

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 417 TRANSCRIPT

Tom Morello: I'm Tom Morello and you're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

[Music] "Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long."

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host David Feldman. Hello, David.

David Feldman: Hello, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: And we also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi.

Steve Skrovan: Antiracism activists in America have achieved a lot. They brought us the abolition of slavery in the 1800s and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1900s. But what about twenty-first century antiracism? What are today's antiracism activists fighting for, and does their work materially improve lives or is it all about the performance of being anti-racist? Our first guest today will be author, linguist and Columbia University Professor John McWhorter. In his new book, *Woke Racism*, he argues that today's antiracism isn't a pragmatic, progressive ideology making things better for real people. Instead, he argues that it is actively harmful to Black people and is more like a religion than a true social justice movement. We look forward to speaking with Professor McWhorter about his book as well as his thoughts on how illiberal tendencies on both sides of the political spectrum can lead to censorship.

In the second half of the show, we'll welcome Father Albert Fritsch, co-author of *Ethnic Atlas of the United States*. Father Fritsch was co-founder of the Center for Science in the Public Interest that quickly became America's leading food safety and nutrition advocacy organization. CSPI campaigned for reforms such as the elimination of sulfite preservatives on fresh foods, and nutritional product labeling we now take for granted. Today we're going to find out from Father Fritsch why ethnicity matters. As always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber, but first let's find out what our first guest means when he talks about *Woke Racism*. David?

David Feldman: John McWhorter is a professor of linguistics at Columbia University. Professor McWhorter is a columnist for the *New York Times*, and author of more than a dozen books including *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English*, *Words on the Move: Why English Won't – and Can't – Sit Still (Like, Literally)*. And his new book is entitled, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Professor John McWhorter.

John McWhorter: Happy to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, John. In your book, you frame it on page 4 and I want to quote, "One can divide antiracism into three waves along the lines that feminism has been. First Wave Antiracism battled slavery and legalized segregation. Second Wave Antiracism in the 1970s and '80s battled racist attitudes and taught America that being racist is a moral flaw. Third Wave

Antiracism, becoming mainstream in the 2010s, teaches that because racism is baked into the structure of society, whites' "complicity" in living within it constitutes racism itself, while for Black people, grappling with the racism surrounding them is the totality of experience and must condition exquisite sensitivity toward them, including a suspension of standards of achievement and conduct," end quote. And what your book is about is a critique of this third wave. And as I've always promised my listeners, we're going to start with specific examples. Could you give three or four examples . . . and I want to add one myself. Can you start with the example of Alison Roman, who was a food editor for the *New York Times*, and what happened to her?

John McWhorter: Yeah. A couple of years ago, Alison Roman made some snarky comments about Marie Kondo, who is a Japanese citizen, and Chrissy Teigen, who is a model who is half Thai. And she was just making some jokes about how they seem to have gone commercial. And Alison Roman was suspended from the *New York Times* and eventually left it. Basically she had to leave the job. And it was because she was processed as having ridiculed two women of color. Now, when we talk about people of color and why we want to be sensitive to any degree to people of color, we're not usually thinking about Japanese citizens and somebody who is half Thai but lives essentially as just an undefinable American person. It's not really what it means, and yet, her life was transformed by simply some snarky comments in one interview.

Ralph Nader: What happened to her?

John McWhorter: Well, she was suspended and for a long time you didn't hear anything from her, and eventually she left and now she is blogging and podcasting, I think, on her own. So it's not that she's selling pencils on the street, but if she hadn't made those snarky comments, she would still have her post at the newspaper that she worked for. That was the first example that made me think, what's going on here? Because she would not have been suspended for the little comments that she made about those particular people probably even just a year before. It was in spring of 2020 that things started to change in a really radical way.

Ralph Nader: Okay. The next one?

John McWhorter: Leslie Neal-Boylan was the head of a department of nursing, and during the post George Floyd racial reckoning period in mid-2020, she wrote an email circulated among the people she worked with, saying that . . .

Ralph Nader: This is at the University of Massachusetts, right?

John McWhorter: That's right. And it said that Black Lives Matter and also all lives matter. So she said she understood what we go through, Black Lives Matter, and then in a salutary sense coming from somebody who is concerned with healthcare for all people, she said, "Also all lives matter." She wasn't contradicting Black Lives Matter or putting it down. She was just making a valedictory and humanist statement. And because of that, she lost her job because she was taken as somehow denying the legitimacy of Black Lives Matter and its claims when she simply wasn't. That wasn't right. It was unjust. And it was another thing that happened that made me realize we were in a whole new world.

Ralph Nader: Then there's David Shor.

John McWhorter: Appalling. David Shor reported on some work that a Black political scientist had done. This Black political scientist showed that the riots in the late 1960s during the long,

hot summers, and events like that have a way of making white people more likely to vote Republican. That was a fact that a Black political scientist had done a study showing that there were all sorts of places you can take that. David Shore reported it. He was interpreted as saying that Black people shouldn't protest, and therefore he was removed from his position at that time out of an idea that it had been racist to quote this article, which had initially been distributed with great praise in the media by a Black young political scientist who had all of the right intentions that people expect. So that wasn't right. And when all of these things happened, it was like dominos falling. And it was rather alarming to see these things going on because they don't make any kind of moral sense. And I just realized that all of these things are connected. It isn't that people are going crazy, because very few people are crazy, but all these things are connected to something larger and I wanted to get a sense of what it was and why all of this became so much more likely after the murder of George Floyd in the spring of 2020.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about two other examples. One, Evergreen College.

John McWhorter: Goodness. That was before this period but it was the beginning of this kind of storm. The thing about Evergreen College is that that kind of thing is now normal. Bret Weinstein was a biology professor there and there emerged a call for all non-Black professors, I think, to desert the campus for a day so that only Black students and teachers could occupy it and be free of the burden of the racism that they experience on the campus every day with white people on it. Bret Weinstein refused to observe that and as a result, was all but physically assaulted at his office. He was screamed at, terrible things were said about him, and it got to the point that campus security could not guarantee his safety and he had to leave the job. That was appalling then but we tended to classify it as campuses going crazy. The thing is that at this point, that sort of thing seems perfectly normal and it isn't just campuses. That kind of attitude, which looked like something that happens at crazy little places like Evergreen College, is not all of American society. Nobody would blink if that happened now.

Ralph Nader: And it's not just campuses. Less than a year ago, the editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the main newspaper in Philadelphia, who was editor for 12 years; people seemed to like him; he had for years before he became editor at the *Inquirer*, and it turned out the architectural editor wrote an article, and the title was "Public Buildings Matter." And he was talking about how powerful demonstrations in the streets can affect public buildings. And some of the staff rose up, said this was racist, demanded the editor resign, who had really nothing to do with the article. He did resign and he apologized. Well, my take on that is number one, there was no due process. He was not given a chance to defend himself. Second, it was certainly disproportionate penalty for what this man allegedly was held responsible for, his own architectural critic. And third of course is the commentary do people have a monopoly on language. Only corporations have a monopoly on language. They trademark their various phrases and slogans.

And then just a few days ago, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reported that the CEO of Estée Lauder, the big cosmetic company who makes \$9.5 million a year, that's about over \$5000 an hour, eight hours a day, he was pushed out. And could you explain that just for a minute, Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. From the *Washington Post* article I'll quote, John Dempsey, who is the executive group president of Estée Lauder Companies, was told to leave the cosmetic giant effective this week after posting a meme spoofing a *Sesame Street* children's book cover; the

meme which showed Big Bird wearing a surgical mask while standing at a sick Snuffleupagus' bedside, used a redacted version of the N word in the title while stating this, "Snuffy had contracted the coronavirus at a Chingy concert." Chingy is a Black rapper. The post had been removed and Demsey apologized. So that was that case.

Ralph Nader: Well, there's something obviously that John in his book points out. There's something very powerful going on here. Corporates executives don't get forced out for producing deadly products that kill, injure and sicken people, or to cheat people on their billings or to illegally deny them healthcare, or to redline whole areas of cities or to profit from Wall Street all the way down to the loan sharks at the payday loan rackets in lower-income areas. But I guess one way to deal with corporate accountabilities is to have these corporates executives say the wrong word at any given time and then they're held accountable. Well, this is all about censorship. It's all about lack of due process. It's all about a kind of fever that's catching on here by people who hurl the phrase "racist" or hurl the phrase "sexist" but don't really do anything on the ground with their time about real racism, some of which I just described and many were described in John's book, and real sexism.

Now, before you get into your argument, there were two questions that popped up in reading the book. And one is why weren't you as upset with the Trumpster racism, which seems to be really real here, and you raise that in your book. And the second question that often arises is that on the ground where people live, work and raise their family, they are afflicted by a racism that's traced directly to corporate crime, fraud, abuse, corporate coercion, corporate control, which of course disadvantages and harms everybody; that's indiscriminate injustice, but also has a severe added effect on people who can't defend themselves at all and never get their calls returned, usually low-income minority people. So could you comment on just those two? Every time someone writes a book, someone tries to comment and says, "You didn't write the book I wanted you to write," so I understand that. But in this discussion, what about the Trumpsters in your framework here and what about corporate-induced or corporate-provoked racism?

John McWhorter: Yeah. I would say that as far as Donald Trump and his obvious casual Archie Bunker-style racism, the question is, how did it hurt Black America? Now, it was rather repulsive to see, but to the extent that you could not say that Black America was harmed by how that man felt about Black people, it just struck me as not as interesting, not as important as many people seem to think it should be. I am not a Trump fan for many reasons. His racism is frankly . . . we're on the bottom of the list because I think that he had effects on many more things much more important than racial attitudes. There are too many Black people who like Donald Trump for me to feel too bad about his racism. And the fact is it's not something that I kept an eye on with a special zeal. But Black people, actually overall, did better under Trump financially than they happened to under Obama. So for me, the main issue was that of course racism exists, but I think that we Black people are taught to exaggerate the degree to which it's important, and especially since about two years ago, a certain class of white person has taken our side in very large numbers in contributing to that kind of exaggeration and all of this recreational punitiveness of the sort that we've been referring to on this episode. And as far as corporate racism, all of that is very real and I think it's almost criminal that we talk less about that than some post on an Instagram that this person makes because he's had maybe a couple of beers and thinks something is funny, with the idea being that our job is to police society for what we think of as heresy, because that's really what's going on, as opposed to thinking about what actually

hurts real Black people living in the real world. And one thing I know is that it's perhaps more fun to chase a CEO out of his job because he posted something with the N word in it than to actually go out into the world and work on things such as environmental racism, work on things that bedevil people of low-income, among whom Black people, are disproportionately represented. I think a lot of people are really just having a kind of fun and that's just not enough. That's not civil rights.

Ralph Nader: Well, you mentioned law schools and I've been to a lot of law schools speaking, and the students now go crazy if they hear an ethnic, racial or sexist slur, but they're not very mobilized on the conditions reflected by those words. Where they go to law school, some of them do clinics of course and they help the poor, but by and large, this verbal fever is expressed in very symbolic ways but is separated from the reality on the ground. The poor, which are more than represented by minorities, pay more, they die earlier because of the healthcare system and how it denies them and deprives them. They are basically blocked from access to justice in so many ways. They can't get to their jobs because the public transit is under-invested compared to highways. And it just goes on and on. And it's gone to a point now, the fever that you describe, and I would call them mindsetters. I know you call them elect. I would call them mindsetters, that they basically tell you what you got to think and you're supposed to shut up and not even respond, which is censorship incarnate. When I was in law school, most of the censorship came from the right-wing, from the conservatives, censoring books and films and things like that. Now it has spread into what is euphemistically called the left or the liberal. But you have people now who want to change the name of Columbus, Ohio, get rid of the Washington Monument and change the name of colleges that have Jefferson in it. What's your take on all that? And they do it because these people were slavers and in Columbus' case, he slaughtered the natives that greeted him when he landed in the Caribbean Islands, et cetera. What's your take on that because that seems to be roaring through schools. There are buildings at Berkeley that are being demanded to be renamed because of some minor failing of the person named 50/ 60 years ago.

John McWhorter: Yeah. What's going on here is that I think to oversimplify it in terms of who is represented, white people do this as a kind of virtue signaling. The idea is that to show that you're a good person, you show that you understand that racism exists and has existed and that you know that racism is what we call systemic or institutional. So the idea is not to show that you have faith in God or Jesus. The idea is to show that you understand that racism exists. And for people like this, they've taken on a sense that the acknowledgement of racism is the central intellectual and moral duty of the enlightened person. Not just one of many things but what should be the focus of how you process the world. So it's become what I term a religion, and many people would consider it to be something else. But it's important to realize how central the idea of battling power differentials wielded by whites this has become to that kind of person.

Black people engage in this sort of thing because it's very easy to fall for an idea that what makes you important is your status as a victim. The victim complex is a human issue. It's not something that only happens to Black people. But because of the cocktail of factors that affect Black people and have created Black history in this country, it is easy as a Black person to develop a sense that what makes you most important, what makes you most interesting, what gives your life its purpose is your role as a victim who survives despite obstacles, and your role as somebody whose job is to announce that racism still exists but it's just underground, it's not as obvious as it used to be. You feel like you have a purpose, you feel noble in that way. The noble victim is a

human type. The Black people who are noble victims engage in things such as pretending that taking Thomas Jefferson's name off of buildings is going to change anything or affect anything or is necessary.

All these people, white and Black, are pretending that nothing is ever past. They're pretending not to understand that people at different points in time naturally are going to have failings compared to how we see things now and that race is not going to be an exception with those sorts of things. Deep down, all those people understand that but they need to show that racism exists. And there are all sorts of ways of doing it. And if the pickings get slim, next thing you know, you're trying to pull someone's name off of the building because of one thing that they said in one book in 1943. Because when you do it, even if you don't get what you want, you have shown that you know that racism exists and has existed. It's a very narrow way of looking at things. But only in understanding it can we see why so many people are so caught up in such trivia and willing to destroy people's lives on the basis of it.

Ralph Nader: At the same time, there are thousands of large landlords violating the law and not changing the content of the paint in their buildings and their apartments and there's still lead paint being chipped off and leading to brain damage mostly in poor areas. We don't see many people who you've described going after these landlords as racist. It's a violent racism. What you're talking about more is a verbal back and forth here. So let's take your metaphor, or if it wasn't a metaphor, you called it a religion. Who are the priesthoods here in this religion, and who are the enforcers? I mean, for example, how do these CEOs get toppled? What happens when the accusation is made or the revelation occurs and suddenly, within hours or days, these all-powerful CEOs who push people around, and exploit people, and pollute the air and forget about global crisis, and keep pumping more oil, gas, coal, greenhouse gases? They stay in place but suddenly they're removed. What exactly is the enforcement mechanism there and what is the priesthood?

John McWhorter: Well, often how these things happen is that the younger staffers are up in arms. The middle-aged staffers kind of scratch their chins and go along with it because they don't want to be called racist on Twitter and on Slack. But it's usually people under about 35 who feel that heads must roll because of this sort of thing. And then, even people older than that are beginning to think that it's better to let that head roll for PR reasons, because you don't want to lose the business; you don't want to lose the custom, so to speak, of people who are hyper-woke, because the hyper-woke have money just like everybody else. And so the enforcers nowadays I find when I hear about these cases. And there's even a cadre of linguists who feel that way about me; there's nothing they can fire me from but it's there. It's younger people who are thinking in this way. And what's scary is that in about 10 or 15 years, they're going to be middle-aged, and therefore have full access to the levers of power.

The priests with this elect religion tend to be writers. It's interesting. It's not preachers anymore like with the old times Civil Rights Movement. It tends to be certain academics and journalists who are taken up as those who are preaching the good word. And so for example, Ta-Nehisi Coates has largely withdrawn from the punditry scene at this point, but he got a lot of this started in terms of laying some of the groundwork. I think he is the one who popularized in an influential way the use of the term white supremacy in place of racist, for example. He wrote for *The Atlantic*. Or today, two of the priests are the sociologist Robin DiAngelo, who wrote her best-selling book, *White Fragility*, or the African-American Studies professor, Ibram Kendi, who

has written some books taking a certain radical position about what racism is. So those are the priests. As I say in the book, you could have a trilogy of Ta-Nehisi Coates's best-selling book, Ibram Kendi's best-selling book, and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, and that would be three testaments of the kind of new antiracist bible because those three books really are read as if they were liturgy rather than pieces of opinion.

Ralph Nader: And *White Fragility* is still selling. It came out in 2018, it was around 300 or so on Amazon today. Your book is around 3000 on Amazon today, so you're getting quite a hearing here. You appear in the *New York Times*. What kind of progress are you making against what I call the censorship that's going on? I mean, whether you agree with these people or not, most of them are not doers to begin with.

John McWhorter: No.

Ralph Nader: They don't follow up their knowledge with action. And second, the censorship is quite pronounced. It's like if you dare respond, you'll lose your job. And that doesn't seem to be abating. So, what kind of support are you getting on campuses, for example, say, Columbia?

John McWhorter: The truth is, from what I know, maybe this will change but from what I know, Columbia does not have a problem with me. If anything, they just think of me as one of their professors whose name is out there which redounds well to the Columbia brand, I suppose. So I don't have that story to tell, but I think that what I'm detecting, despite cases like the Estée Lauder case, is that it's less likely nowadays that somebody gets fired for a minor transgression than it was in 2020. In 2020, all anybody had to do was snap their fingers. Now, an increasing number of people are resisting and I hope that continues because my job, as I see it, is just to embolden as many people as possible to speak out when they see this sort of thing happening instead of watching it happen and knowing that it's wrong but not saying anything out of fear of losing their job. If you don't think you're going to lose your job, speak up. And I think that if that happens to a considerable degree, and I suspect that it's going to because what we see is so clearly egregious. We're coming out of our houses now, we're not huddling during a pandemic; we can return to the paradise of 2019 because really all of this does a phase shift in about April of 2020. That's what I want to get us away from.

Ralph Nader: And you're a linguist and words in our culture seems to matter more than deeds. Bad deeds are widely ignored but words really send up the fever in people. What's your view of that? Why are otherwise bright, articulate students at universities and colleges so obsessed with words and symbols? For example, they would have a nationwide petition demanding Trump's resignation if Trump was caught on a recorder in the White House saying the N word, the S word against Hispanics and the K word against Jews, and they would never have a national petition the fact that he spent four years selling the US government to Wall Street and enriching himself and his family. There is no national protest from the campuses. How do you explain that kind of divergence of consciousness by people who are supposed to be thinking every day in their educational experience?

John McWhorter: Yeah. What you're talking about really does get at the heart of it. And I would have to say, despite that I'm a linguist and people are waiting for me to have a linguist take on this, it's less the words that are making people so upset than you can put words together in such a way that suggests that you are not aware of or concerned sufficiently about the role of

racism in American society. And that, to these people, is a heresy and means that you can no longer be in the room. And the reason I call it religious is because as you say, it really doesn't make any sense if you pull the camera just a few feet back and see that there are things that you could despise about Trump deeply that affect actual lives so much more than some word. And yet, you're quite right. If he had been caught using the N word in the Oval Office or outside of it, then there would have been this national outcry far above and beyond the horrible things that he actually did to the country all the way up to when he finally had to leave Washington. It is analogous to the kind of person who calls for defunding the police in neighborhoods where everybody who actually lives there wants there to be more police. That makes no blessed sense at all that somebody would consider themselves an antiracist by calling for defunding the police, except that when you call for defunding the police, you're showing that you know racism exists. And if that's of paramount importance, then that explains why a sane, smart, concerned person would cherish the idea of defunding the police even though it would hurt the people who they call themselves being an ally of. There's a mental blockage involved here. And so, yes, you see injustice being allowed to pass, being seen as uninteresting, while something somebody says that suggests that they don't have a proper allegiance to one small thing is enough to make them deserve to have their life destroyed. That's the problem. Yeah.

Ralph Nader: How do you explain the post George Floyd phenomena reflected in National Public Radio and *New York Times* where they focus on discriminatory injustice; they have interviews of minorities who are being cheated, being harmed, being excluded, being discriminated against-- it's what I call a plight radio--but they never go to the causes, they just stay with the human interest of the interviews. What do you see about this? I mean, is this a guilt complex here by the whites that dominate NPR at the top and the *New York Times* at the top?

John McWhorter: (chuckle) Well, I'm not in the position to say very much about the *Times* because I work for them now, but what you are referring to in general is this religion where what it comes down to is this: racism does exist in this society in terms of personal racism. There are inequities that are certainly the result of racism in the past, and sometimes racism in the present, although usually what's called systemic racism in terms of the present is too complicated to really deserve the name racism, but these race-based inequities are there. But I think in 50 years when people look back on the mainstream media and its obsessive concern with what it calls racism, it's going to be found peculiar. There are Europeans who observe this kind of media coverage and innocently, sincerely believe that being Black in the United States is this ongoing tragedy that even somebody like me who lives a life that somebody like me would have lived in, say, 1960, which is constant micro aggressions and doors closed and the police grabbing me for no real reason, et cetera. And we all know that that's not true. However, there is a narrative that we're taught to follow and it is to acknowledge that racism exists as a central concern. And *Woke Racism* is about that fetish because many people want to say, Well, what's wrong with acknowledging racism? And the issue is you can get to the point where you are covering racism, acknowledging racism, showing people that you know what it is, to such an obsessive and self-centered extent that you're not really concerned with the people themselves. And Ralph, you completely get this, I can see, that all of this has nothing to do with actually wanting to change the lives of real people out on the ground. It's a performance largely for over-educated people who don't have enough to do. And I think it needs to be called out.

Ralph Nader: I've often said you can't talk about racism if you don't talk about class. Cornel West wrote tracks *Race Matters and Class Matters*. And class means you have to talk about corporate crime, corporate fraud, corporate control, corporate coercion, corporate censorship. Just look at the fine print contracts. We've lost our freedom of contract in this country. Let me put this generically to you. We're talking with Professor John McWhorter, author of the best-selling book, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*, published by Penguin. Let's go back to the slave trade. Simple question. Was the slave trade provoked by profit or race?

John McWhorter: Is that a question for me?

Ralph Nader: Yes.

John McWhorter: It was about profit and it was considered tolerable because people of the Black race were considered less than human, if I'm answering the question properly.

Ralph Nader: Right. Now, what if there was no profit?

John McWhorter: Would it be done? No.

Ralph Nader: Would there have been a slave trade?

John McWhorter: No. Slavery is about pragmatism and that's why there's been forms of slavery worldwide since the dawn of time.

Ralph Nader: And when the slaves came to the United States by the time of the Civil War, they were deemed by economists to represent the greatest economic asset in the country in terms of dollar value.

John McWhorter: Certainly.

Ralph Nader: When I was in law school, we read law cases at the appellate level, very rarely did we go to the trial record because Harvard Law School students were not going to be trial lawyers; they were going to be appellate lawyers, they were going to work for these corporate law firms. And I noticed that there never was a case in the contracts book or the tort book involving slavery even though before the Civil War, the courts were filled with conflicts between slave owners against slave owners over who owned who. And there were actually some lawsuits against slave owners for committing wrongful injuries. And so I looked into it. I said, how could this be? They have cases going back to Medieval England. It turns out that West publishing company, that published all these case books for law schools, didn't want to put slave related cases because it would have offended the southern law schools.

John McWhorter: Interesting. Yeah.

Ralph Nader: And this kind of censorship affected Native Americans; it affected a lot of other ethnic groups. It infected the books that were used all over the country and at the undergraduate level as well. So there's a great opportunity to understand what you're talking about not just with our antipathy to censorship, to the refusal to dialogue, to the penalty punishment far exceeding the alleged crime, to the emphasis on words by people who wouldn't exert any effort to change the deeds of injustice on the ground. But I think we really have to connect class with race here.

There are 60 million poor whites in this country who, if they bothered to listen to NPR, would be entitled to ask the question, Hey, what about us? What about our plight? Give us your views on class and race.

John McWhorter: That's a tough one in this country because we like to pretend that class isn't real or we don't find it as interesting because especially educated people are taught that what we're supposed to focus on is race and racism. But one of the most awkward things about the conversation on race over about the past 20 years is that it's increasingly clear that thinking of there being a Black underclass that is in a special danger, is in especially hopeless circumstances, is obsolete. It's at the point where if we're talking about grinding multigenerational poverty, the white story . . . if we talk about the methamphetamine epidemic, if we talk about the *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance, that problem is just as large, just as difficult to solve and just as tragic as what is suffered by a disproportion of Black people. The idea among many is that the Black story is more important because slaves were brought here in chains and then there was Jim Crow. But it gets to the point where once again it's a rather peculiar attitude towards the past. At what point is the past the past? At what point do you stop being able to say "things are this way" in a flowchart, mousetrap kind of way, Rube Goldberg kind of way because of things that happened in the 1700s and the 1800s or even at this point in the middle of the 20th Century if you're going to talk about redlining.

And so, yeah, really we will be better off if we thought about class, for example, in affirmative action. It's one thing in 1966 to say that we're going to lower standards for all Black people in order to have more brown faces at our school. That made sense especially because a vaster disproportion of Black people were poor or close to it at the time. But generations later, when it's not at all unusual to be a Black persons like me, and in fact, by some arguments, Black people like me, middleclass, outnumber the ones who are part of anything that you would call an underclass. It gets to the point where you should be able to say out loud affirmative action should be about disadvantage, not about skin color. Yet, for many people, that's uncomfortable. They don't want to hear it because there's supposed to be an idea that blackness is a uniquely difficult condition that America is uniquely responsible for attending to the needs of all Black people now.

And the problem with all of that is that you can fashion these arguments for people who have time to chew on them and are inclined to twist their heads around unusual notions. That will never be most human beings. And I don't think that the way this sort of thing is being presented is ever going to convince a conclusive section of the public. Our sense of root causes has gone completely crazy. And you were present at a time when the argument was made more coherently. In the 1960s, America needed to hear about root causes but it's taken on a meme-like status now where it's used to excuse anything and to avoid dealing with realities such as that, yes, today we need to be talking about a race-neutral, general underclass rather than pretending that the plight of Black people in the inner cities in Philadelphia and Cleveland and Oakland is somehow more important than the legions and legions of white people living very similar lives with similarly hopeless prospects.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've gone from the 1950s when kids would be taunted and they'd say, quote, "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me," end quote, to micro aggressions where teachers will say, "We're going to discuss something that might upset you

tomorrow, students, so you're free not to attend because you might be offended or harmed psychologically." What's your take on that?

John McWhorter: Yeah. The reason for that, which sounds so ridiculous, is because you can listen to somebody say something and read it as indicating that they don't understand how important racism is. And because we've decided that that's so very, very important, it means that you sacrifice something as sensible as sticks and stones. Nothing ever seemed to make more sense than that old mantra. You cannot hurt me with words. And that should include, if you ask me, although I get the feeling I'm a radical on this, the N word. You cannot hurt me by saying a word. Not significantly. I won't give you the power. Everybody understands that on a certain level but the way we talk about race in this country, entails tacitly, that you suspend basic principles of cognitive health in order to engage in a certain kind of performance. It's sad and it's fake and you are revealing the extent of that in recalling sticks and stones may break my bones. I was raised on that too, but now I imagine we're supposed to see that as some sort of barbarism from the past.

Ralph Nader: Unfortunately, we're out of time. We've been talking with Professor John McWhorter of Columbia University. His book is called *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*. And if anybody wants to contact you, do you want to give a website, John?

John McWhorter: I don't have things like websites but I teach at Columbia and the people can find me on the usual social media platforms if they want to.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Well, thank you again, John. Unfortunately our time is up. Thank you very much, Professor John McWhorter.

John McWhorter: And thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Professor John McWhorter. We will link to his new book *Woke Racism* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, *Ethnic Atlas of the United States*, appropriately enough. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Report* "Morning Minute" for Friday, March 4, 2022; I'm Russell Mokhiber. Family Dollar said last week that it had temporarily closed more than 400 stores after the discovery of a rodent infestation and other unsanitary conditions at a distribution center in Arkansas, touched off a far-reaching recall of food, dietary supplements, cosmetics and other products. That's according to a report in the *New York Times*. A recent Food and Drug Administration inspection of the facility in West Memphis, Arkansas found live and dead rodents in various states of decay, rodent droppings, evidence of gnawing and nesting, and products stored in conditions that did not protect against these unsanitary conditions. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Regular listeners to the show know that Ralph is a big fan of maps of all kinds. Our next guest celebrates our multicultural ethnic heritage by mapping it all out. David?

David Feldman: Father Al Fritsch is an ordained Jesuit priest, co-founder of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, and director of EarthHealing.info. Father Fritsch is the author of numerous books, including *The Contrasumers: A Citizen's Guide to Resource Conservation*, also *Healing Appalachia: Sustainable Living through Appropriate Technology*, and *Ethnic Atlas of the United States: National Maps 1980 – 2020*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Father Al Fritsch.

Al Fritsch: Thank you very much.

Ralph Nader: Yes. Al, as you know, we go back a long way. You came to Washington years ago and worked on some of our projects before you joined Mr. Jacobson and Mr. Sullivan and formed the Center for Science in the Public Interest which has helped to revolutionize better nutritional practices in our country. But when you went back to your home area in Appalachia, you broke really new ground by applying science to practical problems of dealing with contaminated water, dealing with forests. You taught all kinds of people how to do science for the people, as your phrase went. So we want to point that out as well as one of your many accomplishments. But in this project you have, you're developing an ethnic atlas of the United States. And when I saw this, I wondered, I said, every 10 years with intermarriage, internal migration in the US, [and] gentrification, the concentration of ethnic and racial groups is being diluted or displaced. There are places in cities called Little Italy, that are no longer heavily populated by Italian Americans. How have you been able to demark these to the point where you actually have an ethnic atlas?

Al Fritsch: Well, we used data from 1980 and then followed up on it. And you look at the number of people in the long form of the census that tell their ethnic group. And so, after a while, you figure, on a 10-year basis, what a given predominant characteristic will be of a certain county. Of course you have to look at over 3000 of them to find out which is the group that's most known in it. Most people do not realize but 40% of the county's German is the predominate, but the Hispanics are coming up very fast. When you mentioned that there is that fading, which does occur and we have examples of it showing, such as there were many areas that were Germans from Russia; there were Mennonites, Lutherans and Catholics who came from Russia back in the 19th Century and they actually sent a person ahead in the Dakotas and several parts of the country and they would set up a place and then the people would come and settle there. This was very important for a number of years, and so we show it in the 1990 census where they were located. But over time it became diluted, you might say, because the people would report themselves as being either German or Russian. They never remembered that they were a special ethnic group at that time. Actually you're right about the Little Italys, and of course there are many examples of that. But what we fail to see now is that while we have a melting pot that is occurring when people declare themselves to be American, which about 10% of our people now do, but at the same time there is a growing number of people in a greater diversity because of the Asian-American increase, which have a lot of different groups in the country, and of course the Hispanics.

Ralph Nader: Al, there are so many reasons why you and your colleagues over 40 years have prepared this ethnic atlas. You mentioned societies that have diversity of ethnics are often enriched in many ways, not just different kinds of food, different kinds of music, but also different ways of solving human problems, some of which may be better in certain circumstances

than others and we can pick it up and learn from each other's ethnic heritage. But the big point you make is the relationship to the environment. Can you explain that?

Al Fritsch: Well, it's like species of animals or plants. So the human beings are of different cultural species, and therefore it's important for us to celebrate everyone that we have because greater diversity and mix with each other means it'll be a stronger America because we were actually people that were mixed from the beginning. We were not a single culture. We came together as a people; it was a federated situation, and we still have it today. And the only trouble is that some people are getting scared about the fact that groups that they do not have close affinity to have actually become very strong lately, especially, say, Asian-Americans or Hispanics from the viewpoint of white people who are really parts of like the Italians, Germans, French and so forth. They see their numbers are plateauing, if not decreasing, whereas this other group has come up enormously. From 2010 to 2020, over 5% of the United States increased in this minority group.

And so we have greater diversity than we ever had and what we're saying is we've got to celebrate it. It's something great that we can have with each other. And we're wanting people to actually join, find out the ones--that's why we have 250 different groups listed in that ethnic atlas--that people could come in various parts of the country and go to these meetings, celebrations, festivals and so forth. So our idea is to see that instead of being something that is morose or that it's actually threatening people, rather it's something that is great and glorious.

Ralph Nader: Black and Hispanic groups are making that point in a very diverse way these days throughout the country. How do you distinguish between the word race and the word ethnicity?

Al Fritsch: Well, there is a distinction but of course with the Hispanics, they cover both. And the Hispanics are listed usually along with Asian-Americans, which would be a group that would be racial. And then of course the subsets of Asian-Americans, such as Chinese, Japanese and so forth, each of these are considered a racial group by the US census. At the same time, we'd say, well just be aware that there are these differences but still, they can be counted. They can be counted in a great way which we can see the numbers of people, such as Hispanics having both white, about 90-some-percent, or Black with Dominicans and so forth. And so there is that distinction that you can say a racial group that's Black. And so we do admit this, and of course the government does too, that there is a flexibility here when you do the actual counting. But the simple fact is they exist as racial groups. They exist as ethnic groups too. And that consciousness differs with different people. The Basques are extremely, for instance, very ethnically conscious. And say, the Chinese are very racially conscious, you might say. But in both cases, you can count them, you can find where they're located and you can actually give a picture of it.

Ralph Nader: Certainly, we've been learning a lot in the last five decades about the way Native American traditions have treated nature. We, out of the west, and industrialized society, nature was something to be conquered. And in traditional, tribal history, nature is something to be respected and communed with, not conquered. So there are a lot of aspects to your report and your description that we don't have time to get into, but one thing really jumped out on me. When you said many minor languages are in trouble, some experts estimate that of the nearly 7000 spoken languages at the year 2000, half will be gone. Half will be gone by the year 2100, dying at the rate of one every two weeks. An effort is being made to save some of these languages but for many, that's not promising. Can you give us a commentary on that?

Al Fritsch: Well, for one, my own grandparents' language was Alsatian. And when I go back to Alsace, several times I have, and my cousins, once removed, did speak Alsatian in their older years. When they die, their children only speak French. And we have actually watched the very death of one of those languages, and that was one of them listed; Alsatian is actually dying right at this moment. But this can apply to a lot of languages, such as the Native American ones. There's a large number of them where death is occurring very rapidly because young people simply do not get involved with their parents or grandparents. And that was my fault too, for many ways, for not coming to my father and grandparents and asking them to teach us this language.

So this is happening because social media is causing it to a great degree. We have to have English in our country and Chinese, to some degree, later. But the people are losing the small languages throughout the world. And every one of them is a rich language. It has a lot to do . . . and if it were saved, and it takes a lot of effort to save these, they could add to the cultural richness that we have. And so it is occurring, what you just said. And it's occurring at a very rapid rate. In fact, the rates were set in 20,000. And I believe that they're going at a faster rate than what they even said.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Father Al Fritsch. When the language goes, a lot more than the language goes.

Al Fritsch: That's right.

Ralph Nader: When a language becomes extinct, a lot of knowledge becomes extinct; a lot of traditions become extinct; a lot of wisdom becomes extinct.

Al Fritsch: A lot of what people did, we don't have it anymore. And how they saw each other, oh my goodness, the losses. I was down in the Wend people, a Slavic group from Eastern Germany, that are in Lee County, Texas which is near Houston; they have a settlement there. We went in to that place and were asked if we wanted to meet some people that still spoke Wendish. And they said, There's one old lady over there at the nursing home and she could probably speak it to you. Now, here was a language that was dying in America. I don't know how it's doing but it's dying in Germany too for that matter. But are we able to save these languages? Some people are finding it out and doing it but they're a very minor group. Only maybe 100 to 200 languages are being saved that could have been heavily threatened. But we feel that if we have a better sense of culture, we could probably save more languages. That's what we're saying.

Ralph Nader: Last question, Al. You have an intriguing question here. You say, "Appalachian, as in ethnic group, question mark," what do you mean by that?

Al Fritsch: Well, this is what bothers me very much is that that's how we started. We wanted to figure out, because I was back in the region, what was the ethnic background of the region. The Scotch-Irish which is the basic part of southern Appalachia; northern is still heavily Germanic. But in the southern part, this language has been fractured to some degree by people not actually standing up and saying, I'm a Scotch-Irish person. And usually they'll say Irish but not Scotch-Irish. And what happens then is they became their own culture, which was Appalachian. They were Hillbillies, as people called them. What was happening was a culture was beginning to be formed that composed mainly of this basic group but it also involved English and others. They

were very tolerant people, accepting into their song and so forth, other subcultures that were in the area. In fact, the Appalachian people were very open to this, and therefore it was merging into a new culture.

Ralph Nader: I like the way you end your commentary when you say, "The continued cultural consciousness will help in the global collaboration needed to save our wounded Earth." That was a quote. On that note, we have to conclude. We've been speaking with Father Al Fritsch about his, in collaboration with two others over decades, *Ethnic Atlas of the United States*. Thank you very much for your work and that of your collaborators as well, Janet Kalisz and Mark Spencer, for that stamina over time. And thank you for the way you're making connections that often are not made in our present, frantic, public discussions. Thank you, Al.

Al Fritsch: Thank you, Steve and David, for having us on. We appreciate it very much.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Professor John McWhorter and Father Al Fritsch. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Ralph wants you to join the Congress Club. To get more information, go to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website and in the top right margin, click on the button labeled "Congress Club". We've also added a button right below that with specific instructions about what to include in your letters to Congress.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, "Stand Up, Rise Up", was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is the indefatigable Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody.

[Music]

You say you're tired of trying
You say we have no choice
You say you're just one person
And who will hear your voice
Don't let them fool you
You have the power in your hand
I'm only trying to school you