

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 369 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Hello, everybody.

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

Ralph Nader: Yes, indeed. Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: You know, over the past year, we have spoken with Professor Adolph Reed, emeritus professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, who has rather controversial views on whether it's better to approach sociopolitical issues through the prism of race or of class. On the show today, we're going to welcome another professor whose scholarship and life experience make him no stranger to this debate. His name is Michael Eric Dyson. Many of you will know him from his frequent appearances as a commentator on MSNBC. Professor Dyson has said that any institution or system has the potential to perpetuate inequality. So how do we identify that potential and address that inequality when we see it? He and Ralph we're going to talk about racism, corporatism, cancel culture, and how best to take action. And we're going to jam it all into one program for you as Professor Dyson will be our only guest today. But it wouldn't be a *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* if we didn't take a moment to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber, which we will also do, but first, can there ever be equality in a corporate state, David?

David Feldman: Michael Eric Dyson is a professor, a preacher and the author of several books including *Long Time Coming: Reckoning with Race in America*. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Professor Michael Eric Dyson.

Michael Eric Dyson: Thanks for having me. It's great to be here, my friend.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Michael. You've been interviewed so frequently on subjects that you've written about empirically, normatively, race, poverty, discrimination of all kinds. This time, I'd like to open up a new vista for some of our listeners, because we hear this phrase systemic racism. Every time I hear it, I say, I want specifics. I want [an] empirical base for this. It's far more than an assertion. And I want to start with systemic racism and inaction, which starts so much and so frequently with corporate crime, corporate power, corporate welfare, corporate supremacy, corporate fraud. And who are the principal victims? Everybody. It's a form of indiscriminate injustice that has discriminatory injustice within it against minorities, poor whites and others who are especially defenseless.

So, if people wonder about the connection, just listen for the next half minute. [Ralph chuckles] Mass transit suppressed by corporations like General Motors. Who suffers the most? Poor people. They don't have any other way to get around or get to work from the inner city to the suburbs, for example, where they clean houses for the wealthy. Housing discrimination--the landlord and realtor industry. What they did in Chicago and other cities has been well-

documented in gentrification, driving people out of areas. Labor--underpaying Black workers has been a crime for years, including not paying them billions of dollars a year, where they don't even get the pay that they've earned. Consumer abuse--the poor pay more. Minorities make up a lot of the poor. They're ripped off more in the inner city. It even goes to the point of corporate prisons. The criminal injustice, the bail bond racket; commercialism everywhere, exploiting.

When we did the study on standardized tests, the first one, Michael, it was quite clear that the best way to judge the outcome of these tests by the students was by income level. Because if you live in Scarsdale and your house is safe, et cetera, you're more likely to do better on these SATs than if you work in dungeon type tenements; you live in dungeon type tenements where you can barely avoid freezing in the winter. So that's the corporation too, the Educational Testing Service [ETS]. And it just continues across. The dispossession of Black farmers. By who? By commercial interests. Slavery. By who? Commercial interests, the giant cotton plantations. So, I want to get your thoughts on the impact of this with one final point. I would go to the [Congressional] Black Caucus in the [US] Congress years ago when they were chairs of important committees, you know, Judiciary Committee, Ways and Means Committee. And I could never get any of them to do investigative hearings on what life was like in the inner city--the loan sharks, the payday loan rackets, the rent-to-own rackets, the landlord abuses, the lack of adequate food outlets, dumping contaminated meat and other food into the inner cities, because there's no likelihood of any reporting or consumer protection. I couldn't get any yes. I actually had to get Dennis Kucinich, who had a subcommittee with no legislative authority, to have a couple of days hearings. And then there was Eric Lipton's article in *the New York Times* in 2011, about how these corporations are smothering the Black Caucus with few exceptions with campaign contributions and with support for their annual convention, et cetera. It's not a happy story, Michael, and I'd really love to hear your reaction to this, and one we're going to get far more emphasis on the corporate domination of our political economy and how it particularly skewers the most defenseless of Americans.

Michael Eric Dyson: Well, I mean, you laid it out there. All I can say is "Amen." I mean, when you tick it off. I tell people anything, any word, any, any phrase that ends with system is susceptible to the reproduction of the pathology of systemic racism. Criminal justice system, public education system, mass transportation system, and on and on. So that the relationship between the systemic and the institutional, those institutions of American political life that bear the responsibility to mediate claims between citizens, to adjudicate, you know, claims made by individual citizens on a state by means of the courts or the legal system to seek redress for the unjust denial of either compensation or of recognition within the state. So yeah, when you tick it off, the mass transit system that has really along with the shift from manufacturing to service industry exacerbated, you know, tendencies in the political economy to underprivileged, and those tendencies have been iterated by and reinforced by people with power, political figures, who are doing it; they ain't just falling out the sky. So that when you talk about the mass transit system that have gone out to the suburbs, jobs have gone out to the suburbs; people can't get out there. And if they return to the cities, they are high-wage jobs for high-skilled workers, where people who don't have the kind of requisite training to be able to compete. So either they were a victim of spatial distance when they had to go from inner cities to suburbs or they're subject to a kind of educational distance because they don't have the sorts of training and skills that are available for those jobs. So you got the mass transit stuff. You've got the labor that you spoke

about, which has been devastating in terms of, you know, a century or more of denied opportunity even within unions that had racial undercutting, right? They had a racial infrastructure that denied opportunity to competitive Black people. For instance, when you think about using so-called scab workers in the early 1900s, and then when you think about the fact that Black people were then marginalized, because they were seen as economic competition for working class and middle class descended White workers, then there was a racial dimension that was introduced, or at least exacerbated between workers, so that pipefitters unions, cement unions and so on and so forth began to see the competition, not as the overlords of industry, the captains of industry, where the bastion of wealth resided, but to competitive Black workers who were seeking merely to get a foothold in the economy.

So, when we tick it all off, yeah. When you talk about standardized testing, when you talk about, you know, the housing market, where, look, the bleed off of the greatest amount of wealth in the history of this nation for Black people happened when that housing bubble burst. And then when you talk about the payday loans, you are so absolutely right in terms of the kind of micro erosion of Black economic power at the level of the pay date. It's both metaphorically and symbolically poignant, but it's also substantive in the sense that people who take their wealth, their hard earned money and get ripped off by people trying to promise them that they can get a loan here, they can get the check cashed here until payday and the high interest rates that rip them off. And I'll end by saying this: this systemic character of much of the stuff we're talking about, the deeply entrenched institutional character of it means it doesn't depend simply on some guy that doesn't like you being in place. It's a self-perpetuating machinery of inequity that continues to depend upon the ignorance of the consumer, of the complicity of the political forces that are in place, and the ways in which large corporate America refuses to acknowledge the contributions of the very people that they are ripping off that they depend on for economic remuneration, Black and Brown and poor White people. And yet don't give back to them.

Ralph Nader: And, you know, people say, well, these [are] loan sharks, you know, what do you expect? But they're financed by Wall Street. The link to the banks and the banks don't want the business of poor people. So, there are tens of millions of poor people, many minorities, unbanked. They're exposed to huge fees for just cashing checks or making remittances. They can't get loans. The corporations destroyed the Postal Savings [System] bank inside the [US] Post Office in 1966, which allowed low-income people to have savings and engage in banking services all over the country. We haven't even started talking about health. The Johns Hopkins [University] study five years ago, Michael, it was a one-day story. And here's what they found, the physicians, that due to preventable problems in hospitals, 5,000 people a week die in this country--5,000 a week. You can only imagine what the income levels of most of these people are.

Michael Eric Dyson: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: 5,000 a week. And they said it was a conservative estimate; it didn't include clinics and doctors' offices. These are the physicians at the Johns Hopkins [University] School of Medicine. And it was a one-day story. And then we have Reverend [Dr. William J.] Barber's Poor People's Campaign. You'll like this story. As you know, he went through city after city before COVID with almost no coverage. They would have peaceful marches. They would

connect with local clergy and local antipoverty groups and they would get no coverage. They came to Washington D.C. They would get no coverage. Reverend Barber gets the connection with corporate power very eloquently. And so I went down to *the Washington Post* and met with the editors and I said, "Listen, among other things you're not covering, why aren't you covering the Poor People's Campaign?" And they said, "Well, yeah, we should do that actually; we've been remiss."

Well, you know, you're only talking about 50 million people who live in dire poverty. Half of the people in this country are impoverished, you know, but dire poverty, 50 million people. So the media, the media censors efforts as well. And who's the media? It's a giant corporate media. We don't even have to start with Fox [News Media] and how they treat low-income people. The regular networks don't like to talk about rip-offs of poor people. If they have exposés, it's rip-offs of middle-class, the upper middle-class people. That's been well-documented. So what do we do about all this, Michael? How can we turn around more of the Black Caucus? There are some really good new Black members of the [US] House [of Representatives], but the problem is that the senior Black representatives tend to socialize the newcomers and give them a reality about the way politics works on Capitol Hill. How do we turn this thing around? Because you just mentioned symptoms, symptoms. We've got to go to the causes here.

Michael Eric Dyson: Well, yeah, look, there's no doubt that this thing is, if we can use classic literature, Brobdingnagian [fictional land] is huge like in *Gulliver's Travels*, right? And it has many, many tentacles. And if it's Gulliver laying on the ground, all of these Lilliputians with their arrows shooting at the body of Black economic prosperity, there's no doubt that what you've named--the payday loan stuff--the banks that are bankrolling them.

Ralph Nader: Redlining them. Redlining too.

Michael Eric Dyson: Well, not only that, I mean, yes, absolutely. And then speaking of red lining, even though ostensibly, it is an illegal practice now, we know that the concentration of poor Black and Brown people in particular communities in food deserts where they have no access to say like Whole Foods or Safeway, and as a result of that, they have, you know, high-sugar content cereal in these ghetto grocers that charge them more. As you know more than anybody else in this country, it's very expensive to be poor. So then they get the mystery meat; they don't get the highest quality meat. The healthcare that they are subject to... Here's the tragedy, though. Besides the study you talked about, studies that have been released to suggest that even when we control for differential wealth, Black and White people can go to the doctor, both making say, I don't know, \$150,000. And the Black person will continue to receive a lower-quality of healthcare than the White person making the same amount of money; there would be more aggressive intervention, say for instance, when it comes to issues of heart disease and the like. So the point is that as devastating and as demonstrable as inequality as the economic inequity that prevails that continues to punish Black and Brown people and poor White people for that matter with vicious particularity. The overlay of racist intensity and of racial hostility and of extraordinarily distributed anti-blackness in the culture means that there's both symbolic capital that is derived to pour stigma on the heads of Black people along with the demonstrable, empirically verifiable economic and political factors that you refer to.

So what to be done? I think you're absolutely right when you talk about political representatives who have a handle on this within the curve, if you will, and the art of organized politics is one thing. But when you talk about a Reverend Barber who understands, through his Poor People's March, the relationship between a persistent inequality, racial animus and hostility and the ways in which poor working class and poor working class White brothers and sisters and Black brothers and sisters, and, you know, Latinx have a far better possibility of forging connection and doing things on the ground and from the bottom up than having the possibility of this being addressed exclusively or primarily from the top down. That doesn't mean we abrogate the responsibility and let people off the hook. The point is, though, you got to bring a force and a power from the streets, the kind of heat that you talked about in the '60s and '70s and into the '80s for that matter into the present day. But we got to have a strong enough movement that leverages that, because you know it will never be done out of the goodness of heart or the clarity of vision of even those who are empowered, who are empathetic to those who are poor.

And there are many members of the Congressional Black Caucus, as you say, who are willing and able to see the devastating connection between these economic inequities and the social injustices they produce. And so we got to raise voice there. We've got to go within the political order to talk about it. And we've got to stand outside with the Reverend Barbers or even when Reverend [Al] Sharpton and [Reverend Jesse] Jackson at their height talking about these issues. But grassroots organizations on the ground that have a handle on this should talk about it. And let's throw in as well, because you won't have a problem with economic inequality if you don't have the prospect of remaining here. So that the way in which police departments are funded and the way in which police unions are all out of proportion bankrolled by conservative corporate interests, which redound negatively to Black and Brown communities that result in real devastation and often death for the most vulnerable Black people in our communities. Those things are interlocking. And if we can't get an interconnected analysis of that, we're really not doing justice to those people who are most hurt by it.

Ralph Nader: You mentioned fatalities. You know, the poor not only pay more, they die earlier of course. And you know, I come from the '50s when I was at Harvard Law School, Michael, my class had 550 people. Maybe, maybe one or two African-American, maybe a couple Hispanics, mostly the children of Latin American dictators who got into Harvard Law School. And when I went to the dean and I said, "Where's the rest of America?" He said, "Well, we admit all qualified people." But of course, by qualified people, they meant the LSAT [Law School Admission Test]. They meant going to the right high schools and prep schools. And yet the student body was oblivious. They were oblivious to all of this.

I once went into a drug store. I think it was 1956. And *US News & World Report* had the cover story, and it said, noted psychologist shows the genetic inferiority of Negroes as they were called. So I spent days trying to get a rebuttal in the *Harvard Law Record*, which is the newspaper at Harvard. And at the time went out to 12,000 Harvard law alumni. So it was pretty influential. And I finally got [Montague Francis] Ashley-Montagu and he wrote like a 9,000-word rebuttal, the noted anthropologist from Rutgers. And I remember walking through the buildings at the law school and people would come up and they'd say, "What are you wasting your time on this for?" What are you wasting your time on this for?

Michael Eric Dyson: See, what you're laying out here obviously, you know, makes so much sense. The people who are living the reality every day are subject to it. The vulnerabilities that are not just happenstance, so they're not arbitrary. They're built into the system. The system is working exactly as it was designed to work. And it doesn't work for those who are at the low end of the totem pole, so to speak, those who are most vulnerable to rebut. When you began speaking about, think about it, think about the interconnection and interpenetration between the psychological infrastructure of, you know, the masses of America. The American imagination is suffused with unconscious biases toward, and sometimes conscious and explicit articulation of the inherent inferiority of people who are outside the perimeter of White; so we know that. And then when you think about Montague, who said, what basically that race – he's one of the first ones to talk about race as a social construct, that's a mythology that is accreted around certain totemic processes of power, you know, tied to ethnicity in America that generates a whole superstructure of mythology upon which has premised the distribution of goods and services in this country. So he already deconstructed the notion of race anthropologically so long ago, and yet we cling to it because we get value from it. And so to link that to the way in which the people at the bottom continue to stay at the bottom. When you were talking earlier about say like what we might call financial exclusion, because Black people, for the most part, working class, poor people, you know, when you deny them accesses to banks, that means then a lot of them ain't even got bank accounts. If they don't have bank accounts for some reason, try to get along in this world without making any kind of transaction, without having a bank. And then, you know, you try to buy something online, you try to go to a store, and you know, you ain't got no checks, so you're just way out of luck.

Ralph Nader: You can't get a credit, you know. Your credit rating doesn't exist. They won't sell you anything without a credit rating. They got you trapped in this whole credit rating world, the credit scores.

Michael Eric Dyson: Your credit scores. You don't have a credit card. I mean, think about it. I mean, that's just Ralph Nader territory. But when you think about all that, you know, the fees that you were talking about are exorbitant for those who can even buy into the system; for those who are excluded think about the extraordinary cost to them to do business because they are systematically excluded financially. So that financial inclusion doesn't become a kind of watch word for the elite. It becomes a fundamental premise to at least expand the possibility of financial justice for those who are at the bottom of the totem pole. And so, when we talk about wealth, when we're talking about building up wealth, when we're talking about people having access, they don't even have decent incomes, they can't generate any kind of financial stability for their kids, and as you know, that redounds negatively.

But when we talk about systemic and institutional, most Black people who are poor tend to live in concentrated poverty. And that means that they're poor, the household is poor, the neighborhood is poor. The schools that they go to are poor; the institutions in the neighborhood don't reflect an upwardly mobile striving, because they are deprived systemically of resources that would be pulled back into the community that would allow them to generate businesses, to generate capital, to have any sense of high income or wealth. The wage structure is so devastating to most poor Black people in this country. Then when you add on top of that the shifts in the political economy over the last 30, 40 years; the global economy has been shrunken

in one instance and expanded in many other instances. If you're rich, it's infinite. If you are poor, it is finite. And it is imposed upon you as a cudgel and not an opportunity as a carrot to move forward if you're even well to do in this nation. So those systemic issues are deeply entrenched in corporate America, which continues to reproduce the kind of inequity about which we speak.

Ralph Nader: That's why I think we need a national conference titled: Corporatism is systemic racism. Corporatism is systemic racism. It goes back very deep. Again, another story at law school. When I took the courses on property and contracts, there were never any cases on slavery. You know, we'd go back to the 17th, 18th century when, you know, the main asset in this country for the White dominated economy were the slaves. The main asset was the slaves. And they traded slaves. They broke up families and traded children one way, traded the parents another way. And there was never a single case in the property casebook, not a single case is heavily litigated, you know. Plantation owners fought each other, sued each other over which slave families belonged to them. And they would appeal to the Supreme Courts of the states and Supreme Court the United States. Not a single case in the property casebooks. You had generations of law students growing up oblivious to the way the law was used as an instrument of oppression. And coming down to the present day, the small claims courts were created for consumers to use. They're overwhelmingly dominated by creditors suing. They sue consumers; they sue tenants. Here's how grotesque it's become: In order to use the small claims court in Connecticut, you got to pay a \$95 entry fee. (chuckles) So the whole system has been commercialized and corporatized from A to Z. Is there an area in our country, Michael, that the big corporations are not strategically planning? They're strategically planning the kind of food we eat. They strategically plan the tax system to favor tax escapees for the rich and the corporate. They strategically plan our election system. They're behind a lot of this voter suppression. Clearly, the commercial interests don't want more votes coming from the lower-income rung of the political ladder. They're strategically planning the military industrial complex budget, which is draining away billions of dollars a month from being put into infrastructure and repairing schools and drinking water systems and transit and other desperate public services that can create jobs here. They're strategically planning so many things in our country and we're letting them get away with it with distraction. And one of the distractions is something you've written about. Because in a review of your latest book, the reviewer, who is Michael Fletcher, he said, "Dyson stands on firmer ground when his book offers ways to reimagine the police by parceling some of their unceasing responsibilities to social service agencies and when he calls out the tyranny of cancel culture." Your comment on the tyranny of cancel culture.

Michael Eric Dyson: Yes, sir. Well, I mean, just after you bring it, I got to just briefly respond to that by saying you're absolutely right. The affiliated networks of dominance, the possibility of distributing power in such horrendous fashion, that disadvantages those who are at the bottom, the failure to acknowledge the degree to which both in the kind of Gramscian sense consent is manufactured and generated so that people become complicit in their own demise, sometimes desensitized to the very forces that patrol and control them, and the failure to be able to even identify many of the hidden dominances that rule their lives, precisely because of the example you gave, when highfalutin Harvard students and other, you know, legal schools of jurisprudence don't have access to these histories of legal precedents, which is what it ostensibly hinges on with all of these originalists keep talking about. When you eviscerate an entire chunk of the history, when you suppress not only the vote, but the possibility of consciousness so that you can appeal

to a history of regulation, of domination, of inequitable distribution, and therefore suppression of knowledge, that would allow people to appeal to certain precedent in order to substantively make arguments within a legal system, then it's all messed up and all fouled up from the beginning. A) Because the people who are studying it as students of the legal system don't have access to it, unless they seek it out in extraordinary fashion, and B) it is not set as a precedent, therefore, within these legal circles, that allows working class ordinary people to be able to appeal to them as justification for holding, you know, to account those institutions, especially those corporations that have systematically screwed them.

Now to get to your point about cancel culture. Look, what I argue there is that I don't think cancel culture is the way to go here. I get that Black people and women, if we talk about them in particular, are upset that the court system has been unjust, hasn't often delivered the kind of bedrock, bottom-line justice that we had hoped for. And as a result of that, they seek quicker ends and more explosive means to realize, you know, their desire for justice. But I think it's a wrongheaded approach. And what I mean by cancel culture is not what the right-wing is talking about, for the most part. They're just mad they're being held to account. They want to abrogate responsibility and surrender their own consciences at the behest of corporatization. You're talking about the corporatized conscience that rules many of these right-wing political figures, especially in, you know, in the House of Representatives and in the [US] Senate, but so we can acknowledge that. But the problem is, however, that on the left where I sit, the attempt to bring a digital lynch mob to bear upon the social distresses that present themselves or the economic and racial injustices that prevail or the gender injustices that prevail, cancel culture is not the way to go. Because what it ends up doing is it leverages whatever authority we have as human beings and the political capital we can generate and the conscience that we have in defense of, I think, indefensible principles of assault and attack. Just because you're upset and mad at injustice racially or in terms of gender, which I am as well, it doesn't mean that you go on the internet to adjudicate your claim against another human being. And there's no spectrum; there is no nuance. There is no distinction of these; I'm sorry. Might as well be Harvey Weinstein, a young White singer who messes up in the use of the N-word in their certain way. Might as well be the latest Ku Klux Klan. There is no space for apology, for recognition of hurt or pain imposed or committed, and therefore, the ability to be redeemed and restored. It is not restorative justice; it's retributive justice. And what [Mahatma] Gandhi said is true. In a society where it's an eye for an eye, everybody ends up blind. And Martin Luther King Jr., used to echo that within the context of the fight against anti-blackness and white supremacy in this country. So for me, I think it's a poor, poor model and paradigm for those who are progressive to seek the kind of digital lynch mob that go on, the kind of digital justice that they think can be mediated through these public fora that have nothing to do with evidence, counterclaim, and the ability to have an argument that is rooted in history. A lot of this stuff is rooted not in fact; it's rooted in emotion; it's rooted in resentment. And it has nothing to do with the ultimate form of justice that ought to prevail.

Ralph Nader: And it's a convenient distraction where you'll get high officials resigning over misuse of words, but they're never asked to resign because of their corporate crime abuses that take life, limb, steal from people, all examples which we just ran through in the prior few minutes. It's very hard to find any of these guys resigning. Imagine a banker being told to resign because he was in charge of redlining neighborhoods and deprived people of mortgages for their homes and insurance for their homes. Or resigning for pushing, in contrived discriminatory ads,

junk food, seducing minority kids into high salt, high sugar, high-fat foods, which leads to youth diabetes and predisposes them to high blood pressure and obesity. There's no sanction for that. It's like the focus of young people have been directed toward words, not the devastating deeds, and it goes right into the law schools. When I speak at law schools, Michael, I say to them, you know, the main form of activism in this law school is against semantics. It's against bad words. If somebody uttered an ethnic, racial, [or] gender slur, the law school students would be up in arms. But have you ever gone into the inner city? Have you ever gone to see the deeds that reflect these bad words? No, they couldn't be interested. They're preparing themselves to go work for the very corporate law firms that represent the corporate supremacists and exploiters.

Michael Eric Dyson: Absolutely. That's such a powerful point. It reminds me of a story told about Martin Luther King Jr. When he moved into, as you well know, the slums of Chicago in what, '66, one of the few losses that he endured in dramatic fashion, you know, one with Mayor [Laurie] Pritchett in Albany, as they say, Albany, Georgia, and '60, '61. And then in Chicago, because the wiles of Richard [J.] Daley, you know, when he found out that King was moving into the slum, had somebody go in there and clean the darn thing up, so it looked like a brand spanking new apartment. But here's the point. King was coming out one day with a young man and they were going to go to one of the demonstrations and a White guy spit on the young person and this young person was ready to haul off and he beat this White boy up. And King said, let me get this right. And I'm paraphrasing. You live every day with overcharged rent. You're paying a water bill that you can't even afford. You're living in a broken down slum and the monthly rent is exorbitant. You're living in structural inequality. Your kids don't have access to good education. The tax basis of your local economy has deprived you of parity in education. And you're mad at somebody spitting on you and they're killing you systemically and structurally every day. That's the same point that cancel culture is distracted by the symbolic expression of an offense as opposed to sustaining the structural inequity that produces the people who remain atop a system of inequity. And so in one sense, cancel culture is helping those in power stay in power, because it refuses to focus on the real funneling of that inequality and the real source of its inequity.

Ralph Nader: Michael, are you getting an opportunity to make these points on mass media at all? Or does the cancel culture extend to the taboos here?

Michael Eric Dyson: I mean, the cancel culture is deep, man, but you know, I talk fast, and I try to talk sharply. So I try to get it in even if it can't resonate. The point is we gotta keep, you know, piercing these airtight media cages, you know, with rhetoric. We've got to keep fighting. You know, and your example over the decades has been heroic. And I think that's what we have to do. We can never depend upon, you know, corporatized media structures to accommodate the kinds of subversive information that would seem to be, you know, destructive or dangerous. You know, we got to figure out ways to articulate it. You got to figure out ways to express it. You've got to talk about analogies and metaphors and symbols that you can use to express your beliefs. You've got to find a way to puncture the hard resistance to some of these ideas.

Ralph Nader: You know, recently *the New York Times* quoted Jamie Dimon, who runs a huge New York bank as you know. He said in his meetings with his corporate colleagues during the COVID period, he was so disgusted at their greed, their indifference, their callousness. Now, you know, when that comes from Jamie Dimon, we better take notice. You know, the problem is that

people grow up corporate, right? Starting with elementary school, they grow up corporate. And students, when I mentioned this say to me, "What do you mean by that?" I said, "Well, let me test you. When I give the following words, what occurs in your mind: crime, welfare, violence and regulation?" Well, obviously it's street crime. It's people waiting for their welfare checks. It's government regulation. It's street violence. And I said, "Well, you know, there's a lot of that and you're not inaccurate, but do you know that there's far more corporate crime, far more corporate violence taking lives?" How about the lead contamination of Black kids over decades poisoning their bodies and their minds? Corporate welfare is far greater than welfare for the poor. I mean, how about the bail out of Wall Street and the trillions of dollars in just a year and a half about 12 years ago when they collapsed the economy because of their greed and then were bailed out by taxpayers? Regulation? Oh, really? Every time you sign a fine print contract, or you click on or you sign a landlord contract or an auto loan or a mortgage, it's all written by the seller. You don't have any say. It's complete regulation of your relations with your vendors, totally. If you try to change a paragraph or double the car warranty, they'll throw you out of the car dealership. And then when it comes to violence, it isn't even close. Street crime of about 14,000 homicides, bad. But 60,000 work-related deaths from diseases and trauma in the workplace a year; 60,000, OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] figures. 65,000 people die from air pollution, EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] figures. And with environmental injustice areas, that pollution is worse than other forms of corporate rapacity. The pollution is worse where poor people live. That's where they have most of the air pollution that's concentrated. And then of course the big one--preventable problems in hospitals. And then as the product defects and the varieties of exposure now, which we call silent violence from recent technologies and the side effects of pharmaceuticals that aren't tested. Over 100,000 people, according to medical journal articles, die every year and that's considered an understatement. So you see, they grow up corporate, wherein the very issues of crime are street level, not crime in the suites. So we need a conference and you can help get this done, Michael. We need a conference on corporatism leads to systemic racism.

Michael Eric Dyson: Yeah, I mean, it's brilliantly deconstructed there. And all of what you're talking about, think about it in the context of coronavirus. Think about it in the context of the pandemic. If nothing has served to reinforce the understanding that Black and Brown and poor people in general, poor White folk, for that matter, who are most victimized by this particular global virus, you know, is not a mistake. It is not a happenstance. It is not by chance, because when you think about the fact that the healthcare industry is premised upon access to insurance, the insurance companies certainly have not been hospitable to poor people. Poor people continue to use the emergency ward as healthcare maintenance and preservation. And as you well know, given those diseases you spoke about, that are generated by or at least reinforced by poor access, not only to health care, but the high salt, high-sugar content foods that reproduce, you know, high blood pressure or the hypertension that produces it, the diabetes that is a result of that, and the heart disease that is the consequence of that. And then when you think about the fact that those people are still working on the frontlines, and you know, some people callously say, "Well, why don't Black and Brown people take better care of themselves and they wouldn't be more vulnerable and susceptible to death during a pandemic." Well, easy for you to say if you got access to any routine, high-quality healthcare. But if you don't, then you're in bad luck. And then if you're in these food deserts, and then if you're living with the systemic inequities that deny you opportunity to routinely monitor your health, and then you're working on the frontlines, because

you can't afford to stay at home during the pandemic. So you're exposing yourself on the frontlines, often as healthcare workers, as food preparers, as those who deliver the food, and in some instances on the higher end of that, who handle your mail. So that these service industry folk who are especially susceptible because of the pandemic and given the kind of physical transformations of bodies, the physiognomy, is literally impacted by racial inequity revealed in the coronavirus, you know, the pandemic. That only reinforces the interlocking interconnection between the stuff you're talking about--the social injustice [and] the corporatization of American culture, which undercuts racial justice and the ways in which, I mean, a pandemic has also revealed economic and social and racial pandemics that prevent the flourishing of these communities. So, we got to see it in tandem and then interconnection.

Ralph Nader: And you touch on the vast intangibles here. When we talk about poverty, you just use numbers, you know, like the minimum wage, seven and a quarter, how's anybody ~~it~~ going to be to live on that, the federal minimum wage? But when you're poor, you can't pay your bills and you can't support your family, anxiety, dread, fear, depression, masochism, all kinds of things happen as a result. It's not just a matter of numbers. All kinds of things happen. And people wonder why can't they pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They don't understand the devastating self-immolating process that occurs. And you're constantly harangued and called on the phone, the bill collectors threaten you. They make false claims against you that you're going to be prosecuted as if we still have debtors prison in this country. And it just continues. It's all a matter of raising our expectation levels as to whether people are going to be supreme over corporations or corporations are going to be supreme over people. They were chartered in the early 19th century in New England, the textile companies, and they chartered them. And the state legislatures were so worried about these artificial entities growing in their midst that they put a time limit and they required these charters to be renewed by the state legislatures. Well, what a big difference now. Corporations then were viewed to be our servants, not our masters. And now corporations are masters, not our servants. So we need to raise the expectation level right across the board here. These corporations are strategically planning our children. Childhood is being commercialized. They're bypassing, undermining parental authority, selling them all kinds of dangerous things, not just junk food and junk drink. They were seducing them into cigarettes, passing out cheap cigarettes before the cigarette companies were held more accountable right outside elementary schools to hook them for a lifetime. And they're at it again with the vaping monstrosity. So how can we extend this conversation into action all over the country, Michael?

Michael Eric Dyson: I mean, you know, I mean, what you're saying, your show is so important, but you know, we got to, you know, as you said, I think it's a great idea in terms of convening, you know, you, Reverend Barber, but, you know, think about it. You know, some political figures who are deeply invested in trying to address these issues in a systemic fashion. And we can throw in the kind of folklore, the kind of pop culture, the kind of practical consequences of all this stuff. It's not just some kind of pie in the sky, abstract rationality that governs our concern. It's on the ground, real stuff that occurs to people. And think about even what's going on when I was talking about, you know, coronavirus and thinking about, and joining that to what you were talking earlier, about corporate welfare, we know under Ronald Reagan, this whole notion, the mythology of the kind of symbolic expression of welfare queens, you know, obscured the extraordinary accumulation of wealth out of proportion to any kind of, you know, just metrics of many of these corporations. So that corporate welfare was exempt from the kind of rigorous

scrutiny to which you routinely subjected, but that many other people failed to do. So now you can set up in the culture of the welfare queen and we've seen the revival of some of that discourse under Donald Trump. And then, you know, they tout this line of self-reliance, and this guy, Donald Trump, talking about, as you say of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, and you say, yeah, I got a little loan from my daddy. Yeah. To the tune of what? \$400 million. I suspect many of us could pull ourselves up by our bootstraps far more successfully than Donald Trump did, because he blew so many opportunities to maximize his wealth because he was a horrible businessman and didn't understand the function and mechanics of wealth in a way that allowed him to permanently in a crookish way, I might add, you know, reproduce his wealth. But look at it this way. When you think about, you know, those Paycheck Protection Programs. If you are, for instance, you know, part of the CARES [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security] Act, if you are a felon, like at any point of your life, you were a felon convicted of a particular crime or even an ex-felon, you cannot get a Paycheck Protection Program loan if you own more than 20% of a business. So what does that do? That tells you that it discourages you from generating, you know, whatever wealth and capital on the local level by your own, pulling yourself up quote by your bootstrap, making sure that you wanted to start a small business, but you can't even own 20% of it if you are, you know, an ex-felon and expect to get a paycheck, you know, to get a Paycheck Protection Program loan.

So the point is that the institutional mechanisms of suppression are systemically preventing the flourishing of ordinary people for whom these particular safeguards were put in place. So I say all that just to add that little note to what you were talking about. If we could join, you know, a Nader, a Barber, a Dyson and others who are interested, I think it certainly is a propitious time to try to figure out how we could address it. And I think we'd have a surprising support of, you know, many, many people who have been waiting for somebody to intelligently and with lucidity address these particular issues. Because they've been all but obscured in the give and take between the bipolar opposition of so-called liberal and conservative when we both know neoliberal expressions of corporate dominance have pervaded Democratic Party elites and the failure to acknowledge the complicated vision of a progressive that would provide people the opportunity to thrive is all but a fact in the status quo here in America.

Ralph Nader: Well, the corporate Democrats who run the Democratic Party, look what they did to Bernie Sanders's movement, both in 2016, 2020. Even when they're condemning voter suppression, Michael, they don't use strong language. Voter suppression is the number two crime against democracy. The first one is a coup d'état, a military coup d'état. And they don't even have democratic legislators in Georgia, Florida, and Alabama, that are dominated by the Republicans, introducing criminal penalties for voter suppression. The reason why the voter suppressors get away with it is either there's no criminal penalty whatsoever in the state law or it's just a misdemeanor. And it's almost unheard of when you steal people's votes by denying them the vote to the negative form of stealing people's votes systematically around the state, that it's just business as usual. The Democratic Party cannot be relied on to defend our country against the worst Republican Party in history. I mean, you know, why haven't they been landsliding the Republicans? They're only anti-worker, anti-minority, anti-women, pro-militarism, pro-war, pro-Wall Street, anti-tax fairness, anti-public budgets for public needs. I mean, and here the Republicans have been winning state legislators [and] governors. They almost won the presidency if it wasn't for 100,000 votes in four close states last November.

Michael, Trump would have been re-elected. Out of 160 million votes, 100,000 votes switched in Nevada, Wisconsin, Georgia, and Arizona would have re-elected Trump, this monster. So the Democratic Party has got a lot to answer for, and we need to form strong citizen networks and they're all there. There are a lot of good people, a lot of active people, as you referred to, a lot of great books, articles written. There's a great connection that can be brought up with all these people to form the kind of grassroots effort that basically leads to a democracy of, by, for the people rather than of the Exxons [Mobil Corporation], by the Pfizers [Inc.], and for the Monsanto [Company].

Michael Eric Dyson: Right. Absolutely. Amen to that. That's a perfect articulation of the point. And I think that there are forces within, you know, progressive Democrats, right? When you think about the most progressive elements within that party who seek to leverage the authority of that particular perspective, who seek to bring policies, whether it's, you know, a green, you know, new deal for all, whether it's environmental racism, whether it's talking about a decent living wage. Bernie Sanders, of course, said that he is committed to making certain that the \$15 minimum wage prevails somehow. So I think that there's a possibility that within pockets of that particular group, that there is a way to leverage it. Because you know, at the of the day, you know, you dance with the one that brung ya for certain and you figure out a way to open up those possibilities and to reinforce the best values and inclinations that many of these political figures and forces have. Because growing up poor and Black in this country as I have, I have been forced to work with a whole host of people who on the surface would not look like a friend, but that I've had to, you know, forge connection with and contact with in order to make substantive change occur.

So I think that taking your ideas there and to address all of this stuff – the vast reach of corporate America, the harmful perspectives that are generated when the logic of corporatism is justified at the expense of the lives of working class people. And the failure to understand that to hurt those people is to hurt America, is perhaps one of the most devastating. These people are willingly perishable in the minds and imaginations of the dominant culture. They are willing to dispose of them. They're disposable. And they feel no moral compunction and we have no legal redress to the almost inherent hostility toward these peoples and their desires to not only get out of the vicious pockets of poverty, to which they have been consigned, but to generate new ways of imagining institutional relationships in this nation in order to bring about true justice.

Ralph Nader: And taking off from your point, it's a very unifying effort – the challenge to corporatism. People in red state, blue state, conservative, liberal; [it] doesn't matter. They all bleed the same way. They all get ripped-off the same way by the healthcare system. They all get overcharged the same way. They get under-insured the same way. They get laid off the same way. And that's why I think there's a liberal-conservative unity that can be forged here once you get down to where people work, live and raise their families and all of these ideological divide and rule abstractions by the ruling classes dissipate because they want the same thing. Regardless whether they label themselves conservative or liberal.

I had 25 areas of unity between conservatives and liberals in one of my recent books, *Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State*. But people throughout history, Michael, have been manipulated by abstractions, because abstractions

separate people from grim reality and whip them into a frenzy where they're actually asserting measures that are against their own interests, like supporting Trump as a populist. Trump is a corporatist. He's a Wall Streeter. He's a failed gambling czar. He's a corporate welfare king. He's a crook as Nancy Pelosi told me, "He's a liar; he's a crook; he's a thief; he should be in prison."

Michael Eric Dyson: I'm gonna go on to my next thing here. But man, what a high honor to hang out with the great Ralph Nader, man!

Ralph Nader: It's a long delayed pleasure of having you on the show. If we stay in regular communication, we can make this happen. And you know, conferences have led to great movements. It's not just talk. It has led to great movements. Our campuses are, you know, deserts. They used to be the incubators for civil rights movement, environment, labor, consumer. And conferences rooted with some good scholars as well as practitioners, doers, and organizers can have great ripple effects. If we stay in touch, we can get this done Eric. Well, listen, we're out of time, unfortunately. But this is going to have good ripple effects, this conversation. We've been talking with the formidable, prolific, unyielding Michael Eric Dyson. And Eric, how can people reach you?

Michael Eric Dyson: They can reach me on Twitter, Michael E Dyson. They can reach me on Facebook and Instagram @MichaelEricDyson. And then the email, dysonspeaks@gmail[.com]. They can hit me those three ways.

Ralph Nader: And you have moved from Georgetown University to Vanderbilt. Is that correct?

Michael Eric Dyson: Great Vanderbilt University. Georgetown was a great school and I'm at a great school Vanderbilt University. Looking forward to hanging out and doing some stuff there with those good folk there. Yes, sir.

Ralph Nader: Shall we say Tennessee politically needs you badly?

Michael Eric Dyson: Bless you, my man.

Ralph Nader: Thank you again, Michael. We'll stay in touch on this idea

Michael Eric Dyson: All right, my man. Bye-bye

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Michael Eric Dyson. We will link his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now let's take a quick break to 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 Reporter*, "Morning Minute" for Friday, April 2, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber.

A Paris court has convicted a French pharmaceutical company of manslaughter and fined it \$3.2 million for selling a diabetes drug blamed for hundreds of deaths. That's according to a report from the Associated Press. The ruling capped a judicial marathon targeting Servier Laboratories

and involving more than 6,500 plaintiffs. The case centered on the diabetes drug Mediator [benfluorex]. Servier was accused of putting profits ahead of patients' welfare by allowing the drug to be widely and irresponsibly prescribed as a diet pill — with deadly consequences. Servier argued that it didn't know about the drug's dangers. The court found Servier guilty of manslaughter, involuntary wounding and aggravated deception. The firm was acquitted of fraud. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. And that's our show. I want to thank our guest again, Michael Eric Dyson. For those of you listening on the radio, we're gonna cut out right now. But for you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music *Stand Up, Rise Up* was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you all. And please join the still organized families of the victims of the [Boeing] 737 Max who are pursuing a consumer boycott of this plane. You can get buttons titled *Ax To The Max* by going to nader.org and put them on your lapel, take a picture, put it up on Facebook, on other internet portals and show Boeing that the consumers are not going to take the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] surrender lying down.