

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021
Criminal Justice: Effecting Change At City, County And State Levels

Speaker 1 (00:04:56):

We believe in freedom can rest. Mm. We believe in freedom can rest until it comes. We believe in freedom. Freedom. We believe in freedom

Speaker 2 (00:05:36):

Is as important as killing a white man, white mother.

Speaker 1 (00:05:45):

We believe we who believe

Speaker 2 (00:06:02):

To clutch for power, not the light, just to shine on the, I need to be just one and the number as we stand against to me, young people, they, the courage where we, if I just shine, carry us,

Speaker 1 (00:06:33):

We, we,

Speaker 2 (00:06:53):

And I must be heard

Speaker 3 (00:06:57):

At

Speaker 2 (00:06:58):

Times I can be

Speaker 1 (00:06:59):

Quite

Speaker 2 (00:07:00):

Difficult.

Speaker 3 (00:07:02):

I

Speaker 2 (00:07:02):

About to,

Speaker 1 (00:07:14):

We believe freedom on, we believe freedom,

Speaker 2 (00:07:34):

Freedom

Speaker 1 (00:08:11):

We'll believe freedom.

Speaker 2 (00:08:17):

Rest.

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Speaker 1 (00:08:19):

We believe freedom.

Speaker 2 (00:08:23):

Freedom.

Speaker 1 (00:08:27):

Now we'll

Speaker 2 (00:08:28):

Believe in freedom. Freedom, freedom cannot rest.

Speaker 1 (00:08:36):

We

Speaker 2 (00:08:37):

Believe in freedom.

Speaker 4 (00:09:03):

Yes. All right. I am Judy Richardson, uh, SNCC veteran, and a member of the, uh, SNCC legacy board. I want to welcome you to the second day of our wonderful SNCC 60th conference. Uh, even with all the bumps yesterday, I think we all felt just so glad to be together. And we were energized by the great discussions. We had both with other SNCC folks and with the incredible young people who continue with their passion and their intelligence to give us real hope for the future. We are just off to a great start, right? Uh, now today, before we move to our criminal justice panel with James Foreman Jr. And Minnesota attorney general, Keith Ellison we'll view a video that reviews S Nick's history and accomplishments and the work done by SNCC folks. After we left SNCC, you know, as if anybody ever leaves SNCC, uh, it will reveal what our small group of SNCC organizers, um, have, have accom has accomplished over the last, uh, 60 years, 60 years.

Speaker 4 (00:10:07):

Okay. But before we view the video on behalf of all of us SNCC folks, I'd like to particularly salute Cortland Cox, who has been, he doesn't know this is happening. Uh, who's been behind the scenes since the earliest days in SNCC. He was a key strategist and organizing organizer during his SNCC days. And then he and Karen Spellman with the work of Charlene Krantz 12 long and hard as conference coordinators on both the SNCC, um, SNCC 50th conference in 2010 and the freedom summer 50th conference in 2014 to make them a reality Cortland envisioned and develop the SNCC legacy project, helping to conceptualize and make the SNCC digital gateway, a lasting archive. And he continues to involve us in projects that will expand S Nick's legacy and our contribution to the struggle for a just world. Lastly, he has been tireless these past two years as he kept our planning committee focused and moving to make this 60th anniversary conference a wonders reality we're we did it, we're doing it.

Speaker 4 (00:11:20):

Uh, and Cortland, we really could not have done this without you. We thank you, my brother, and now to the video, SNCC 60 years strong as we, um, you know, as we know, I'm shifting, shifting gears here, as we know, some of our folks gave their lives and many put their lives on

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the line to create change. And most of them remain unheralded. This video you're about to see was produced by our SNCC folks, us SNCC folks. And I was gonna mention that I worked on this with Jennifer Lawson. She said, I couldn't mention all the work she did. So I won't. And with research from Aja mu de hunt, and it was edited by edited by the incredible Emmett Williams. So now let's roll tape.

Speaker 5 (00:12:09):

We,

Speaker 6 (00:12:39):

I am here to represent the struggle that has gone on for 300 or more years, a struggle to be recognized as citizens in a country in which we were born

Speaker 7 (00:12:55):

The first time the community was confronted with Negroes in places where they had never been.

Speaker 8 (00:13:02):

You go to a counter, you do not, you do not request, but the person's sitting next to you. Get up and leave. You really come in, sit down beside him

Speaker 9 (00:13:12):

As any human being would do all together was a moving feeling within me that I was sitting there demanding a God given, right? And my soul became satisfied that I was right in what I was doing at the same time was something deep down with failure moving me that I could no longer be satisfied or go along with an evil system.

Speaker 10 (00:13:45):

I had always assumed that my role was to facilitate, which did not involve leadership. I didn't have the need for, uh, being considered a leader. So they felt they could trust me to, uh, maybe further the, the matter of their independence

Speaker 11 (00:14:31):

Went around house to house door, to door and the hot sun every day, because the most important thing at the beginning was to convince the local towns, people that we meant business it is that we were serious, uh, that we were not only young, but that we were people who were responsible

Speaker 12 (00:15:28):

That not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution, where is a political party that will make it unnecessary to March on Washington, where is a political party that will make it unnecessary to March in the, of Birmingham, what we will March with the spirit of love and with the spirit that we have.

Speaker 6 (00:16:08):

And if the freedom democratic father is not seated. Now, I question America is this America, the land of the free in the home of the brave, where we have to speak our T our dead human. Thank

Speaker 3 (00:16:44):

Keep

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Speaker 5 (00:16:44):

On

Speaker 3 (00:16:45):

Push.

Speaker 5 (00:16:47):

I've gotta keep on pushing.

Speaker 13 (00:16:51):

We hope to find and develop and mold local leadership. Among the young people.

Speaker 14 (00:17:00):

We have organized into the Mississippi freedom, democratic parties. We are holding a freedom registration drive throughout the state, encouraging every Negro and white who wants a stake in his political future to prove it by getting his name on a freedom registration book. We have scheduled precinct meetings and district caucuses. And on August 6th here in Jackson, we will hold our state convention. At that time, we will elect a slate of delegates to the national convention in Atlantic city. And when that convention meets, we will present ourselves for seating as the only democratically constituted body of Mississippi, Mississippi citizens worthy of taking part in that convention's business.

Speaker 3 (00:17:45):

I

Speaker 5 (00:17:45):

Know I can make it

Speaker 15 (00:17:50):

With little bit of soul. I've got not look, look up, look a watch player. I see a big, whoa stands that ahead of me.

Speaker 16 (00:18:26):

There's only one man in this country that can stop George Wallace. In those posses, we can present thousands and thousands of bodies in the streets if we want to. And we can have all of the soul force and the moral commitment around this world. But a lot of these problems will not be solved to that. Shalee over of, until I shagged the blade over a place called the white house, begins to shake and gets on the phone and said, now, listen, George, we coming down there and throw you in jail. If you don't stop that mess. That's the only way it's not just the sheriff of this county or the mayor or the police commissioner or George Wallace. This problem goes to the very bottom of the United States. And, you know, I said it today and I will say it again. If we can't sit at the table, let's knock the off. Excuse me.

Speaker 17 (00:19:41):

You had a situation where 80% of the people were African Americans, and there were four people, African Americans registered to vote. And it's given that we had come to the conclusion. There was no way of asking those who oppressed us to deal with the nature of our oppression. It was important now to now assert the ability to both define and decide your own reality. So we

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said, all right, now, when we look at the black belt of Alabama, the question was, if you had the majority county, why couldn't the majority of people who lived in that county, make the rules, make the decisions and determine how they lived. But the question then is could you believe get people who all that time had been told that they could not do it? How would you get them to begin to think of themselves as being in charge,

Speaker 15 (00:20:43):

Put

Speaker 16 (00:20:43):

Your best?

Speaker 15 (00:20:45):

And some people say we got of some lot. I, we

Speaker 18 (00:21:05):

Don't have to be ashamed of it. We have stayed here and we begged the president. We begged the federal government. That's all we've been doing. Bagging begging it's time. We stand up and take over pickle. We have to do what every group in this country did. We gotta check over the communities where we outnumber people so we can have decent jobs so we can have decent.

Speaker 15 (00:21:45):

There's too many there's to bring. Don't see. War is

Speaker 19 (00:22:39):

The old African people's revolutionary party is a mass socialist revolutionary political party. It's objective is pan Africanism, which is defined as the total liberation and unification of Africa on the scientific social.

Speaker 20 (00:24:32):

A boys born in hot Mississippi, surrounded by his parents, give him love to keep him strong. The, just

Speaker 21 (00:24:57):

In the sixties, we were using the vote as a tool to organize the community for political access. So here math literacy is no reason why it can't be a tool to organize the community for educational and economic access.

Speaker 22 (00:25:44):

Southern echo came about as a result of me making the decision to continue the work of the civil rights movement. After most of the people that were working in the civil rights movement, left the state and went back to where they came from. You know, after the 1964 summer project,

Speaker 3 (00:26:07):

I ain't nobody crying. Ain't nobody ain't no, come on, come on. Help me. I thank you. Help. Y'all I'll take you. I'll take you there. I'll take you Christ. I'll you let,

Speaker 4 (00:27:43):

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It's about stepping out on faith and you don't know whether you're gonna succeed, but you got to do it. Cause if you do nothing, nothing changes

Speaker 3 (00:27:56):

All ain't nobody I'll take ain't I'll you. Oh, I'll take you. I faces I'll here. Lying tonight. I'll oh, oh. I'll I'll I'll come on.

Speaker 15 (00:31:15):

Let's celebrate.

Speaker 3 (00:31:17):

There's

Speaker 15 (00:31:17):

A party going on right here. A celebration to last throughout the years. So bring your good times and your laughter too. We gonna celebrate your party with you. Come on now. Let's all celebrate and have a good time.

Speaker 3 (00:31:46):

We

Speaker 15 (00:31:46):

Go celebrate and have a good time. It time to it's time together. It's up to

Speaker 3 (00:32:20):

Times.

Speaker 15 (00:32:23):

It's

Speaker 3 (00:32:27):

Celebrate. Good times. Come on.

Speaker 15 (00:32:30):

Let's celebrate.

Speaker 3 (00:32:32):

There's

Speaker 15 (00:32:33):

A body going on right here. A dedication to last the years. So bring your good times and your too, we gonna celebrate and party with you. Come on. Let's all celebrate and have a good time. Yeah. Yeah. We going celebrate and have a good time. It's time to together. It's up to you. What's your pleasure. It's

Speaker 4 (00:33:39):

I swear. We sniff folks with some bad ma pajamas. I it's, I love it. Okay. Um, but now to begin the panel, let me introduce James Foreman, Jr. And I will note that my first job in SNS national office in 1963 was working as secretary to his father, James Foreman, senior, then SNS

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legendary executive secretary and I room with his mother dinky, AKA Constantia, roly in the SNCC freedom house in Atlanta. But now to professor foremans, formal biography, James Foreman, junior is a professor of law at Yale law school. He attended public schools in Detroit and New York city before graduating from the Atlanta public schools in 19. And in 1997, along with David do DOI, professor foreman started the Maya OU public charter school and alternative school for dropouts and its youth who had previously been arrested. Professor foreman has written many law reviewed articles in addition to op-eds and essays for the New York times, the Atlantic, the new Republic, the nation and the Washington post locking up our own was his first book professor foreman over to you.

Speaker 23 (00:35:05):

Thank you very much. It's uh, uh, enormous honor for me to be invited to be part of this conversation. Um, I was so moved by the video, uh, that I just watched. Um, so many of the faces. I know and remember some of the historical, uh, vignettes. I, I remember and I've seen before and, and some of them were, were new and I congratulate everybody who put the video together. And more importantly, everybody who did the work, um, the work, uh, that, um, still, uh, does not get the attention that it deserves, um, for having created a society that allows me, um, a level of freedom, um, that was not possible, um, for previous generations. So, um, I just want to, I just want to thank you all for everything that you've done. Um, it's my, uh, honor, at this point to introduce attorney general, Keith Ellison, uh, he and I are gonna have a conversation about crime and justice and safety, uh, and affecting change at the no national state and local levels.

Speaker 23 (00:36:15):

Um, Keith Ellison has a storied career. Um, he has worked as a civil rights attorney. Uh, he's worked as a defense attorney. He spent four years in the Minnesota house of representatives in 12 years in Congress. Uh, during which time he was a steadfast, uh, champion of progressive values and progressive legislation. Um, and now, um, he has taken that passion to, uh, the state, uh, office of attorney general, uh, in Minnesota, um, where he is, um, I think doing really transformative work in helping Minnesotans live in freedom in peace indig and with safety. Um, so it's, it's my great honor to introduce to this group attorney general, Keith Allison,

Speaker 24 (00:37:09):

Hey everybody. Hey, uh, James, good to be with you again, my friend and I, I joined you, man, that video was outstanding and remarkable and I've, uh, admired Judy Richardson for so many years and loved her work. Uh, so many things she's given to us. Uh, thank you. That was, that was really, really, uh, heartwarming.

Speaker 23 (00:37:32):

So let's, let's dive into this, this issue, uh, Keith, and, and in a way, you know, let's just because this is, we're dealing with SNCC and they always want to tackle the hardest questions. Right. That's what they've been about. Um, so let's just like dive into the, the heart of the matter, um, in, in some ways, right? Yeah, we are, you know, as you and I sit here today and as all of us on this call and, um, sit here, you know, we're at a moment when really two things are happening at the same time, right? On the one hand you have this rising consciousness, much of it pushed by, um, a young generation of activists. Mm-hmm <affirmative> um, that is saying simply, you know, we have been taking, uh, police brutality. We've been taking mass incarceration. We've been taking an unfair justice system for too long, and we are not gonna take it anymore.

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Speaker 23 (00:38:27):

So you have that strong, strong, powerful movement. And at the same time in cities, around the country, in new Haven, uh, uh, where you are, I'm, I'm quite sure, uh, in Atlanta where I've been spending some time with some activists recently and all over the country, we have crime rising, we have violence rising, um, and people are scared. Uh, and I wouldn't say we are, I mean, we are statistically not where we were, you know, in the eighties and early nineties in those, those, those, uh, you know, crack cocaine years and, and the violence associated with that. But, you know, the thing is people don't, people's historical memories don't work that way. It's not right. You know, it's irrelevant if it was more violent in 1988 than it is today, they, they don't want to hear that, um, right. Their, their, their point is, do I feel safe today?

Speaker 23 (00:39:22):

Do I feel safe, um, going to get groceries, do I feel safe? Uh, having my, uh, children go to school on their own. And so these two things, you know, are, are often presented, um, in, in great tension, uh, you know, how can we do things to make, um, policing more fair and less violent, um, and not, uh, turn the streets over to, uh, to, to those who would having have us, have us live in fear and live in terror. And I know you, because I've heard you, you talk about this issue, and I know that, that you don't necessarily see those intention in the same way that a lot of people do. Um, and so I would love to hear you talk a little bit about what it's like to be the attorney general in the state, in that moment where you are being pressured, uh, to create change. And you wanna, you don't, you, you knowing you, you don't need, you don't need the pressure. You wanted to do it already. So you've got people pressuring you to do something that you wanted to do. And at the same time, um, you have people who are crying out, um, uh, for safety. How do you, how do you wrestle through that?

Speaker 24 (00:40:37):

Well, we have to wrestle through with, with some courage and some patience, uh, because, um, a lack of political courage would, would lead us to a certain conclusion, just Jack up, uh, more cops, more prisons, more prosecutions, more this, more that, that, that is one answer that some people are looking for. But when you consider the fact that the 30% bump in violent crime in 2020 is tightly connected to the pandemic, it has cooled a lot in 2021. It's important for responsible leaders to point that out. Let me agree with you though. The only statistic that matters when it comes to crime for the individual is the crime of one. Did I have one murder near my house? That that's what I care about. And I get that, but if you're in a policy making role, you've gotta say, how do we create safety and human rights?

Speaker 24 (00:41:38):

I would, I would submit that if you have a situation where you have distrust and conflict and tension between police and community, community will not contact police to deal with the problem. You have a, you have a reduction and a slowing down of cooperation reporting in a number of things where you have that trust gap, which allows people who would work out their problems violently in the streets, have a freer hand to do so. So actually it's not police, uh, it's not civil and human rights or safety. It's really civil and human rights and safety. If we have a better co working relationship, you will have more cooperation. You will able to be able to engage, uh, uh, safety and civil rights better. I would submit that what this moment calls for is community led violence reduction efforts, unarmed saturation of the hot spots in any given community and,

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uh, violence reduction specialists, going to the communities most closely associated and engaging.

Speaker 24 (00:42:58):

What we found in Minneapolis is that a group of pastors saw spiking, you know, spiking crime. And they're a good barometer cuz they do the funerals, you know, mm-hmm and, and so, uh, they're saying, well, they went to a local trusted member of law enforcement, black, uh, police, uh, inspector named Charlie Adams said, where are the hotspots? And then all these grandmas and neighborhood people deployed on those hotspots in lawn chairs, played music and even barbecued. And we saw a reporting of crime reduction in those communities. We didn't, we didn't do a stop at frisk program. We didn't, uh, you know, do do sort of a, um, a program or we stopped every black kid threw him in jail and all we didn't do that. We had a community led program and that I believe is the real key to, uh, addressing this violent, uh, this wave of violence.

Speaker 24 (00:43:56):

Um, and I think it's important to understand that it is rooted in a public health crisis, which is the pandemic, uh, and, uh, nearly every measure of wellbeing, uh, is going, is gone in the wrong direction. Since the pandemic, not just treat violence, domestic violence, self-harm suicides, um, you know, uh, alcoholism, drug addiction, you know, we know how to deal with trauma when it's one on one, we even know how to deal with group trauma, but how do we deal with social trauma? And we need to be thinking about that. That's gonna get us to a safer community with a better, uh, with, with, with, uh, clear recognition of civil in human rights.

Speaker 23 (00:44:40):

Can I J just to follow up, cuz you were very clear there and you talked about community led violence reduction efforts, right? And then you, you gave us a, a concrete example of one. And again, given that we're given that this is a SNCC event, it seems like that is something that we should probe on a little bit, right. Because that's what, you know, we heard speaker after speaker and, and you, and I know this history, so we know what SNCC is about. And we know that SNCC was about helping to work in communities to help those communities themselves develop the strength and the leadership and the fortitude to be able to fight for themselves. Uh, and so I think what you're saying would resonate, um, with this group and I guess the, the, so I wanna, co-sign what you're saying. Um, and, and the question that I want to ask is, do you think it feels to me, like we don't have enough people right now who are trying to go into that work?

Speaker 23 (00:45:41):

You know, I talk to people now I'm a law professor. They say, I wanna fight mass incarceration. And a lot of times I say, don't go, don't come to law school, go do community work to build the alternative infrastructure that we need to try to keep communities safe without relying on police and prosecutors in prisons. Right. And you know, I was, I'm a lawyer. I was a former public defender. So I chose a different route. Sure. But I feel like we're at a moment now that in a way is different from when I came out in the 1990s, when there wasn't an openness to any of these alternatives. I mean, you could say I'm gonna do alternative crime reduction and people would laugh at you. Um, you know, back then, but now because of some of this energy and this activism and some of the academic work there's been, the space has been created for that.

Speaker 23 (00:46:32):

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Do you, do you agree with that assessment that is to say, do you agree that there, there are not enough people organizations on the ground doing the kind of work that you've just said is so crucial or, or, or, or isn't something else? Is it that they're out there, but they're not getting enough funding. They're not getting enough support. How would you, you know, if you were, how would you build up how, what it is that you're talking about is so important? How do, how do we make more of it and have it be more sustained and have it in more communities?

Speaker 24 (00:47:10):

Well, I think one thing to point out is that locking up our own crime and punishment in black America made a significant contribution to the, to what I'm talking about, right? Your book was a major contribution to constitutional humane, public safety. Uh, and I, and I think we ought to stop and thank you for it. Uh, writing a book is no easy thing to do, takes a long time. Uh, a lot of self-reflection a lot of energy and then everybody, uh, you know, then you got your critics, you know, so bottom line is, uh, I would commend everybody to pick up locking up our own. How do we make more of it? Here's what I think we should do. I think, uh, the right thing to do is to write more about it, create a public conversation about it, make sure that it is something that is in every editorial page that we're, we're pushing out podcasts about it.

Speaker 24 (00:48:08):

People who do it need to talk about it. Why? Because P action follows thought, right? So first you gotta conceive of it, then you're gonna do it. So we need to get it out. We need to massify this concept of community led public safety, crime reduction. And then what we need to do is lift up examples. People who are doing it. I think what we need to do is we need to get it into budgets. It's gotta be into municipal budgets, you know where it is, and this is a good thing. We always complain about what's wrong. Let me talk about something that went right. Biden, put it in the, in his budget, there's money for this in the Biden budget. So if you are listening to this broadcast and you're like, okay, well, what should I do? Well, why don't you call up your Congress person and say, I wanna get some hand my hands on some of that community crime reduction money, because if we need walkie talkies, if we need, you know, and again, if we need training and you do need training, we don't wanna create a vigilante system.

Speaker 24 (00:49:08):

We don't need more. We don't need any more George zimermans okay. Absolutely not. But what we need is people who believe in the core dignity of everybody in the neighborhood who understand that a lot of the young people who do keep up a certain degree of mayhem, let's just be honest, they're they, what they need is somebody to engage them. What they really do. They do need somebody to care. Right? And we don't wanna go back and we gotta just mind be mindful of history. I mean, we, you know, your book outlines, this we've been down this road before, you know? Yes, absolutely. The mass, when we saw it, you know, cheap, uh, cocaine, um, uh, in the form of crack flood our neighborhoods, it became the biggest employer in some neighborhoods and there's no police to regulate it. So people regulated themselves and it caused violent interactions.

Speaker 24 (00:50:04):

We know this, what we, what we don't wanna do is go back to the bad old days where we ourselves are asking the system to give us law enforcement and social supports. But they just, but they don't give us no social supports. They don't give us no housing. They don't give us no job. They, they just said, no, we're gonna give you the hard edge boot of the system. And then you get

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books, uh, like, uh, the sister who wrote, um, um, the, the, the, the new Jim Crow, right? Uh, and you know, which is, uh, which is just a replay of, uh, old systems of, uh, of oppression. So that is what I would say about the, how let's write about it. Let's talk about it. Let's encourage it. Let's get it into some budgets. Let's not do it on the cheap let's hire.

Speaker 24 (00:50:50):

In addition, you know, you wanna hire more cops doing what, first of all, let's interrogate that, doing what, and then let's say maybe we don't need people with badges and guns. Um, engaging unhoused people, mentally ill people. We found that about half of the people killed and deadly forced encounters with police were people who were in a mental health crisis. And if you understand anything about autism, you know, that a, a person in a, in an autistic meltdown is not going to even hear the commands the police has given them. So the officer goes, get on the ground. So somebody sees somebody talking to themselves in the middle of the street. They don't know what to do. Our only option is to call 9 1 1. So that's what they do. The officer rises on the scene says, come here, get on the ground. The what? The, the artistic melt, the person in that artistic meltdown might ball up their fists.

Speaker 24 (00:51:46):

They might not comply with it with the, uh, commands. So the officer thinks that this person's getting in a fighting stance. So what do they do? I don't know. Maybe they TAs the person. Maybe they tackle the person. Maybe they Baton the person. And next thing you know, somebody's dead. And then we have protests, marches, outrage, upset, all because we took the ver we took a certain kind of tool cops with guns and tried to apply it to every public health problem. That's out there including a person in a middle event, mental health crisis. So we need to change how we do policing to say, you know, if there is a robbery in progress, a domestic violence in progress, a violent episode happening. Now, maybe you need somebody who can meet that challenge. But so many other things we ask police to do, don't have nothing to do with that. And if you're talking about violence prevention, maybe that's done without a badge in a uniform, in a gun, maybe that's done better on a peer-to-peer neighbor, neighbor level. Let's support that effort. So those are just a few thoughts.

Speaker 23 (00:52:52):

Yeah. And I appreciate you cuz you actually got right into the next question that I was asked, gonna ask you because, um, one of the, you know, SNCC veterans, I'm not sure whether she's joining in on this, uh, this webinar or not, but she's like an aunt to me. Uh, Dorothy Zelner and she raises the question. When we talk about, you know, I, we, I started talk, you know, last summer or two summers ago now when people started talking about defund and abolish and she raised the question of, okay, well what's what, what about if I need somebody to come to my door because there's a violent crime, right? What who's gonna be left for that. And until the abolitionist can answer that question, I can't be down with abolition, you know, was the, was the que the point that she was kind of making to me.

Speaker 23 (00:53:40):

Um, and, uh, and, and Dorothy, this is hearsay through my mom dinky. So if I messed your position up in some way, I apologize in advance. Let me just say that, but here's what I want to ask you. So, okay. We're gonna do violence prevention where we're gonna do this community based initiative. We're going to have some police we're gonna have, non-police dealing with mentally ill with homelessness, with addiction, right. So we don't need as many police, but am I

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right? And I don't know if he's an elected official. Maybe you can't really go in on this, but I'm just gonna ask it. Sure. Isn't it true though, that under this model we would shrink the police department. Like we would have a smaller department. If what you're talking about is just the people who are left to respond to the violent crimes. Am I right about that? Or, or, or, or no?

Speaker 24 (00:54:37):

Well, let me just say, so we, we use this term police.

Speaker 23 (00:54:42):

Okay.

Speaker 24 (00:54:43):

I wanna offer another term public safety. What if the goal was public safety? What if, what we're actually trying to do is have better public safety, fewer domestic violence, fewer street shootings, fewer, uh, gang violence, less robbery. Uh, what if we, what if that's the goal, if that were the goal, then we use the tools we need to achieve that. Okay. I would never describe myself as a defund or abolitionist. I don't use the terminology. I don't find it helpful because it does lead people to legitimate like concerns, right? But if you tell everybody, we wanna make sure that everybody gets home safe, that their property is safe, that they don't have to worry about straight bullets going in the backyard, hitting their three year old daughter, who's playing on a swing. If that's what we wanna do. And then we engineer a system designed to maximize safety.

Speaker 24 (00:55:41):

Then what does that look like? It clearly will have people who are state agents who are armed and prepared to use violence when they need it. It will include that, but it will also include a wider array of professionals. So will you, what doesn't mean reduce the police department? It could, but what doesn't matter if what we're really going for is reduction in violence. Now, if you have a community that has suffered like stray bullets going to small children, people don't wanna hear nothing about fewer police. Mm. But the point that I wanna make to you is that's that that's, that is a snapshot in time. Let's look at it over the longer term. We can maybe ramp up right, to more people who have, who, if we are going through a ugly spade of violent crime, we might be able to ramp up. We, you can dual train people, right?

Speaker 24 (00:56:40):

You, you know, but what, but what we don't have now, it, our problem is not that we don't have enough people who know how to carry a badge and a gun. Chicago has more police per capita than any other city in America. And yet it has a reputation for certain neighborhoods being extremely violent. We talk about 54 people over a weekend getting shot. So just having a certain style of public safety officer doesn't necessarily lead to less violence. Mm-hmm, <affirmative> what we need is intervention strategies, prevention, strategies. And we need to deal with the problem as it's unfolding, which is a reactive strategy, but it's also needed. We also need to have, um, you know, uh, uh, you know, we also need to look at the other part of this. I mean, if you are a police officer, who's walking into a tent city in one of our major American metropolitan areas and you're dismantling it, cuz the neighbors are complaining about it.

Speaker 24 (00:57:42):

Isn't the first problem that the tent city exists. Hmm. I mean, shouldn't, we invest in a little housing. What about that? You know, I mean, we, we, we do, we, we see the, so we see

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investments in housing and in healthcare and in mental health as sort of softer, but it's not, it's actually designed to promote public safety. I mean, we, if you look at it that way, then your, your after school program is not just, some is not the first thing you want to cut. If you're trying to keep youth occupied and doing constructive things, you may realize if your goal is public safety, that cutting the afterschool program is probably gonna give a whole bunch of kids a lot of free time. They quite honestly, they don't necessarily need what they need is homework help. What they need is athletics. What they need is, uh, arts entertainment. That's what they need. They need adult supervision to help build their skills. But just saying turn 'em loose and run the neighborhood. Do whatever you want. How long is that? How long will it be before mischief starts up? I mean, we were all teenagers, right? Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And so, um, those are some thoughts on that. Yeah.

Speaker 23 (00:58:55):

So let, let me shift gears just a little bit in that so far we've been talking about in a way, how to have a world in which you need fewer police officers, right? Because you've, you've, you have less crime, you have less violence. You have, you don't have people living tents. Right. And we also talked about how to create a world where the people who are responding, those state agents, that we have more, we have a range of responders. We have, you know, not just the one model we have now, right. Which is send that armed officer with the gun and they're supposed to deal with everything.

Speaker 24 (00:59:35):

Right.

Speaker 23 (00:59:36):

But now let's talk about kind of the other really kind of policing issue that brought people to the streets. And that brings people to the streets, which is okay, whoever you have, you're gonna have some people that have weapons and guns and, and the authority to use force. So let's talk about what it would take to make those people less violent, less racist, more responsive to communities of color and poor communities, right? That, that piece of the police reform kind of puzzle. If you, if you want to think about it that way. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And

Speaker 23 (01:00:16):

Because I, I believe from talking to my students that one of the main things that separates generations on this issue is the question of whether or not police can be reformed because you have a lot of people. And I know you confront them. I know you work with them who say, look, y'all, you've been talking about changing police behavior, community policing, problem oriented policing, uh, uh, uh, uh, having police live in the neighborhoods that, you know, they police you for 40 years. You've been talking about training. You've been talking about hiring and credentials and oversight, and it's not working. The police are no less violent after 40 years of that talk than they were beforehand. And my question to you is what do you say to those people cuz that's behind their fundamental claim that we need to either defund or abolish or, or again, forget about the terms, if you will, right? That's what's behind that claim is this belief that this reform is a fool's errand and you are gonna spend another 40 years hiring trainers and going into the academy and teaching procedural justice and legitimacy. And it's BS.

Speaker 24 (01:02:04):

Yeah. I hear you, man. You know, I gotta few,

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Speaker 23 (01:02:08):

What do you got for me?

Speaker 24 (01:02:09):

Well, let me just point out a fact. If you look at historic rates of fatal police shootings in Europe, uh, and you compare them to the United States, uh, I think that European police, uh, are a heck of a lot, uh, less, late lethal than European police officers, two predominantly, you know, uh, two societies that have a lot of similarities, right. And, um, yet somehow, um, you know, uh, American police are, uh, are a hundred times more dangerous than say the police in Finland multiples in, in, in nearly in, in nearly every country. So if we talk about police killing black people, uh, let's compare police, killing white people, police kill more white people in America than, than police kill white people in, in Europe. Right? There is something about the way we do policing in America that is, has brought us a national nationwide historic, uh, problem. You know, we, we think of, I mean, here's the other thing, police kill more white people than black people. Nobody seems to keep that in mind, but it's true. They kill us on a much more disproportionate level. Right. But, but most of the, I mean, you know, you ever saw, um, the, the movie smokey in the bandit that you know, that that's a that's between the police and the, and the white communities. If you ever watch that racist show, uh, you know, the Dukes of hazard, I

Speaker 23 (01:03:43):

Was wondering if you gonna mention the Dukes of hazard after smoking the band.

Speaker 24 (01:03:46):

Well, there's, that's a show about white boys and going, getting into it with poor white people getting into it with the police. That's what, that's what the whole show's about. So what is my point? I think that the people who make the critique, that training and all that stuff is what's needed, um, is not effective. Uh, that the point they make cannot be ignored. Uh, I don't think that means we give up on training and all that, but I think we gotta, first of all, make the main thing, the main thing, what is the main thing? Here's the main thing. You must prosecute people who violate the law, whether they have a badge or not, that's the indispensable, we've gotta start talking to prosecutors, getting independent investigation. You violate the law, you're going to get prosecuted. Guess what? You're gonna have more law, abiding police officers.

Speaker 24 (01:04:40):

What else do you gotta do? You have to fire people. You simply have to. I mean, you know, you, we have a situation in American police departments where the most aggressive, most racist bullies, they, they run the show. I mean, I, I hate to say it. You have a lot. I mean, this is unpopular. When I say it to some of my, uh, civil rights friends, the police departments have a lot of people who are there to help people. They wanna do good. They wanna do right. But they get into a culture where thumpers rule. I'll give you an example of that. There's a black woman who was a police officer in Buffalo, new, uh, New York. Her name is Carrie horn and she's a wonderful public servant. 15, 20 years ago, she went to make an arrest with her partner. Her partner, not only does the arrest, but beats the crap out of this suspect.

Speaker 24 (01:05:35):

She says, Hey man, Hey, the guy's arrested stop. And she sort of physically sorts to intervene. He punches her in the face. Now, do you think, well, he's gonna be in a lot of trouble, right? Oh no,

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she's fired. She's fired. What is wrong with the Buffalo culture? And, and, you know, during the George Floyd protest, there was an old man I think, knocked to the ground by the Buffalo police department. And they lied about it until it was caught on tape. And then when the authority said, we're gonna discipline you guys who knocked the old man down. All of those guys said, well, we're not going to do we're. We're going to have a boycott. I mean, what I mean the bottom line is you cannot expect to treat people who break laws with impunity and then be surprised when they continue to break them laws.

Speaker 24 (01:06:29):

I think the recruiting problem that police are having nationally is rooted in the fact that a lot of good decent people don't wanna be in that culture. The problem is not that police don't get any respect. The problem is you got a lot of cops who are, who are racist and bullies, who never are held accountable. And the Caro horns of the world, they get thrown out of the department and, and bullied recently. Uh, James, I mean, I want you to check out some video that recently came to light in Minneapolis. There was this situation where this black man was charged with shooting a gun at police officers horrendous, right? Definitely needs to be prosecuted until you find out that first, the officers who never identified themselves, never told the man who they were, were shooting 40 round non-lethal, uh, rounds at him. So he's minding his own business.

Speaker 24 (01:07:25):

Legally is in possession of a firearm in the middle of the Floyd, uh, unrest. And some guys in a white van starts shooting at him. What does he do? He shoots back, oh my God, they happen to be police officers. You wonder what happened when he was charged with attempted murder, the jury acquitted him, not guilty, all counts. Black man in Minneapolis, not guilty. All counsel when he was admittedly shooting at people who turned out to be police officers. But the video shows that these all after he said, oh my God, your cops, he got on the ground, laced his hands and faced the ground flat out prone. They ran up to him and kicked him and beat him all on video. That's assault right there. You're charging him with assault. They're the ones who committed an assault. They're not gonna be held accountable. So, I mean, we have a situation of impunity and I believe you're gonna get a lot more officers who are there to really help and serve community.

Speaker 24 (01:08:24):

If you can get rid of these bullies, I'm sorry. If I'm going on too long, I got one quick more story. I think it's go ahead. So as you may know, my brother, I happened to be a man of the Muslim faith. Mm-hmm <affirmative> when I was elected to Congress, back in 2006, there was a police, uh, Lieutenant who was teaching a class to police officers. Nobody was in the class except for police officers. He says to this class, well, you know, the people of Minneapolis are really stupid. We're at, you know, you know, we are at war with the terrorist and we just elected one of them. So this black woman, police officer raises her hand and says, are you calling Congressman Alison terrorists? He says, well, he is one of them. And she says, uh, as far as I know, he's never done anything, even remotely close to what you're talking about.

Speaker 24 (01:09:22):

And you're calling Matt terrace, just cuz of his religion. It got into this combative thing. Long story short. Um, the police chief had to apologize to me now, now. Okay. So that happened that's of the record. This same guy goes on to become what? Oh, only the president of the police Federation <laugh> oh, this guy, Bob car is, it was the president of the police Federation. And so, I mean, you see what I'm saying? So look, I'm not scared of Bob Kroll or anybody else. Bottom

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look, I'm a, I'm a 58 year old lawyer, uh, ag. I'm not worried about bullies in the police department at all, but, but what if I was a 17 year old Somali kid? Mm-hmm <affirmative> what happens then? Mm-hmm <affirmative> my Lieutenant who's training me is telling me that this kid is a terrorist by virtue of his religion.

Speaker 24 (01:10:20):

If I go beat the crap out of this kid and disrespect him, I'm fighting terrorism. I'm not committing an unconstitutional assault on someone I'm not violating civil rights. I'm I'm a warrior against terrorism. So bottom line is we've got issues. And the re and back to this guy who was shooting, who, who got acquitted for shooting at the police there's body cam video that was recently released the body video CA shows that you had an officer, a tra a leader in the police department, high ranking, who said, if we see these people on the street, you know, we're gonna hunt them. We're gonna light them up. We're gonna shoot 'em with forties nonlethal rounds that will put your eye out rubber bullets. You know what I'm talking about? Mm-hmm <affirmative>, we're gonna light them up. And then they said, but oh, that over there, maybe, uh, you know, uh, you know, uh, maybe they are white, uh, because they're not booting and, uh, looting and burning. They must, he said, oh, that group over there. They're cool. Because, and I think they're white. He said white. He specifically identified their race and concluded that they must be white because they were not burning and looting. This is in the Minneapolis papers right now. You can look it up on Google if you're watching this show. Hmm. So my point is, what are we gonna do about cultural norms of racism and discrimination and hate that are held by people? I mean, how many cops were it, January 6th,

Speaker 24 (01:11:58):

Ask yourself how many cops were there. So I guess my point is James. I agree with my young friends who say, um, half measures are not working. I would say, let's deal with prosecution of crime no matter who does it. And let's start firing some people. And I guarantee you you're gonna have a better police department once you change the culture in those institutions and you punish bad conduct.

Speaker 23 (01:12:26):

Thank you. I really, I appreciate that. And I love hearing some of those stories and some of those anecdotes, I think they were, they were powerful and, and, and, and traumatic in a lot of ways just to, to even to even hear that.

Speaker 24 (01:12:40):

Yeah, man,

Speaker 23 (01:12:41):

I'm wondering, so you were talking about prosecution and, you know, firing people and, um, obviously you were involved in leading one of the most famous prosecutions of a police officer for police violence in American history. And I'm wondering if there's, I know it's still an active case and, and there's things you cannot comment on. Yeah. But I'm just wondering, is there anything that is not widely known, you know, is there anything, is there any, you know, uh, analysis or story, is there, is there anything that, that is important to you about that case that you want people to really understand that you feel like maybe hasn't gotten enough discussion it's obviously, you know, much discussed everywhere, but is there, is there a piece of it that you feel like people need to know a little bit more about or think a little bit more about?

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Speaker 24 (01:13:46):

Well, I would just start out by saying that it was a, a, that it wa the violence that happened to George Floyd was typical, but the way the prosecution occurred was very unlikely. In fact, there was a series of unlikely events that culminated in the prosecution. The first thing that happened that is somewhat typical is that when the initial report came out, uh, from the Minneapolis police department, they said that George Floyd died in a medical emergency, no mention of force or nothing like that. So then that happens. So first unlikely event, um, not that unlikely, but somewhat unlikely, 17 year old, Dar Frazier takes video and uploads it. So the story that they want to tell gets exploded because the video goes viral next, uh, the protests start that's typical. And we know that that happens and is a pattern. Uh, but then, uh, the next response is that the chief fairly quickly fires these officers, which is somewhat unique, right?

Speaker 24 (01:14:48):

If there was no video, they wouldn't be fired, cuz it would be a, he said, she said thing. And the chief knows, even if he believes they did it, they're gonna get an arbitrator to keep them on the force. So the chief firing them, the, the chief taking leadership is, is, is unique and not typical. So the blue wall of silence begins to crack a little bit with the chief saying you're out. And then the next thing that happens is that, you know, the tip, the local prosecutor, um, who's a friend of mine makes some statements that shake the community's confidence in him.

Speaker 24 (01:15:27):

And then the community says, we want Ellison on this. So the, I, I'm not the, I'm not the office of original jurisdiction, right? That is the local prosecutor. This case got sent to me because the prosecutor said, I made some comments. Maybe I were, that were ill advised. And uh, I don't have the trust of the community. Would you take this case? I'm like, let's do it. And then I had people calling me, telling me, don't take this case. You're probably going to lose. And when you do, everybody's gonna blame you and it's gonna ruin your political career. What they didn't know about me is I don't care about that. <laugh>, you know, that's, that's not on my agenda, you know? So what, you know, I'm like, look, if I can help, we gonna try and yeah, we could lose it if we do, we do, but we're gonna, one thing we can control is we can put on the best case we can.

Speaker 24 (01:16:15):

So we, we went off to do that, but then I knew the medical case was gonna be tough. And you're a, uh, you know, a legal scholar and a great lawyer. So you know that the medical causation is not simple, right? And there are jurors who can't wait to find even the slightest thing to hang and not guilty on when it comes to a cop. So we so actually had to recruit some people from the private sector, deputize them as assistant attorney general. And they came on board and that's not the most average thing. So they, so now I got these lawyers who are big shot, you know, representing fortune 500 companies in mass tort litigation who are awesome civil lawyers, but they usually apply their trade representing the big and the powerful. I said, why don't you do something for the community? What does that law degree mean?

Speaker 24 (01:17:06):

Don't you have enough houses to live in enough boats to ski behind, come do something for the folks. And so I had a couple of them join up and, um, they helped put up together a very tight case. And I haven't, you know, and I'm real proud of the work that they've done, but that, but the private bar usually it's like, ah, that's not my business. So, and then honestly, I did not know what

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was going to happen until it happened when the jury said not guilty, not guilty, not guilty. Oh, skim. When they said guilty, guilty, guilty.

Speaker 23 (01:17:39):

That's an old defense lawyer speaking right there. Right,

Speaker 24 (01:17:42):

Right. That's that's but you know, I'm gonna tell you though, James, I had to use all my defense lawyer thought when you prosecute a police officer, you have to think like a defense

Speaker 23 (01:17:52):

Attorney I could tell. And as a defense lawyer watching that prosecution, which was put together so well. And my, you know, the defense attorneys, all we do is talk about how this prosecution is messed up, you know? Right. <laugh>, we'll, we'll look at the prosecution and we'll say they took, they lost the emotional content of the case. They came, locked in with tunnel vision. They weren't able to predict what the defense was gonna do. Right. Those are typical prosecution errors. Right. But you all made none of, uh, it was, it was a case that was put together so powerfully. Thank you. Um, so our, our time is, is, is running short here. We only have, we only have about one minute left. Um, and I just want to, um, in that minute, uh, if there's anything, uh, that you want to, uh, to say to the audience, um, in, by way of any, you know, closing thoughts or, or, or, or closing comments, um, I want to, to invite you to do that.

Speaker 23 (01:18:56):

And, uh, before I do that, I just want to thank you again for how you lead, uh, with your heart. You lead with your head when you, you know, when you said, oh, I don't care about that political outcome. You know, I followed you for long enough. I've known you for long enough to know that that's legitimate. You know, that's what elected officials say, right? Most of 'em say, oh, I don't care. I'm doing, but I know you, and I've seen you and you do things, um, because you believe in them. And so I want to thank you for, for your work and give you, give you the opportunity to close us out.

Speaker 24 (01:19:28):

Well, I do wanna ask everybody to go out and get a copy of locking up our own. It's it's, it's not only good scholarship. It's, it's easy to read. Uh, and I think you have a Audi audio version, right? I do. So, so if you can go, if you wanna go get on your, you know, your treadmill and listen to the book, you can do that. Uh, it, it, cause cuz I really believe this moment need, it needs people holding signs and marching and it needs people prosecuting, but it needs people writing and thinking and publishing ideas on how we get out of this situation. We need that the intellectual work is a critical part of what is here, because we have a lack of imagination. We don't, we're not thinking about how to make a safe community. We're thinking about, should we have more police or not?

Speaker 24 (01:20:15):

And my thing is okay, if we, whether we have more or not doing what you know. And so, um, that is the moment we're in. You know, look, I, you know, James, I know, you know, very well who the great, uh, Kenneth Clark is. And he said at the, uh, at the, at the Kerner commission, uh, when he, when we were responding, when they were responding to all of the, uh, the civil unrest of the 1967, he said, look, you know, uh, when I read the 19, 19 Chicago riot, it was like, I read

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the 1935 Harlem riot or the 1943 Harlem riot or the McCone commission regarding the LA uprising or this or that, or this or that bottom line. He said, it's like an Allison Wonderland where we repeat over and over again, resulting in the same in action. And it didn't stop in the 68.

Speaker 24 (01:21:08):

It kept going, I mean, even 21st century policing, what Obama did was response to Ferguson. So my point is let's do something different. The status quos not working, the status quo, uh, is bad for nearly everyone. Um, 500 buildings burned on lake street in Minneapolis. Is that good for even a business person? There's no business case for the status quo, but we are ha lack imagination as to what we should do next. So we just stick with the bad status quo. Let's reach for a better future, which may be uncertain, but it's gotta be better than this. So, uh, James Foreman Jr. You are the man I'm on team foreman, baby. Let's do this and I'll see you soon. I amen. Thank God for SN.

Speaker 23 (01:21:58):

Thank you. Thank you, Keith Ellison. And thank you SN we appreciate everything that you have done and continue to do.