



## The Activist Files Episode 28: America Disrupted - Vince Warren and Angela Glover Blackwell Reimagine Civil Rights

Vince:

Hi there. My name is Vince Warren. I'm the Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. And today I'm very excited to be in conversation with the great Angela Glover Blackwell. Angela's the founder-in-residence of PolicyLink. She started the organization in 1999 with a mission of advancing racial and economic equity for all. Through her writing, speaking, and leadership, Angela has helped to grow and define a national equity movement focused on innovating and improving public policy with a wide range of partners to ensure access and opportunity for all low-income people and communities of color, particularly in the area of building an equitable economy, health, housing, transportation, infrastructure, and arts, and culture. She is also the host of the "Radical Imagination" podcast. So, we are co-producing "The Activist Files," which is the CCR podcast and the "Radical Imagination" podcast. "The Activist Files" is the Center for Constitutional Rights' podcast, where we feature stories of people on the frontline fighting for justice, including activists, lawyers, and artists. And tell us a little bit about the Radical Imagination podcast. Angela.

Angela:

Thank you, Vince. I'm so happy to be in conversation with you. "Radical Imagination" is a podcast that really tries to highlight the stories that are fueling change and the leaders that are fueling change. It occurred to us a couple of years ago, at PolicyLink when we had our last equity summit, that it was time that we moved beyond reform efforts. And we really started calling out exactly what it is that we want. And in doing that, we thought it required us to move to the edges of our imagination about what really could be in an equitable society. And so "Radical Imagination" is highlighting the fact that there are a lot of ideas out there, many of which can really be grabbed onto today. And that there's some extraordinary leaders who are redefining the edge of change.

Vince:

This is fantastic. And I'm really looking forward to having this conversation with you. So many folks are asking in this moment, what is it that we can do? And my view is that we need to be thinking

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radically and we need to be thinking on the outskirts of our imagination, just like you said, so that we're centering the right things when we're coming up with solutions. So, let me ask the first question: Over the last couple of months, you know, in my view, Black people have faced two pandemics. We've been dealing with COVID-19. We've been dealing with all of the fear and the anxiety and the inequity of COVID-19. And on top of that, we've been dealing with really rampant police violence of Brianna Taylor, George Floyd you know, and some other folks that's even more recently, but even going back, there was Eric Garner, there's Philando Castille, there's Dana Martin, that transgender woman who was killed in Montgomery, Alabama, and Jazzaline Ware, a transgender woman who was killed in Memphis.

Vince:

This is a national epidemic of, it feels like extermination of Black people. We at CCR, the Center for Constitutional Rights, have made some shifts over the last couple of months in response to both of those epidemics. One is that we have recently when there was a curfew in New York City, we had to threaten the mayor that we were going to sue, unless that curfew ended. That curfew involved the rampant violence against protestors and people who were protesting for their own lives. We also filed a lawsuit in the context of our stop-and-frisk litigation about disproportionate and discriminatory policing around the social distancing and things like that. We brought in our immigration work about freeing people from immigration detention, where healthcare was not a priority and that they were at risk from COVID. So the last couple of months has been a real sea change in, I think the way that we've been thinking about it. What's been coming up for you? How has your work shifted? What do you think is necessary to reimagine civil rights in America? Just based on the last couple of months alone?

Angela:

We're right there with you. And we made the shift a couple of years ago. What happened was that we had been very involved in police reform and very frustrated that the reforms weren't making a difference. And even when we imagined that they would be put in place, we knew they would make difference. And so we started allowing ourselves to gravitate towards some of the organizers and advocates who had been working on these issues on the streets who have been calling for police abolition. And that was a big lean forward for us because like everybody else, when you first hear the term, you think, could that be, but then we took it apart. And as we took it apart, we realized that was the way to go. We have every three or four years, a big national equity summit. The last one was in Chicago in April of 2018. And it was called "Our Power, Our Future, Our Nation."

Angela:

And I spoke at the opening plenary that was "Radical Imagination: Fueling Change." And I've made the point that we're not going to solve the health problems in America by - through healthcare. It's going to really take creating new environments, greater access to healthy food. It's going to take jobs. It's going to take respect, going to take a change in all kinds of things. That we weren't going to solve their housing problem, just by building more housing. We needed to rethink what it would mean to have a right to housing. And we weren't going to solve the safety problem by investing in police. We needed to think about what it was really going to take. That safety is built on trust. It's built on familiarity. It's built on having opportunity and that we needed to shift our focus and begin to think about abolishing police and investing in those things.

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Angela:

Right before that, we started to work more with the advocates who were calling the police abolition until finally we became converts. And we got to the point where we actually concluded that the conversation should be about how do we build safe communities and think about. Is there a role for something that focuses on what police now do? And if there is a role thinking about how to create that whole cloth, but not rely on a system that was never designed for the results that we need. And when we educated ourselves about how police started catching runaway slaves in the South, the Texas Rangers for Christ's sake. The police in the Northeast, trying to cheap labor down, we realized that their whole existence was about contain and control. And that is not what's needed today. What we need is safety and mostly safety does not come from the kinds of things police is doing. So we were there and we were still surprised, but in the past couple of months, that has become almost mainstream.

Vince:

That happened in our work, right? You have this visionary view and you're out there by yourself and people are like, what the heck are you talking about? But I think it, there are these catalyst events. And I think what we've seen, I think both in terms of COVID and in terms of their current expressions of outrage around state violence really do seem to be catalyst. And we, you know, and you, and I know this and it's worth saying on the, on our podcasts, that these types of changes in public consciousness do not happen by themselves. There are a lot of people who will wake up one day and say, what George Floyd, that's terrible. We need to do something about that, but they don't come to the radical imaginative solutions that say reimagine it rather than trying to fix it by themselves. That is organizers that are out there in the streets every day that are lifting the voices of ordinary folks, poor folks, folks of color undocumented communities, trans and queer communities.

Vince:

And they're saying that if you ask us what the problem is, the problem is that we have no social services other than law enforcement, and law enforcement's job is to socially contain us. And they can socially contain this in a lot of ways. They can rope off our communities and say, no white people are allowed in here. What we saw in your hometown of St. Louis during the Ferguson uprising is they would rope off the white parts of the area and you can't protest over here. They can put you in jails. They can put you in mental health facilities that can have you under lock down in terms of benefits and the hoops that you have to jump through. And that is most people's experience with policing and law enforcement. And you know, what I like about the thinking that you all are doing is that you're not limiting yourself to what this, because you realize what exists, doesn't get us where we want to go.

Angela:

That's right. Actually on the Radical Imagination podcast. The second one that we did after open borders, which was the first, was police abolition. And we did it with a young rap artist from Chicago named Jessica Disu, FM Supreme, is her other name, and Rachel Herzing, who's an academic and an activist, both talking about police abolition. And one of the things about Jessica is she was in the middle of a town hall conversation on CNN and people were going back and forth about police. And I think it was after Mike Brown, if I'm not mistaken, and she just said we need to

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abolish police. And she realized when she said it, that she had said it without knowing what that meant or where she was going, but it got so much attention. She had to educate herself. When we put that podcast out. I can't tell you the number of people who I know in social, in my friend group, and some family members who call up to say, you know, we're excited about your podcast, but abolish police, what exactly are you - where are you going with that?

Angela:

And those same people are coming back to me in these times saying "I'm so glad that I wasn't hearing about it for the first time as the country started to debate it, because I had had some conversations, which I've been able to point out, you shouldn't be going to the police for mental health." We shouldn't be given police money for midnight basketball. We have boys and girls clubs and community groups that do that. We have mental health professionals, and domestic violence is something that really needs a whole different kinds of intervention. And when people really were able to open their eyes by saying, you know, how many times have you called the police and they did not come? How many times have you wanted a police officer and there was none around? I said, so we walk around with a myth that we're telling ourselves about how police are keeping us safe. They really don't. They come in after the fact sometimes and move things forward. What they really do is control and contain. And we cannot invest in the things that we need in our communities because 60% of the city budget is going to police. And that's a good percentage in some jurisdictions. It's even more than that, but we're putting all of our money in police and not enough in the things that build healthy communities, that create pathways to economic security and mobility.

Vince:

Let's talk about that. And actually first, I want to just mention one of the challenges of being a lawyer and then thinking in these ways. One of the things that we've had to do at the Center for Constitutional Rights was, you know, we're now 52, 53 years old. And we had to, at our 50th anniversary, we had to ask ourselves the following question: Why should we be lawyers in this moment, given all of the things that need to be done, that lawyers can't do? And the reason that we settled on, which I think is a very good one, is for a couple of things: people, vulnerable communities, and how they organize into community groups, into social movements, have vision about the solutions to the problems that society has put on them. A - nobody listens to them. B - even if they do listen to them, we still have this law enforcement punitive reflex.

Vince:

And so the cops will crack down on them. Mainstream politicians will say, that's not reasonable. That's, you know, no one's going to go for that. You're asking for too much. And we end up with a situation where our communities are constantly on the daily, being told that your dreams for your own liberation are unrealistic. And as lawyers, our job, we practice a type of lawyering called movement lawyering, where we work very closely with social movements, with organizers, with community groups. And it creates an interesting space for us because we don't go in as lawyers and say, okay, here's our superpower. We can file this case. We can file that case. We think this case is the best case that this is what we're going to do. We say to them, what is it that you need? Where is the law an obstacle for you?

Vince:

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And how can we help you remove that? So we take our leadership where we can from social movements, which were, requires us to think creatively about the law, because the law was designed to shore up the inequities that the society was built on. You can't have an institution like slavery without the law backing it up. And in the current context, you know, where are the limits on protests? Where are the limits on liberation? What can you do and not do when a cop is about to crack your head? And all of that is defined by how the law looks at it. So what is limiting? It is not a tool for social change, but our job is to turn it into a tool of social change by working with folks that articulate these beautiful visions of the future that you were talking about.

Angela:

You know I used to be a lawyer. I was at- Recovery. I was a public interest lawyer and public advocate in San Francisco for 10 years. And my last case, which would have been in 1987 is why I left. And it made the point that you are lifting up the community. But to me, a problem that California back then had passed a law saying that you had to have automobile insurance. And if you did not, you could not keep your license. When they came to me, I thought, "Oh, that's just wrong." But as I looked into it, what we decided was file a suit with a constitutional violation that this was a taking of property, your interest in your driver's license without due process, because there was no due process with getting automobile insurance. The case went all the way to the California Supreme court. And I argued it.

Angela:

Now I have to tell people that day, and you can imagine how exciting it is to be before any Supreme Court. I felt like I was playing tennis because the justices were really into it. And I would get a question here, a question there, and I left feeling like "Whoa, they were really on the issues." In the end I lost. And the reason was because what was really going on here was these were poor communities and poverty is not a suspect classification. There's nothing we can do about it. And I thought to myself, there's a problem here because this is wrong. And it lives at the intersection of race and poverty. And if you can't deal with stuff at the intersection of race and poverty, I want to be in another venue to deal with it. And I left and started doing community building and all of that. But I do think that one of the things that is so exciting about young activists today is they just want what they want and their forcing everybody, whether it's a business leader or an elected official to say, it's your job to figure out how to get it. We're not backing down from what we want, because that's what it's going to take for the nation to live up to its promise and for the economy to be robust and sustainable and for democracy to flourish.

Vince:

Absolutely. That's the thing that's most exciting about working with young organizers is that they refuse to cabin themselves in by the challenges that the older generation toiled with. They're just like, "Ain't got time for that. Y'all can do that if you want, but we're over here." And that's what leadership looks like. In one of our - Ella Baker, the wonderful, wonderful organizer lives at CCR all the time. We've named our summer lawyer programs, law student program after her. But the idea behind that is, here we have young lawyers and young advocates that come to CCR and it is important for us to center their experiences as we move forward and doing what we need to do, because they really don't have time for the "We can't do this" because it must be for them. That's really, what's amazing. Let me throw a sort of different idea out, back to the divestment and

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abolishment question, as you know, and as a lawyer, but maybe a lot of people listening to the podcasts don't know that the U.S. constitutional law is based primarily on civil and political rights.

Vince:

And so that says a state can't do this to you. Here's your rights vis-a-vis the state. It's a challenging paradigm in itself, but what it doesn't deal with are all the things that you care about, the economic security, education, health care, and those sorts of things. Those are considered social and economic rights, but they come together in really interesting ways. And I was watching Charlene Carruthers from Chicago, who was on a show and she was wiping the floor with some police advocate that was trying to put police in everything. And she said, you know, when Chicago and also this is true in New York and Detroit, that there are more police than there are school counselors and in Chicago in particular, there are more police in schools than there are school counselors. And what does that tell us about that investment in policing, in schools and policing? What does it tell us about what we think about Black children? What does that tell us about what we think about education and what does that tell us about what we think about the police?

Angela:

It says that this nation operates with a hierarchy of human value and that it controls everything that some lives are just more than others in this nation. And for a nation that was founded on stolen land, genocide, and human bondage, there needed to be poor people, and a way to justify that. And the hierarchy of human value became that means of justifying it. And the narratives that began then and that carry through to this day reinforced this notion. First, it justified slavery and it continues to justify. Some people are just left behind because they're not trying hard enough because they're not smart enough cause they don't care the narrative of every million for themselves that pick yourself up by your bootstraps. All of those narratives reinforced and hierarchy of human value. So that those people who are doing best are somehow more deserving, more able. And so when you live in a nation that operates with a hierarchy of human value, you're going to get what we've got and nothing has laid it more bare than COVID-19 because I worked when COVID-19 started in the early weeks, because I've done a lot of work around health equity.

Angela:

I knew that Black people were going to get sicker and we're going to die more. I knew about asthma and high blood pressure and all of those things. And I was ambivalent because partially I wanted to make sure the data was coming. But the other part of me feared and when America knows this is hitting Black and brown people, it's not going to be all of us together anymore. It's going to be those people over there. We really don't care about as much. One of the things that gave me a little bit of hope is that in the beginning, when they started talking about let the old people die to save the economy, I knew that a lot of those old people were going to be white, at least in the minds of the American people. And I thought, "Oh, people will react to that."

Angela:

And sure enough, they did. They did night shows. People were making fun of that. And when we found out that these were also people of color, we got right back into the same situation. What has been interesting though, is for white people to understand that once you have a hierarchy of any human value, anybody can sink to the bottom. We've seen it with the opiate crisis that working

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class, white people who had no more value in the economy could be thrown away. The hierarchy of human value, allows them to be at the bottom. There was a moment when people thought they all were going to be white, who were dying from COVID. They could be at the bottom, of course, Black and brown children don't matter in America. And we need to get right to the heart of that in our conversations. And as we're doing that, we actually have to tie it to what we want.

Angela:

That's what's exciting about this moment. There's nothing new about knowing that we have a hierarchy of human value. What is new is the people who are talking about it, who are thinking about it, we're putting it out there for all to face and tie solutions to it, which is why our solutions have to be so radical right now, because we are going back and disrupting the fundamentals of the nation. And in disrupting the fundamentals of the nation, we actually are poised to be able to make the nation better. Because as we become a nation which is going to earn the people of color. The fate of the nation is dependent on the very people who have been left behind. And until we begin to place a priority on making sure that they become the middle class, we have to accept that there will be no middle-class. If people of color don't become the middle class, they'll be no middle class. If people of color aren't able to unleash their entrepreneurial spirit, there'll be no innovation and entrepreneurial activity in this nation. And so it's not just a problem for people of color anymore. It's everybody's problem. And people of color are setting the agenda for how to deal with it. This is the most exciting moment I've seen in my lifetime. Vince. I just have to say it. It really is.

Vince:

That's extraordinary. And I, and I totally agree with you. You know, if we think about these as two pandemics, the COVID pandemic did this extraordinary job of disrupting the normalcy of society and revealing the thing that we've always known, but there it's there for everybody to see. And for everybody to read and everybody to ponder, the next question is, what do you do about it? The pandemic of what looks like and feels like Black genocide has been around for so long. It's not a novel virus, but the other piece of that is that it's almost the opposite. Whereas the COVID pandemic disrupted our notion of normalcy with structural racism. People now are disrupting our sense of normalcy. And so at least in our work, it feels both. It feels like everything is up for grabs and that there are possibilities everywhere. I'm sure from a lot of other people that don't do the work that we do, it feels like chaos and they're curled up under their bed.

Vince:

And they're asking what to do. The good news is that they're asking us and asking the organizers and listening and listening to some of these solutions. But I totally agree that, you know, at some level the Black Lives Matter, hashtag can oversimplify a very clear problem. And we see that a little bit now because I don't know, I haven't done all the checking, but just about every major corporation is flying the Black Lives Matter flag. Now they were not flying it five years ago, 10 years ago, 50 years ago, but they're flying it. Now. We saw Mitt Romney out there talking about Black Lives Matter. And you know, he said the words and I'm sure somebody went up to him afterwards and say, we need to walk that back. But you know, I don't want to overstate it, but the simplicity of the notion that we just don't matter, coupled with the evidence that other people are seeing.

Vince:

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And it was evidenced unseen for a long time, except for by Black people and systems of impacted people. Now it is evidence for everyone to grapple with. This is an extraordinary moment in our politics. I want to ask you another question though, because invariably, what happens in these moments where we see shifts the ground shifting under the, underneath the feet of power, power is very, very good at reinventing itself and reorganizing itself. Are you concerned that given all of the possibility that's happening now within a presidential election, that's coming up in 2020? Are you at all concerned? I know that neither of us can talk about this because we are 501(C)(3) organizations and we are not electioneering IRS, but what we can talk about is the concern that we might have that the idea for the of beating Trump, even with moderate messages becomes more of a priority than saving Black lives in the way that I have articulated. You have thoughts on that?

Angela:

I have many thoughts on it, and I have, there were many things in what you said. I want to go back to something you said earlier, as you talked about the political and the policy. I think the thing that has caused people to open their eyes is the economy. We left that out when we talked about COVID-19. COVID-19 laid bare how vulnerable Black and brown people were to disease, but it also laid bare how intertwined the economy is with Black and brown people to keep it going. When we had to shut down, Black and brown people were the ones who kept the nation alive through the delivery, through the essential services. And people realize that this isn't just going to go away. This may be with us for two or three years. And if we can't figure it out, the economy will be closed for two or three years because it may go through this thing of opening up for a few months. But if we have the same thing that happened in New York, starting to happen across the country, we have to shut down again because it's not just Black and brown people who are going to die. It's lots of people because we all are coming in contact with each other because we do the essential frontline work.

Angela:

And so the threat to the economy is the thing that gets people, including corporations, shaking in their boots. They can't sell anything if they can't open up and they can't open up. If the pandemic isn't under control and the pandemic will never be under control until we pay attention to the people who are most vital to keeping everything going. And so we're really at a moment. And that is the thing that gives me hope, because I don't have confidence that anybody is going to change because they feel morally challenged nor do I think they're going to change because they're feeling some compassion for morbidity and mortality happening to somebody over there. But I do know that they will struggle if the economy is threatened and the economy is under the biggest threat that it's been under. And we know that it also is combined with the moral challenge of the nation, the moral challenge of our moment.

Angela:

And I think that takes us right into whether or not when we have our next election, people are going to do the right thing. And I have begun to challenge the notion of not being able to talk about politics, because it's one thing not to talk about politics. It is another not to be able to speak about what is right and what is wrong. And when you begin to see people in high and powerful positions, talk about things that are morally wrong, you have to speak out against them. And if you allow some notion of politics to quiet you, I want to say, if me saying this is wrong, offends you because you think I'm talking about your political party, that's your problem, because I'm just talking about

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right and wrong. And I think that this notion is going to carry us through a little bit, but let's not let our guard down.

Angela:

We've got to vote. We've got to register to vote. We have to get people out to vote. We have to save democracy and we have to save democracy from two things. We have to save democracy from all the power of being in corporations. They have hijacked democracy. They have taken over the role of civil society. They have, they have debased democracy. We've got to save democracy from corporate power, but we also have to save democracy from complacency. We have to save democracy from attacks that are out and out cheating. And so democracy is in a very fragile moment and we have to do all we can to save it because I used to think, as I heard this country brag about democracy on the global stage so much, I would think, what are they bragging about? Because it's a democracy that does not work in the context of difference. It's not a democracy was lifting up or exporting, but a democracy that does work in the context of difference is what the world needs. We've got a chance to be able to show that this is going to take a lot of work.

Vince:

A lot of work. I think it is going to take a lot of work. And I'm hopeful that as I often am, that people don't forget. I think one fundamental truth of one of many fundamental truths from the COVID-19 outbreak, which is that poor folks, people of color, Black folks, single parents, and not just emergency service workers, but people who are not in those categories of first responders, we'll call them, but people were not in those categories had to make the following choice, "Either I put myself and my family at risk and I make money to survive, or I don't make money to survive and don't put my family at risk." It's the choice that poor folks have faced and continue to face on a variety of different levels. The stakes might have been a little bit different, but the bottom line is, is that even in the analysis that you laid out, which I think is a hundred percent right, the linchpin is poor, Black, single parents. People who need that income, but the challenge is can we do it in a way that doesn't put their life at risk in order to be able to feed their families and ultimately save the economy?

Angela:

That's right. And you know, there's another issue here. The thing that makes these moments, this period so extraordinary is that all the things that we have not wanted to talk about are right in front of us, and here's another one: Blackness, centering Blackness, anti-Blackness there is, you know, we started off in this nation coming out of slavery, moving into the civil rights movement. We were focused on Black people. It was Black people who were enslaved. It was Black people who led the great migration. It was Black people who led and framed the civil rights movement. And then after civil rights, it became all people who had their rights trampled upon, or didn't have them. It was women, Latin X, Native, American, Asian, until we got to the point where it was all of us who were oppressed, it was all people of color. And yet we didn't make fundamental progress.

Angela:

And part of the reason that we didn't make fundamental progress, we didn't deal with the fundamentals and the fundamentals in the United States of America are this: the protocol or terms of oppression were developed within the context of the Black/white paradigm because of the genocide of Native people and the isolation of Native people. It was living together between Black

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and white in slavery that developed the terms and the protocol of oppression. And as we came out of slavery, the chasm that was developed in this nation between Black and white, has created a giant fucking mechanism that anybody who is vulnerable, whether you're that next or Asian or Native American, or a poor white woman, or a person with disabilities, you fall into this thing that was created by the Black/white paradigm. And it is hard to get out of it. And we we've been trying to fix it in recent decades, by focusing on all the people who are being left behind and understanding the economic definition of that.

Angela:

And that hasn't worked. We've got to go back to mentoring Blackness, not to exclude anyone else, but to get at the fundamentals that hurt everybody so that we can lift it all and have people be able to move forward. If you just think about it, the Black/white paradigm was the thing that defined welfare reform back in 1996. People did that. It was an image of a Black woman with a lot of children. But if you are a white woman in poverty and you move into a low-income community and you need to go on welfare, you fall into a system that was defined by the Black white paradigm. And so we've got to be able to talk about that without being defensive, without having people think that they're being forgotten, but understand that we're trying to deepen the struggle so that we don't have to keep revisiting.

Vince:

Yes, I totally agree on that. And that's actually a hard conversation for us to have on the left. We're having that discussion at the Center for Constitutional Rights right now. And one way that I think about it is that we as Black folks, as people of color, as queer folks, as a gender nonconforming folks, native folks, all of us together have to be able to hold all of us, but not at the same time and not interchangeably because all of our experiences are different and some of them are intersectional. And I think that's a very important piece. We have to be talking about all Blacks, all Black lives and how they matter and not just Black men and not just people that are killed by the police, because the vast majority of killing of Black women happens through personal violence and interpersonal violence. So we have to be able to hold all of these things.

Vince:

And it, and it reminded me that, you know, when I was reading the 1619 Project, I just did a little bit of research at what the laws were like at 1619 and prior. And the punitive reflex of this country was around social control of Native people. And as soon as we were brought here in chains, enslaved, it migrated and it shifted and it encompassed. And I agree with you that the story of African Americans, Black folks in this country is distinct from the story of every other group. But the thing that is not different is the fundamental, colonial based power grab of social control extermination killing that this country was founded on. And that is an important thing for us to remember is that we're not fighting each other. What we're trying to do is we're fighting the power or fighting state violence and all of its manifestations, and it gets a little bit twisted so that we're actually having very heated conversations about who's being left out of a particular articulation.

Vince:

And I think that's important for us to keep our politics clear, but it's more important to realize what we are fighting. That if you look at all of the discussions that have been happening every

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single time a police killing has happened, the only violence that the media wants to talk about is first violent protesters. And then after the police and the police union will leak a history of someone that they killed, then they, then the media wants to talk about how violent the person was that the cops killed. If you look at the history of what - I'm putting this in air quotes, for those of you listening to the podcast - of "race riots," that's in air quotes. If you look at the history of the United States, that they've really all happened because of a relatively short subject set of issues. One that they were as a result of police killing Black people, too, that they were a result of white people, killing Black people burning towns to the ground because of their fears of the economy. Free Black people who have achieved or had achieved some level of power or political office and white mobs just descended on them with the added value of also being connected to law enforcement and that any - and the reason why these are called riots, and the reason why this is called violence, as opposed to rebellion and resistance is because you can't crack down with law enforcement on resistance.

Vince:

You can only crack down if law enforcement has a thing to enforce the law on, and that is a violent narrative. So, you know, we're left with this question. When I tell people all the time, the fourth amendment, you know, this is the prohibition on search and seizures that you can, you have a right under the Constitution when a cop is coming at you to say, "Why am I being searched?" And "No, I don't consent to this search," but you're going to get the beat down most of the time. And it's just a beat down if you're lucky. So the question is, what does the Constitution mean? If some of us literally cannot access it with the arms of the state that are trying to do us harm.

Angela:

And you left out of the list in terms of police having a reason, and that is curfew.

Vince:

Yes.

Angela:

Absolutely. That's what a curfew does. That's all. You know, people are out here, peaceful protest. How do you make this a crime? Curfew. Right?

Vince

In fact, we went to the mayor of New York City and said, "Alright, we're going to sue if you don't lift this curfew." And we prepared all of the papers to be able to do that. And he did lift it earlier than I think he would have done it otherwise, but it shouldn't have been there to begin with. We haven't had a curfew in New York for 75 years and you are 100% right. That, that means what it's doing is you get to protest between these hours and then everything you're out beyond those hours, then you're going to jail.

Angela:

And it made it a crime, made peaceful protest a crime by imposing a curfew. Just one last thing I want to say about what is a really tough issue within our movements is to think about this notion of centering Blackness. In 2002, Manuel Pastor, Stewart Kwoh and I wrote a book called Searching for the Uncommon Common Ground. And the notion of this book is usually when people come

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together, they come together around the lowest common denominator. But what we really needed to do was to set a high bar and see if we can reach that. Stewart, Manuel and I were friends, and we were asked by the American Assembly to write this book, to write a book about race. We decided the book we wanted to write. And so we actually gathered in our conference room before we started to say, you know, we were friends coming into this, we need to understand where the land mines are.

Angela:

So we don't lose our friendship writing this book. And we spent a couple of days in the conference room talking about it, and this notion about the Black/white paradigm and that in relationship to the others and where did it fit? And we collectively came to the conclusion that the Black/white paradigm was defining, embedded and continuing, and that you couldn't deal with these issues if you didn't understand that. And that was one more thing, insufficient, insufficient to completely explain the journey and the struggles of people who were Native and Asian and Latin X. And that frame allowed us to write a book in 2002 that people still ask for. And I just was looking on Twitter the other day, somebody was lifting up that book as being important in this moment and it's because we struggled with that. And that kind of struggle is what takes us to transformative solidarity. You know, that we really do have to move beyond just supporting each other and being in coalition. It is time for a solidarity that is not afraid of the issues, not afraid to name them, not afraid to talk about them or move to them, transformative solidarity. They're the now to reach out goals that we come to with Radical Imagination.

Vince:

Exactly. And I think that's a wonderful place to leave this conversation. And particularly for those of you who are listening, who are asking, what can I do? What should I do? What will I do? We want you to think about the idea of transformative solidarity. It is not a passive state. It is an active state. You have to do it with other people. You have to be all in. You have to have those discussions and you have to learn before you're out there swinging. Angela Glover Blackwell, what an extraordinary conversation.

Angela:

Oh, it was my pleasure. Thank you so much.

Vince:

Wonderful to be with you. Thank you so much.

Angela:

And with you.