the conversation would have been a disaster. His way of speaking about these issues just strikes me—to put this in starkly invidious terms from which he would want to defend himself—as not intellectually honest. There’s a kind of pandering to white guilt and black rage that never stops—where one can’t just talk about facts in a civil way—and that worries me.

Glenn: We can talk more about Coates if it suits you. And I’m happy to not do so. But I want to mention the name Thomas Chatterton Williams. He’s an African-American, maybe 10 years younger than Coates, which puts him in his early 30s. He lives in Paris, he’s a trained philosopher, graduated from Georgetown University, and I’m not sure where he did his graduate study, but I think he did some graduate study in philosophy as well.

He has an essay in the *London Review of Books*, a review essay of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s book *Between the World and Me*. Williams uses Coates’s open letter to his son—in which he advises his son that America is so thoroughly contemptuous of your value as a human being that you must not ever, ever relax. You must not trust these people or turn your back on them. They will rip you to shreds. There’s nothing more American than taking a guy like you, hanging you from a lamppost, and tearing your limbs off one by one. Don’t believe in the American dream. We are up against an implacable force. That force erases your humanity. It’s always been so, and it will always be so. (This is a paraphrase of the posture that Coates takes in *Between the World and Me*; I think it’s an accurate paraphrase.)—Williams uses it as a point of departure to say, “There’s no place to go from here for black people. This is an absolutely bleak landscape—and it is disempowering. It just surrenders agency. There is only one possible future here, and it’s a very bleak one indeed.” And Williams thinks that’s untrue of the actual socio-historical circumstances in the United States—it’s rather more complicated than that—but he also thinks it’s a soul killer. That it’s an essential surrender of one’s humanity to take such a posture.

I just want to mention that for listeners who might not have come across Thomas Chatterton Williams—who, by the way, submitted that essay to *The New Yorker*, I happen to know on good authority, and it sat on an editor’s desk for many months and was eventually killed. It’s an absolutely brilliant if controversial engagement with Ta-Nehisi Coates’s book. Williams ended up taking it to the *London Review of Books* because it couldn’t get published in the United States, because the liberal cognoscenti, the ruling class of cultural mandarins, will not tolerate that kind of argument from an African-American contra the stance that Ta-Nehisi Coates is taking.

So that’s one thing I want to mention. The other, and I’ll be very brief, is Mitch Landrieu, former mayor of the city of New Orleans. At the Ideas Festival at Aspen a couple of years ago, Landrieu and Coates were paired up in a panel in which they were discussing race and inequality in America, and Coates was taking the posture that we know he would take, and

Landrieu was armed with what he called “The Books of the Dead”—literally the casebooks from his police department in the city of New Orleans that recorded the details of as yet unresolved homicide cases in that city. There were hundreds of them.

And 90% or more of the victims in these cases were black people, and Landrieu was trying to say in response to Coates’s arguments about the implacability of American racism, and the erasure of black humanity, and the devaluation of the black body, that black people are killing themselves in very large numbers. He’s not a Sean Hannity conservative wagging his finger about black-on-black crime: This is Mitch Landrieu, a centrist Democrat, mayor of New Orleans, a scion of a political family of some prominence, Democrats in Louisiana.

And confronting Ta-Nehisi Coates in a debate about race and inequality in America, in which Coates had taken a position that we know he takes, Landrieu tried to gently call to the attention of the audience the observation that much of the threat to the integrity of black bodies and black life is coming from other black people, offering as evidence of that his so-called “Books of the Dead.”

Coates’s response to Landrieu was to dismiss him with the back of his hand—this, by the way, is written up in *New York* magazine. Search “New York Magazine, Coates and Landrieu,” and you’ll find a very long essay about Ta-Nehisi Coates that reports on this. Coates’s response was to give Landrieu the back of his hand: “There ain’t nothing wrong with black people that ending white supremacy wouldn’t fix. What do you expect people to do? They’re rats in a barrel, you’ve got the lid on the barrel. You open the lid and peek down in there and you find that they’re at each other’s throats. Well, what would you expect to happen? It’s the friggin’ barrel, man. You gonna blame the rats?”

Okay, that’s my metaphor and not what Ta-Nehisi Coates might have used, but it’s capturing this idea that the mayhem—the despicable devaluation of life attendant to people riding up and down the street in an automobile with heavy weapons, firing them more or less aimlessly out the window at their gang rivals, and killing innocent bystanders along the way, and this happening in the scores and hundreds within a year in a given city—that kind of mayhem, that kind of contempt for human life shown by black people toward other black people, is not relevant to assessing what it is that actually imperils black life, because those behaviors are the consequence of a system and a history of oppression.

Now, you can say this. You can say this with eloquence and style, you can say this with fury and anger, you can say this with economy of word and clever turn of phrase, as Ta-Nehisi Coates has been given to do. But that doesn’t make it a valid, moral argument. It seems to me, and I’ve said this before, that Coates was holding a pair of queens and looking at an ace face-up, and he was bluffing. In other words, he was daring Mitch Landrieu to come back at him and say, “What an absurdity. You’re telling me that people have to run up and down the street firing guns out of windows and killing their brethren because we didn’t get reparations for slavery handed over to you yet? Because somebody who was mayor of this city 10 years ago happen to be a racist? Because the police department has somebody who’s affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan in it? And you’re telling me that that explains or somehow excuses or cancels out the moral judgment that I would otherwise bring to bear in any other community in which I saw this happening? You’re telling me that the history of slavery and Jim Crow, now essentially in the past, is responsible for this lived experience on a daily basis of African-Americans? You’re beneath contempt to talk in that way. You’re the one who has no real respect for the value of black life—you live in a bubble. Why don’t you get out of it and walk the streets of some of these places where people are dying?”

Then Coates would flash out, “Oh, well, I was raised in Baltimore, and I’ve seen enough gang activity, and I know what’s going on inside and out, and I’ve been there and whatever.” And Landrieu could say, “The body count continues to mount while your blather titillates the cultural elite in Washington, DC, and New York City and gives guilty white people an excuse not to feel so guilty. While you blather on, we’re actually burying the dead.”

Landrieu might have responded to him like that. He might have told him, “Get the heck out of here with that nonsense that attempts to intellectualize what any person with common sense can see is an absolute disaster. You’re blaming white people for black people living like barbarians? You’re blaming white people for that?”

Sam: Now you’ve convinced me that we need to stage a public debate between you and Coates and put it on prime-time television. That would be well worth seeing.

Let’s talk about the mayhem and get into the question of violence. So here’s the basic picture as I understand it: America is distinguished as one of the most violent societies in the developed world, as almost everyone knows—but this almost entirely due to the level of crime and violence in the black community. This is true even if you include all the mass shootings by crazy white guys. Violent crime in America is overwhelmingly a problem of black men killing other black men.

What I just learned in preparation for this podcast is that this has been a problem more or less since the end of slavery. I’m kind of embarrassed not to have had a complete picture of this problem before now. You recommended the book *Ghettoside* on your podcast, which I also recommend. I just learned that this disparity in violence didn’t start with the crack epidemic in the 80s, which is more or less what I thought and what I think many people believe. You can read newspaper editorials in the 19th century that give the predictable racist topspin to this, where they say, more or less, “This is God’s form of population control. Let the black man kill himself out of existence, that works for us.” But this problem of black men killing other black men is an old problem.

Again, I’m not saying that white racism or structural racism don’t have some role to play here. But the fact is that black men are killing other black men in overwhelming numbers. Violent crime in America peaked in 1993, and it has fallen precipitously since, perhaps with the exception of a recent uptick in major cities, which people fear is due to cops now being afraid they’ll be caught on cell phone cameras arresting black suspects. This has been called “the Ferguson effect.” Do you have an opinion at this point about whether the Ferguson effect is actually real, or is the jury still out on that?

Glenn: I think the jury is still out on it. I don’t think enough time has gone by with enough data for there to be a persuasive empirical argument. It’s speculation. You do have the accounts of some people active in law enforcement in cities around the country saying indeed morale is low, or everybody’s armed with a mobile phone recording device now and the cops are afraid to do their jobs. You have this kind of anecdotal evidence. Heather MacDonald, whose book *The War on Cops* has just come out recently, is a leading proponent of the Ferguson effect.

There is a guy, Richard Rosenfeld, at the University of Missouri?St. Louis, an expert criminologist, who has recently been saying that at first he thought the Ferguson effect was an exaggeration, but now, with the uptick in data of violent crime in cities and so forth, he’s not so sure.

So some people are big proponents of it, a lot of people are deniers of it, and Richard Rosenfeld—I'd place him in the middle as a relatively objective observer—is saying the jury is out, so I'm going to go with him and say, as far as I can tell, it's not clear one way or the other quite yet.

Sam: These are facts that some might be familiar with, but many of the numbers I have now are plucked from that book, *Ghettoside*. At its peak—and again, this is 1993—the homicide rate for black men in their early 20s in a city like Los Angeles was 368 per 100,000 per year. That is 100 times higher than is normal in any civilized society that we would recognize. In fact, it's probably 200 times higher than most cities in Western Europe, and don't even think of comparing it to someplace like Japan. This rate of death by homicide was similar to that suffered by U.S. soldiers deployed to Iraq at the height of the war.

So you have young black men who are literally living in a zone, and they're killing one another. The crime rate has fallen since, but it might not have fallen quite as much in the black community. The facts at the moment, as I understand them, are that black men make up 6% of the population and are currently 40% of those who get murdered. And they die, in the vast majority of cases, at the hands of other black men, who commit more than 50% of the murders in the country. Do I have my facts straight up to this point?

Glenn: I don't have a book open in front of me to give exact numbers, but as far as I know, those numbers are accurate. Certainly qualitatively, they're in the ballpark. I've seen the same kind of statistics.

Sam: I'll put one other fact in play here: There's been a problem of extraordinarily bad policing in the black community, and far too often by white cops. As you know, there have been some very visible instances of cops who've used inappropriate force in arresting or in defending themselves from black suspects, and the result is that the community believes itself to be unfairly profiled for crime, and that it suffers an inordinate number of lethal encounters with cops as a result. We're going to talk about whether that perception is true, in terms of the level of lethality from encounters with cops, but there's no question that a movement like Black Lives Matter is born of the perception that these things are true, and that white racism, whether it's implicit or explicit, is the underlying cause of all this.

But one thing I got from *Ghettoside*—and you mentioned this already—is that there's a lot of talk about how the criminal justice system disproportionately targets and incarcerates young black men. That seems to be true when you're talking about petty crimes, or when you're talking about the War on Drugs, which has been a disaster. But murders in the black community generally go unsolved, and the main reason is that witnesses refuse to testify. Obviously some of that reluctance is understandable, because witnesses afraid of getting killed. But it seems to me that this is a problem that can't be pinned on police misconduct or white racism.

So, the problem is that you have murderers walking around unpunished. The state monopoly on violence just doesn't exist in these neighborhoods, and so people either refuse to testify or take the law into their own hands, and it perpetuates the cycle of violence. Paradoxically, or seemingly paradoxically, the black community is suffering from too much application of law and order on petty crimes, and on nonviolent drug crimes (which I have argued that no one should be punished for) and too little law and order on crimes that really matter. If the Ferguson effect is real, it would be a terrible irony, because the

solution to violence in the black community can't be a matter of neglect from law enforcement.

Glenn: Okay, you said quite a bit there. There are a number of things I want to touch on in response; I hope I can remember all of them. Jill Leovy is the author of *Ghettoside*, this book you've been referring to. She does a great service with her granular, on the ground, detailed account of what homicide detectives trying to deal with the problems of killing in South Central Los Angeles are up against. And you're right: One of the things they're up against is the difficulty of persuading people who have the information necessary to bring a case effectively in court against someone alleged to have committed a murder to cooperate with the police.

Jill Leovy wants to underscore what horrible consequences follow from the fact that it's possible to kill more or less with impunity. If people don't want to come in to testify, the effect of that will be to reduce the likelihood that anybody who actually commits one of these offenses will ever be brought to account. The idea that you can kill with impunity makes it possible to really intimidate witnesses. You can see how this becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy or a self-reinforcing dynamic.

One thing I think sympathizers of Black Lives Matter and others would insist that I say here—and I don't mind saying it—is that the unwillingness of witnesses to cooperate with the police is partly a reflection of their fear that they will suffer some reprisal, and also partly a reflection of their distrust of the police, which is itself a consequence of the historical practices of police in these communities.

So if the police have been bad actors—maybe only a few of them, but they get away with it—if the police are unsympathetic, they don't know the community, don't live there, if they treat people in their ordinary intercourse with citizens who are black with contempt, if they're too quick to resort to violence in their encounters with black people, and in the extreme, if they're prepared to use lethal force when it's unjustified and the victims are black, who can blame the community for not wanting to snitch, not wanting to have anything to do with the police?

So in a way this cycle of violence could be traced, if one looks carefully, to the consequences of racism. And in the case at hand, alienation between the communities and the police is a consequence of racism affecting the police with the community in days gone by. The other thing I think I should say—and again, people would want to make this point, they'd make it right away—is that there can be no surprise that most of the murders with blacks as victims have been perpetrated by black people, because murder is the kind of crime in which more often than not, the person who was victimized and the person who commits the crime are connected to each other in some way.

They may know each other because they're a part of the same social network, or they're located in the same general geographic social space. People kill those who are connected to them in some way, and given the segregated patterns of social affiliation and residential location in our society, we can't be surprised that most of the blacks who are killed are killed by other blacks. It's also true that most of the whites who are killed are killed by other whites. That's an argument that people will make. I don't think it's adequate to the problem that you've described, because it doesn't account for the two orders of magnitude difference in the rate at which people are being killed.

It's almost tautological to say that most people who are killed are going to be killed by somebody who looks like them, in the sense that they are of the same race. But that doesn't speak to the issue of these killings occurring at so much higher a

rate. So it still makes sense to talk about black people killing black people, not as a matter of emphasizing the race of the persons who are killed as much as emphasizing the qualitatively distinct character of the killing. Finally, I want to say something that my colleague and friend Rajiv Sethi, an economist at Columbia University, Barnard College, would insist that I say, and I think it's a point worth making, which is that sometimes killing and epidemics of killing have a kind of logic of their own.

In the sense that if I think somebody is trying to kill me—suppose I have a dispute, suppose I step on this fellow's shoe? The shoe was newly shined, he's sitting on the bus with his foot slightly out, and now I walk past and I step on the shoe. He looks up at me and expects an apology, and I sneer at him and keep walking. Everybody sees it, and laughter breaks out somewhere in the bus. "Aw, man, he dissed you. He stepped on your shoe. You're gonna let him do that?" So now we have a beef, right? He says to me, "You m-f, you dissed me like that? You step on my shoe and don't apologize, I'm gonna friggin' kill you." He says it in exactly that tone, and then he gets off the bus.

Now, how do I know that tonight or tomorrow I'm not going to be sitting on my porch and that fella's going to drive by with his homeboys, and they're going to start blasting out the window, and I or somebody I love is going to be dead? I've got a beef. It's not like I can go to the cops and say, "This man threatened my life," and expect that anything effective is going to happen. I just might want to take preemptive action. I might want to make sure that I'm the one who's doing the shooting and he's the one who's doing the dying.

So we have a situation where the fact that there is no dispute resolution mechanism on which I can rely, that will protect me and my person, protect my family and my household, leads me to want to take matters into my own hands. Suppose I know that if I go to the police—suppose a murder has happened, my brother is killed. There's this now famous incident reported by Alice Goffman. Alice Goffman is a young sociologist whose book *On the Run* is an account of guys in Philadelphia who are being sought by the police authorities and who are on the lam, they're trying to avoid being taken into custody.

And she lives among them and gets to know them very well, and writes an ethnographic study of what life is like in this quarter of our society among people who are being sought by the law. The book is called *On the Run*, and I highly recommend it. Alice Goffman is a very fine, very promising young ethnographer. But in any case, she gets to know these guys very well, and one of their number is killed in a gang dispute that leads to gunplay. And the surviving friends—and she's close to all of them—decide that they're going to take matters into their own hands and get revenge, because otherwise nothing will happen.

Given that there are so many unresolved homicide cases in America's big cities, they know the chances that justice is actually going to be done are slim, and so they decide that they can't let it stand. She actually records this in her book—she's in the vehicle with the surviving buddies of this social group that she's gotten to know, riding around looking for the assailant. She is driving them. And this became such a notorious thing because after all, she's a scholar. She's an academic. She's a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin.

Sam: Did her grant money pay for the gas in that car?

Glenn: One wonders! And what would the institutional review board that's supposed to supervise research involving human subjects have to say about this? But in any case, they don't find the assailant, so she doesn't actually become an accomplice

to murder, but the anecdote underscores the fact that people may feel the need to take matters into their own hands, tit for tat, because they can't rely on civil authority to resolve these things in a satisfactory way.

So both the strategic preemption element and the kind of, there is no law except the law I made, and therefore it's the Wild West and I'm going to settle this matter in my own way, will tend to elevate the level of this kind of violence within racially classed, geographically defined orbits of social interaction like inner-city neighborhoods. Those things might somehow account for some of the elevated level of homicide, although given the numbers—6% of the population, 40% of the murders—can you quantitatively account for that? I'm dubious about that. Other things must be going on, one imagines.

Sam: Well, to stick with your anecdote for a second, other things have to be going on because there is nobody, certainly not the cops, who can preemptively resolve a problem like that, even in the most effete and privileged circles in white society. If I'm walking through a Starbucks and I step on someone's toe and this person gets pissed, the situation doesn't escalate because I will almost certainly apologize. And if I'm so distracted that I don't apologize, and he says something, my culturally acquired conflict-resolution skills will kick in, one hopes, to a degree that will mollify him, and I will not be left with the sense that someone now believes it's his full-time job to figure out how to kill me. But at no point in that process do I get to appeal to the cops or even to the barista in the Starbucks to resolve the matter. And if it does escalate, if it comes to the point where this guy is actually committed to killing me, I'm in the same situation you are in, in the hood. I receive death threats, and I know what it's like to talk to the FBI and the cops to try to resolve those situations. There is very little they can do preemptively. This is not *Minority Report*, where you can arrest people for "pre-crime." The level of threat has to be extraordinarily high before anyone from the state will take action preemptively.

So, we're talking about cultural memes, attitudes, and norms that must be allowing for the regular eruption of lethal violence in the black community. And we're often talking about teenagers, right? They don't even have their brains fully wired up so that their frontal cortices could prevent this behavior...

Glenn: Let me say this to you, Sam, just very quickly. Your Starbucks analogy is interesting in the sense that it underscores your privilege in the following way...

Sam: I was deliberately underscoring my privilege. In fact, I was trying to think of something fancier than Starbucks, but couldn't.

Glenn: What I mean is this: You say "cultural memes." I think we ought to unpack that a little bit. You, as a middle-class white person at a Starbucks, have absolutely no investment in your public persona as a tough guy. The advantages of your cultural location and social economic location are such that you lose nothing from offering that apology—by, you say, deploying your "conflict-resolution skills." Well, yeah, partly they're skills, but also partly they are the advantage of being nestled comfortably within a complex of social interactions in which a reputation for toughness is of no particular value to you.

On the other hand, if you were someone like Ta-Nehisi Coates growing up in inner-city Baltimore 25 years ago as a teenager, it would be absolutely a burden on you going forward to be thought of as a pussy, to be thought of as a wuss, as weak, as somebody who backs down, as someone who doesn't have the courage to fight. The cultivation of that kind of persona or reputation comes to be an automatic reflex in that kind of environment. You can't seem to be somebody who

would back down. A person living in inner-city Baltimore simply doesn't have the luxury.

It's not as if they don't know it's not in their cultural toolkit—so this argument would go—to rely upon more civil means of conflict resolution, lowering the temperature and so forth. It's that the bitter fruit of their isolation over such a period of time, with so little opportunity and so much damage that's been done, is partly that they have to carry themselves through the world with a certain swagger. They have to evince a certain hair-trigger sensibility, and a willingness to go to the ultimate level if it comes to that.

That's just a way of being in the world cultivated of necessity in that environment. You can call it "culture" if you want to, but if you fail to see that it's a product of history and the social oppression of African-Americans in these ghettos, you would be doing a grave disservice to the people who live there.

Sam: I agree with virtually all of that, and I could easily imagine suddenly finding myself in more or less the same condition. For instance, if I were sent to a maximum-security prison, well, then despite my best intentions and everything I know about how people should behave so as to maximize their mutual well-being, I would find myself with no choice, given the way the incentives are aligned there, to behave in precisely the way you've described. I've written about this before.

It seems that the only rational choice for a person being sent to a maximum-security prison is to become immediately affiliated with the gang of his appropriate skin color so as to be as immune as possible in the perpetual race war that goes on in those prisons. You literally might not have a racist bone in your body—take Morris Dees, from the Southern Poverty Law Center: If he got sent to prison, the only rational choice would be for him to join a white-supremacist gang; otherwise everyone—white, brown, and black—will prey on him.

So I understand that there are certain contexts, such as the inner city among gang members in the black community, that share many of the same incentives that one notices in a prison.

Let's pivot to the issue of police violence. I want to kind of creep up on the Fryer study, which has received a lot of press. Let's review a few facts first: 4% of blacks who die by homicide are killed by cops. So 96% are *not* killed by cops. Virtually all are killed by black men—there are not a lot of white men are killing black men. And, as you pointed out, not a lot of black men are killing white men either (though there are more homicides running in that direction). The fact is that most violence is intraracial. Incidentally, 12% of whites and Hispanics who die by homicide are killed by cops—so, at least by one measure, this is three times the rate at which blacks are killed by cops.

As we get into this data, we should admit that statistics are a bit of a Rorschach test. It's possible to read even valid statistics in misleading ways or in ways that are guided by bias. Needless to say, we'll do our best not to do that, but here are just a few more facts as I understand them: A thousand people are killed each year in the U.S. by cops, more or less. Around 50% of the fatalities are white, and about 25% are black.

Glenn: Right.

Sam: Now, that's double what you'd expect from the demographics, because as you said, about 12% to 13% of the population is black, but they commit, again, 50% of all violent crime, at least. In some cities it's as much as two-thirds of all

violent crime. So my question for you and for our listeners to ponder is, given how much crime black men are committing in our society—again, mostly against other black men—and given how much attention from the police they will naturally attract because of this, and *should* attract in the hopes of keeping black communities safe, what percentage of fatal encounters with cops would make sense? I mean, honestly, I am surprised. Even if I'd never heard of the Fryer study, which we'll talk about, and was just looking at these data, I'm surprised that only 25% of the fatalities are black—that strikes me as surprisingly low.

Glenn: I cannot respond to your question—what percent should we expect given the aggregate statistics—since I don't think those statistics are adequate to assess the individual encounters between black people and police that lead to shootings.

Let me explain that. I want to use an analogy: Let's suppose that a survey finds that on average, women make 70 cents for every dollar that men make in the labor market. I just make that number up, but something like that is undoubtedly true—it's certainly less than 100%. The 70% number has been thrown around. And someone says to me, "Given the fact that women have the bulk of the child-rearing responsibilities, often take time off from work in order to attend to those responsibilities, are disproportionately electing to pursue careers in lines of activity like caregiving or teaching or something like that"—I don't mean to traffic in stereotypes, I'm just imagining a hypothetical response—"which pay less than, let's say, construction work or engineering, or something like that... Given that men and women are different in so many ways, exactly what proportion of their earnings on the dollar would you expect? If you think 70 cents is too low, should it be 85? Certainly it shouldn't be 100, given the fact that women are withdrawing from the labor force in order to disproportionately take on the child-rearing responsibilities and so on." Let's say someone says something like that.

Now, I don't know how to answer that question when the moral issue is, are women being treated fairly in the workplace? Are they getting paid the same as men for the same work? So that's kind of a question about what happens to an individual woman when she encounters an employer. And these aggregate averages don't reach that question.

Sam: Understood. Given the background facts you described, I would expect women to work less, but I would still expect them to get paid the same for doing precisely the same job. I'm not saying there wouldn't be some economic consequences for working less: You might not advance up the hierarchy as much as men in the aggregate. But the two vice presidents of the same company, man and woman, should be paid the same, and I think that's clear.

I guess the issue here is that if there is much more crime being perpetrated by black men, and the call to the cops usually runs, "Somebody's just been shot." "Can you describe the shooter?" "Yeah, he was a black guy." When the cops show up, they are going to be looking for and encountering black men more than white men. Given that any encounter with a cop can escalate, to the point of lethal violence, whether reasonably or by dint of incompetence on the part of the cops, you'd expect the rate to be higher than just the demographic of 12% would suggest.

Glenn: We're on the same page here. Yes, we would expect the rate to be higher. The question is, how much higher? That was the question that you asked me. Likewise, as you say, fairness would dictate that if it were the same job, the man and the woman should be paid the same rate. But the question would be, how would I know from aggregate statistics whether or not I was really comparing like with like? I need individualized data. I need data at the level of the encounters between police and citizens to assess whether or not the circumstances in which blacks and the police encounter each other, and the

subsequent rate of killing, are similar.

Sam: That seems like a perfect segue to talk about the Fryer study.

Glenn: It is. What I regard to be virtuous about that study, and you should introduce it properly, is the fact that such conclusions as are drawn there—subject to certain qualifications we might want to bring—are based upon individualized data of encounters between officers and citizens, not upon a comparison of aggregate rates across large collectivities where you don't really know whether you're comparing like with like.

Sam: This study was performed by Roland Fryer at Harvard, who, I believe, was a student of yours, is that correct?

Glenn: And that's an important qualifier. I like Roland Fryer very much. I was his mentor when he was in graduate school, and he and I have written some papers together. We're very good friends and close colleagues. I'm proud of him. He's now one of the leading young—young meaning under 40—applied economists working today.

Sam: So you're probably in a better place to summarize the findings of this study as well as its flaws. Some people have pointed out specific limitations, and one of them that I'm aware of is Rajiv Sethi, who you just mentioned, and this was actually on your podcast. He was concerned that the characteristics of the sample of people arrested didn't match those of the people who were killed. Perhaps you can discuss the Fryer findings and the limitations as you currently see them. I also recall that Fryer's data are not representative of the whole nation: He looked at specific cities.

Glenn: It's an ongoing project, and I expect we are going to see more out of it as time goes on. The study in question, which was reported about in a front-page piece in the *New York Times* just after it was released, is now a working paper at the National Bureau for Economic Research. Anyone can find that online and can download the study and look at it. It's based on data from the city of Houston. Fryer's ongoing project has data from other cities as well, but the study at hand, its main findings, are based upon data from Houston.

I'll explain in more detail exactly what these data are. Fryer is trying to control for the specific aspects of the encounter between a police officer and the citizen—things like what part of town does it occur in? What time of day? Is the suspect armed? Did the police come to the scene as a consequence of a report of illegal activity? Was the suspect resisting or in some other way attempting to avoid being processed by a police officer? Were third parties, innocent third parties, endangered by the behavior of the suspect?

All these kinds of details of the encounter are known to Fryer, and he attempts to control for them in an effort to ascertain whether the likelihood that the police officer discharges his weapon is greater when the suspect is black, other things being equal. Now this last—other things being equal, *ceteris paribus*—is critical. So the way he proceeds is, he's got two populations of people in citizen-police encounters in the city of Houston, and this is based upon data made available to his research team by the Houston Police Department.

One population is arrestees. Within a given period of time, for all the persons who are arrested by Houston police, a detailed report has to be filed by the police officer, and Fryer has access to these narrative accounts. So police officers need to write it up, and they write up what happened—leading to the arrest, the justification for the arrest, and so on—and that's all

reported. So that's the arrestee population. And Fryer knows, for example, whether or not the police officer discharged a weapon in the process of prosecuting the arrest.

Separately he has the population of people who were shot by police officers. So the universe of people who were arrested by police is thought of as those who were most likely to be the victims of a shooting.

Sam: Shooting by cops.

Glenn: Yes, they were susceptible to being shot by a cop. They either were or they were not, but the fact that they were arrested means that there was an encounter in which shooting might have occurred. So he's got this zero-one variable: It's one if the shooting occurred, and zero if it didn't occur. Of course, in the vast majority of the arrests, shooting didn't occur. We use this little so-called logistic regression analysis to estimate the probability that a shooting would occur in the context of an arrest as a function of the features of the arrest, which are such as I described: where, when, and under what conditions did the policeman encounter the citizen, and also whether the citizen is black.

And what Fryer is finding is that the likelihood of the police officer shooting in this arrest population—once you control for every aspect that Fryer can observe about the encounter between a police officer and a citizen—is no greater if the citizen is black than if the citizen is white. Indeed, it's slightly less than if the citizen is white.

So on that basis, he concludes that the likelihood of the use of deadly force by a police officer is not greater if you're black once you control for the features of the encounter between the police officer and the citizen. As well, he finds that the likelihood that the police would use physical force in their encounter, short of shooting—putting cuffs on someone, using a baton or a Taser, forcing them to lie down on the street while they're being interrogated, what Fryer speaks of generically as the laying on of hands—is greater.

Again, he does the same kind of analysis: Is some kind of physical force, short of deadly force, used against the suspect? As a function of all the things that we can see about the encounter, including the race of the suspect, does it seem to depend, once you control for those other things, on the race of the suspect? His answer there is yes: about a 25% greater chance that some kind of force, short of shooting, will be used against the suspect if he's black than if he's white—other things being equal—and about a 28% or so lower probability that shooting will be used against the suspect if he's black.

So that's the broad outline of his findings. Race is implicated: blackness is a factor in the police use of force, short of deadly force, but is not implicated as a factor, and indeed the number goes the other way in police shooting a suspect. This in Houston.

Now, here are some of the concerns that Rajiv Sethi and others have raised about this finding: The only way we know about it is because the police department is willing to let this research team look at their data in depth. Some police departments do that, some don't. Not only is this finding limited to Houston, because it's only Houston data that we have, and we don't know if it applies to New Orleans or Dallas or Los Angeles, but also we should be suspicious, because the fact that Houston would let you get the data could be indicative of the fact that Houston knows that the data are largely exculpatory, and the police department where the data would not be exculpatory is not letting you see the data.

So you can't draw any valid conclusion about policing as such from the fact that you have these data, not only because it's only one city, but because it's not a representative city. The fact that they're giving you the data is itself an indication that they are not representative. So that's one major line of critique.

Now, Fryer is aware of this, but he can only analyze the data that he has. It's an ongoing project. There are other cities with which he has been in contact. I don't know what all they are. Camden, New Jersey, I know he's been very active there. New York City has turned over all its stop-and-frisk data to him over a period of years, which he is also in the process of analyzing. And by the way, the preliminary analysis of the New York City stop-and-frisk data confirms his finding that police are more likely to use force, short of deadly force, against suspects if the suspects are black.

The other criticism, though, is that because he relies on arrest data for the universe of people who might be shot by the police in his effort to ascertain whether or not the shooting is dependent upon the race of the suspect, he has implicitly to assume that the processes leading to an arrest work in the same way regardless of the race of the suspect.

In order to draw any valid conclusion about whether or not, based on those data, the police are more or less likely to shoot at somebody given that they're black, he has to assume, for example, that the pool of black arrestees is comparable, in its degree of threat posed to police officers, to the pool of white arrestees. But suppose, says Rajiv and others, that the police are menacing relatively innocent black people and arresting them. Sandra Bland gets arrested in Texas for talking back to a police officer when she's stopped for a broken taillight or for not signaling a lane change or whatever, and she's actually taken into custody. But a white person in the same circumstance perhaps wouldn't have been taken into custody.

Suppose something like that is true, so the black population of arrestees disproportionately consists of people who are relatively less threatening than the white population. Rajiv points out that there are differences by race in some of the other characteristics of the arrestee population. The blacks who were arrested were less likely to be armed than the whites, for example. There are relatively more women among blacks in the arrested population than there are among whites in the arrested population, and things of this kind. So suppose the police are discriminatory in how they decide about arresting people and are quicker to arrest blacks, who are less threatening, than whites?

Then the black population of arrestees, if that's true, is on average less threatening than the white population. So finding that the rate at which they are shot is comparable to the rate at which whites are shot is not proof of no discrimination, but rather it's proof of the fact that they're being discriminated against, because on the hypothesis that they were less threatening—the blacks who were arrested—we should have expected a much lower rate of shooting, not a comparable rate of shooting, in that population.

So if Fryer is wrong about the implicit assumption that the police do not discriminate in the processes that lead to someone being arrested based on race, then he's also wrong in the conclusion that, from his data, which is based on the arrested population, the likelihood of being shot by the police officer is roughly the same or maybe even a little bit lower if you're black. It's based on assumptions that are not verified in the data, assumptions in this case that the police are biased in the process of arrest.

Sam: That's fascinating, and I think it's obviously hugely important research to continue. I would add that at least one other study I know of—I just saw the coverage in the *Washington Post*—lends some support to Fryer. It was not a real-world data

study, it was a simulator study where they put cops in a shooting simulator and watched their choices about who they shot. In that case, they were actually slower to shoot black suspects than white ones.

Again, if valid, who knows if this is a recent phenomenon resulting from all the attention that's been brought to this problem? But in any case, those data are out there. I think there are other data that add another wrinkle here, where black officers are actually more likely to shoot unarmed black suspects than white officers are—which cuts against the narrative of racist policing.

Glenn: You said this earlier, and I think it deserves to be underscored. The energy behind the animus, the angst, the sense of outrage behind the Black Lives Matter movement—“Just stop killing us. We want you to stop killing us”—is premised on a claim that we know that people are being shot. You say, “What should the number be, given the disproportion of blacks and crime?” I say, “That's a hard question to answer without individualized data, which we don't have enough of,” and so on, and so on. But behind the movement lies the presumption that race is factoring causally in police officers' decision to use deadly force in their encounters with citizens.

In effect, the counterfactual that's being entertained is, if this person had been white, they wouldn't have been killed. So take a very graphic example: Tamir Rice—that's the 12-year-old in Cleveland, in a park, playing with a toy gun that the police presumably mistook for real, and they took his life. The sense people have is, had he been a white boy at 12 years old in exactly the same circumstance, he wouldn't have been killed. Now, as a social scientist, I recognize that question. I recognize it because of the difficulty of being able to give a valid statistical answer to it, because no one will ever live in the parallel universe in which the suspects in these particular instances were, by an experiment, sometimes black, sometimes white, and we see what the police do.

Nobody lives in that parallel universe, and the problem of drawing a valid statistical inference about a question like that, when we have imperfect data and we live in a nonexperimental world, is a huge problem. That's spoken as a social scientist. We don't have good data to draw statistical conclusions, but we do have the videotape evidence, and we do have the recordings on the cell phones of particular incidences.

You pointed out correctly that around 1,000 people are killed by the police in this country every year. One thousand. We have a dozen videos. We have 1,000 people killed, we have a dozen videos. Let's make it 50. Let's suppose we have 50 videos. We have 1,000 people killed, so what we've got are crumbs. We've got anecdotes, we've got sensationalized cases. Perhaps they're cherry-picked, perhaps they're not representative, perhaps the most egregious cases are the only ones that come to our attention. Should we have a national narrative leading to a movement, leading to large demonstrations in dozens of cities across the country, leading in some instances to violent, retaliatory actions?

I'm not blaming that on the movement. I'm just saying it happens in the context in which this kind of discussion is ongoing, driven by anecdotes and untethered from any rigorous and systematic investigation of such evidence as is available to us that attempts at least to be comprehensive and to deal with the universe, and not the cherry-picked cases. As a social scientist, I would want to say no; as an observer of culture and politics, I would say that it's very hard to keep the narrative in the box.

Once it gets out of the box, once it becomes compelling to people, once they start making analogies with slave suppressions, and American cities in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and they start saying, “This is a part of a very old American story”—once

we turn Ta-Nehisi Coates loose on a dozen cases, all of which are buttressed by tape recordings and such, it takes on a life of its own. And this is a grave concern to me, that serious political consequences can flow from circumstances that are perhaps not very well understood.

Sam: I'm very worried about this as well. I worry that Black Lives Matter, if it got all the attention that it wants, could set race relations back in this country a generation. Obviously I'm not aware of everything that is said under the banner of Black Lives Matter, and it could be that some highly rational and impeccable people are advocating in the stream of this movement. But I've seen it filtered through the left-wing media that is largely, if not entirely, sympathetic to the movement. And most of what I have heard—in particular about these videos and the cases about which we don't have videos but which have been well described, like the Michael Brown shooting—has struck me as dangerously and offensively irrational.

Here's the core issue for me: These cases run the full gamut of police malfeasance and culpability on the one end to completely predictable and even rational uses of force on the other, and everything in between. So on the one end you have cops who are quite obviously guilty of murder, whether it's from racism or some other deranged motive, and I would put the Walter Scott and Laquan McDonald shootings there. These cops, to my eye, clearly should never have been given a gun and a badge, and they belong in prison. And if I'm not mistaken, the cops involved in those shootings are actually being prosecuted for murder, so the system appears to be working in the right direction in those cases.

But on the other end, you have legitimate uses of force that would have happened 99 times out of 100 in the presence of any sane cop, and race surely had nothing to do with it. I would put the Michael Brown case pretty close to that end of the continuum. We don't have a video of what happened, but the facts as reported suggest that he attacked a police officer and was trying to get his gun.

If you're trying to get a cop's gun, it is only rational for him to believe that you intend to kill him with it. Whatever the color of your skin, you're going to get shot. And if you don't get shot, it's either because you got very lucky, because the cop had amazing hand-to-hand skills and he just decided to spare your life, or because there were enough cops on hand to physically overpower you without requiring lethal force.

In the rest of these cases, you see almost every variety of incompetence, bad luck, poor training, and just basic human chaos, and I would put all these recent incidents, like Philando Castile, and Alton Sterling, and frankly even Eric Garner somewhere in the middle here.

These cases, the three I just mentioned, are totally unlike the extremes but they're importantly different from one another too. One thing to point out is that in some of these videos, the video record itself can be profoundly misleading. Some start after the shooting occurred—you simply don't know what precipitated it—and some that show the shooting don't show you what the cops themselves saw. So you can't really judge whether it was rational for them to feel that their lives were in danger. The range of these cases, ethically and as a matter of police procedure, is almost as wide as can be imagined.

And then you throw the Trayvon Martin case in the mix, where the guy who shot him wasn't even a cop and arguably wasn't white, right? And yet all these cases are spoken about in the same breath as intolerable examples of murderous racism on the part of the police. So my problem—and again, this doesn't subsume everything Black Lives Matter is doing—is that this seems to be the moral core of the movement, as far as I can tell. And these claims are not only inaccurate

and unfair, they seem frankly dangerous to me.

Glenn: Okay, that's a lot. Time is limited, but I think I need to respond. First, Black Lives Matter is not one thing. It's an aggregation of a fairly large number of loosely connected initiatives and movements that are ongoing, so it's going to be a little ragged around the edges. And you said you're sure that some decent, upstanding, sensible people are involved. I don't know the movement as well as I might, but from what I know, that's certainly true.

I perhaps should make a confession. In the January 2015 *Boston Review*—that's a literary and political magazine published out of Boston—I have a piece on the Ferguson matter, Michael Brown and Darren Wilson, the police officer, in which I say Michael Brown is no Rosa Parks, and he's no Emmett Till, either.

What I meant by “no Rosa Parks” is that Rosa Parks was a woman who refused to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama and in effect started the civil rights movement with the subsequent protest in Montgomery, Alabama, and the bus boycott and so on. She is thought of in some circles as the mother of the civil rights movement. Michael Brown is no Rosa Parks, and I only meant to say, “Please don't use this case as the template on which to try to build a national movement for racial justice.” And the reason I said that in that piece was precisely because I thought Brown was culpable in what happened, as best we know.

Two separate investigations came to the same conclusion. The local authorities and the federal government both looked at that and concluded that the officer had acted reasonably under that circumstance. So please, don't make a movement out of this. And he wasn't Emmett Till, either: Emmett Till was the victim of a lynching in the 1950s in the South, and he became a celebrated case of racist violence against black people because his body was displayed for public viewing in a casket, even though it was partly decomposed because he had been murdered and then buried. It was a horrible thing to behold.

So he's a celebrated case, and I'm saying, you know, Michael Brown, as best we understand the facts, tried to assault a police officer, tried to take his weapon, and placed the police officer in fear for his life. I got tremendous negative reaction to that article, and I describe that in order to try to put my finger on a phenomenon. You say “irrationality,” you say these cases are different. Of course they're different. You say that it's dangerous and disconcerting that people would aggregate such cases into a generic indictment and then mount a movement on the basis of it. I agree with that.

On the other hand, it would appear to me that if we were to step back as social analysts and just try to understand the dynamics of the phenomenon, we'd recognize that there's a kind of logic. I mean, a movement will have its own momentum from the appropriation of these varied cases, and the eliding of important differences between them, and the suppression of specific factual information like the guy, George Zimmerman, who shot Trayvon Martin in Florida, was not white. He was of Latino background, and he was acquitted by a jury of his peers after they concluded that he had acted in defense of his life. People will say, “Well, he should never have been following Trayvon Martin in the first place.”

I'm prepared perhaps to credit that. But that doesn't change the fact that these inconvenient details in these various cases will be suppressed in the interest of affirming a narrative. The case fits the narrative, not the facts. The narrative has a momentum and a kind of “integrity”—I use the word in inverted commas—of its own. People are looking for evidence of racists. They don't trust the proceedings of duly authorized tribunals that attempt to assess the facts. “We all know, don't we, that the police lie. Why should I believe the outcome of any particular grand jury?”

They don't indict the guy who applied the chokehold in the Eric Garner case. No one's going to talk about, well, why is the man resisting arrest in the first place? If he'd merely complied, the encounter would have ended in a mundane manner. No one is going to bother with the idea that, well, the cop was attempting to control a situation. Perhaps he shouldn't have been using the chokehold, but he certainly didn't attempt to kill anybody. The narrative has such a power of its own that these features are going to be suppressed, and indeed anybody who raises them—even a black person like myself—will be suspect. “Don't you know that by dwelling on that kind of detail you are actually undercutting our effort to get justice for our people?”

Sam: One thing I see in these police videos in general—and I've seen a lot of these videos, for black arrests, white arrests, and I've trained with police officers, so I can see this from the other side—the overwhelming fact that comes through in these encounters, is that people don't understand how to behave around cops so as to keep themselves safe. You mention resisting arrest. People simply have to stop resisting arrest, and they have to understand how the force continuum looks from a cop's point of view.

This will be a bit of a public service announcement. If you get nothing else from this end of the podcast, this is something you can take away that will actually keep you safer, and I think it's something that Black Lives Matter should be teaching explicitly: If you put your hands on a cop—if you're wrestling a cop, or grabbing him, or pushing him, or striking him—you are very likely to get shot, whatever the color of your skin.

When you're with a cop, there's always a gun out in the open. And any physical struggle has to be perceived by him as a fight for the gun. A cop doesn't know what you're going to do if you physically overpower him, and he has to assume the worst. Most cops are not so confident in their ability to physically control a person without shooting him—for good reason, because they're actually not well trained at that, and they're continually confronting people who are bigger than them, or younger and more athletic, or more aggressive, and they're not superheroes. Cops are just ordinary people with surprisingly little training, and once things turn physical, they can't afford to just hope for the best.

This is something that people are totally confused about. They think that if they see a video of somebody trying to punch a cop in the face and the person's unarmed, well then the cop should just be punching back, right? And any use of deadly force is, by definition, unwarranted. But that is just insanity. It's not the cop's job to be the best bare-knuckle boxer on earth. He can't afford to get hit in the head and risk getting knocked out, because there's a gun on the table. This is the cop's perception of the world, and it is a justifiable one given the dynamics of human violence.

There's a part in your podcast with Rajiv Sethi where I felt you guys were talking past one another a little bit. I recommend that people see that podcast, because it was very valuable on many points. On this point he was totally correct to insist that you should be able to be rude to a cop in our society without being physically punished for it, much less killed. And I think he's right to think that it's a measure of a civilized society that cops don't start beating you just because you've been disrespectful.

Glenn: Sure.

Sam: But you were right to insist that people shouldn't be rude to cops because it's unwise. You should be respectful to a cop because you don't want things to escalate. And again, Rajiv is right in saying that they shouldn't escalate based on

anything you might say, and if they do escalate, it's the fault of the cop. He's right to think that it's the cop's job to have a very thick skin and be totally professional in his dealings with the public. But on your side, do you really want to increase the risk to your own life by testing the emotional maturity of the guy with a gun?

No, you do not. In my view, you have to deal with a cop like he's a lethal robot who could malfunction at any time. And what I see in these videos is people who just have no idea what the implications are of grabbing a cop, pushing a cop, of doing whatever they're doing to resist arrest.

Just think about this: It's never up to you whether or not you should be arrested. How could it be? How could it *ever* be? Does it matter that *you* know you didn't do anything wrong? How could that fact be effectively communicated by your not following police commands? Unless you called the cop yourself, you actually never know what situation you're in.

If I'm walking down the street, I don't know that the cop who approaches me didn't get a call that some guy who looks like Ben Stiller just committed an armed robbery. I know I didn't do anything, but I don't know what's in the cop's head. So how am I the best judge of whether or not I should be arrested? The time to find out what's going on—and again, I'm sorry for the public service announcement, but this is really important for people to understand—the time to find out what's going on, the time to complain about racist cops, the time to punish them and the time to go ballistic, is *after* cooperating, at the police station, in the presence of a lawyer.

That's the time to rectify all the problems in the system and to punish all the bad cops, which are surely out there. But to not comply in the heat of the moment, when the guy with the gun is issuing commands—this raises your risk astronomically, and it's something that people, it seems, just do not intuitively understand.

Glenn: That was a long statement, Sam, and I think it's worth every minute of it. I couldn't agree more with what you've said. With respect to my colloquy with my friend Rajiv Sethi, you're right: I do think we were talking past one another. I was making your point, which is that it's unwise not to comply with a police officer when you're in a situation in which he's arresting you, or may arrest you, or detaining you, or whatever it might be—he may be doing so unfairly, but you should not attempt to resolve that dispute by resisting his prosecution of that situation.

You should do it in another context. I certainly agree with that as a matter of prudence. But I was also making the point that as a citizen, one has an obligation to avoid that conflict with the police officer, notwithstanding the fact that the police officer may have made a mistake. That civility or interaction with the duly constituted institutions of authority in this society, which are there on your behalf, is a duty of citizenship. I was making that claim. You may not agree with that, but I was making that claim. That's leading me to what I really want to say, which is that people for whom the institutions of police and authority have lost legitimacy are not going to be compelled by the observation that one has a duty to comply.

They may be persuaded by the observation that it's unwise not to comply, but there will still be resentment, maybe intense resentment. I'm thinking of some of these cases I mentioned during my conversation with Rajiv: Sandra Bland, the woman who was found dead in her jail cell—evidently of suicide, although that's disputed—who gets into an altercation with a police officer who pulls her over for a minor traffic violation. "People shouldn't be pulled over just because they changed lanes without signaling it; that's harassment," a person might say.

She blows smoke in the police officer's face, and he tells her to put the cigarette out, and she doesn't comply. He loses his cool. Maybe he should not have lost his cool. Maybe he should have been more temperate in the circumstance. But she's provoking him. She ends up being arrested. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.—another celebrated case. This is the Harvard professor, arrested on his doorstep for breaking into his own house because he gets into an altercation with a police officer who's been called to the scene, suspecting that a burglary might be in progress, and asks him to produce ID.

He doesn't respond to the police officer politely. Instead he berates the police officer for signaling him out for attention because he's black. He ends up in handcuffs and being taken to the police station. The president of the United States even has to weigh in on the case. But these are cases where I would say that the background contempt for the institutions of authority associated with simply being black in America, and thinking of police as not necessarily being friendly to you, thinking that they're profiling you, thinking that they've singled you out for attention, leads to the kind of contempt or disrespect or refusal to honor the law-enforcement officer in this circumstance. And that can, of course, backfire on people.

Rajiv's response to me was to suggest that I wanted black people to be passive and servile in interactions with police officers. He was saying, "Why should a person have to lower themselves to the position of being passive and servile simply because this person is wearing a uniform?" Of course I didn't counsel passivity. I counseled civility. But the perception that even an act of civility is a kind of passivity is more likely to arise in the mind of somebody who resents the very fact of the presence of the police officer in the first place, and thinks that generically "the police, the cops" have it in for their kind.

"So you're asking me to be civil? In a way, I want to show my contempt as a reaction to what I believe to be the contempt that the officer has toward me." That's not a justification, but it may be, at least in part, an explanation for why so many people don't follow your very sage advice.

Sam: Glenn, I'm now mindful of just how generous you've been with your time, because I've stolen at least 15 minutes more than we had budgeted. It's been really a great pleasure and privilege to have you on the podcast, and I hope it's just the first of many conversations we have by Skype or in person. Just to close, please tell people where they can find more of your work online—your Twitter handle and your website, in particular.

Glenn: My website is the [Economics Department at Brown](#). I actually don't even know my Twitter handle. God, forgive me, please. ([@GlennLoury](#))

Sam: I'll put it on my blog, so wherever this podcast is embedded on my website, you will find how you can learn more about Glenn online.

Glenn: And in my signature for my email to you, Sam, you'll find a URL for my website.

Sam: Great, great. Glenn, thanks again. This has really been great.

Glenn: Take care, Sam. I really enjoyed talking to you. We have to find a happier subject next time.

Sam: Will do.

[music]

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