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Reading the Crisis: 'Uncut Funk: A Contemplative Dialogue' ft. Gary Younge & Keeanga-Yamahtta

9th September 2025. Part of 'In Search of Common Ground' – learn more here.

Aasiya Lodhi

Hello and thank you for joining us. I'm Aasiya Lodhi, a Stuart Hall Foundation trustee, and a senior lecturer at the University of Westminster. I'm really pleased to welcome you all to the third session of this year's conversation series Reading The Crisis, part of the Stuart Hall Foundation's 2025 programme In Search Of Common Ground. Marking our 10th anniversary, this year's programme has considered the role of difference in broadening and ultimately bringing together social justice movements today. We want to forge common ground in order to deepen progressive solidarities and to build a collective politics against the consolidation of right-wing forces around the globe.

Throughout the year, we've been engaging with a range of Stuart Hall's work to ask where are the intersections where solidarities are or can be forged right now? In this moment, when – I'm still having to say it – when the West continues still to make polite noises about the violent campaign of erasure enacted against Palestinians, this moment when authoritarian crusades tilt against windmills and assault civic and educational institutions, legal and ethical frameworks, truth and truth-telling. This moment of imagined defence threats, of scaremongering, of new eras of capital and empire building, both in the grounded realities of our everyday life and in the clouded-out infrastructures of our algorithmic world. Reading The Crisis drills down into the histories of some of the many crises we face as well as the tools and strategies we need to meet them head on.

We springboard, of course, off the work of British-Jamaican critic and theorist Stuart Hall to help us think through our social, cultural and political formations. In today's conversation, we'll be hearing shortly from two dynamic thinkers, Keeanga-Yamahtta

Taylor and Gary Younge, as they discuss Hall's extended conversation with the African-American feminist bell hooks, published in 2017 as Uncut Funk: A Contemplative Dialogue. We hope you were able to read the introduction to this fascinating text, and that you will share in the conversation and put forward your questions. Our speakers, who I'll introduce very shortly, as always, will be in dialogue for about 45 minutes, and then we'll turn to your questions in the second half. So do of course please submit your questions or comments using the Q&A box at any point during the event, and we'll try to get to as many as we can. And a reminder that automated live captions are available – just click the CC button in the Zoom bar. So without further delay, I'd like to welcome our guests.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor is a professor in the Department of African American Studies – hello! – at Princeton University. She is the author of Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in History. She's also the editor of the volume How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective – I've made sure to try to say that properly! – which won the Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ Nonfiction. Keeanga writes on race and politics, on black social movements, organising and much more. She's a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship, the MacArthur Foundation's Genius Fellowship, and she's a contributing writer for the New Yorker magazine.

Gary Younge is a journalist and a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester, a former columnist at the Guardian newspaper and a winner of the Orwell Prize for journalism. Gary's written for publications ranging from GQ to the New Statesman to the Financial Times, and he's made several broadcast documentaries on subjects ranging from gay marriage to Brexit. Gary is the author of seven books, I think, including Dispatches from the Diaspora: From Nelson Mandela to Black Lives Matter, Stranger in a Strange Land: Encounters in the Disunited States and most recently, Pigeonholed: Creative Freedom as an Act of Resistance. So welcome to you both. It's great to have you here.

Keeanga, if it's OK, I'd like to begin with you, by asking, really, just for your initial thoughts on the practice of dialogue in this book, of disagreement and of finding consensus, perhaps, as undertaken by Hall and hooks. It's obviously a transcription of an actual conversation they had in a hotel many years earlier, in London, I think, in 1996. And it's an interesting model, isn't it? There's lots I'm sure we will go into, but there's obviously, on the broadest level, there's a lot of obvious parallels with you and Gary, given your location as an American writer and theorist, one who writes on feminism, and Gary's position as a British writer and thinker. Is it a model that you aim to replicate or you think should be replicated in some way?

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Well, first, let me say thanks for the invitation to join you in this transatlantic conversation. I think, you know, there are several things that come to mind. One that I don't think is unimportant is that this was a conversation that was had almost 30 years ago, and in that timespan, what has happened to transform our ability to dialogue or have conversation in the way that hooks and Stuart Hall undertook in doing this, and I think about the ways that our culture has so substantively changed in those three decades, and how in many ways... I mean, and this just might be an expression of American life, but in many ways, it feels like our culture has shifted in ways to dissuade talking, to dissuade conversation. One of the things that struck me as I was reading this was, on a couple of occasions, bell hooks talked about being on the phone with someone, and it's been a long time since I was on the phone with someone. In fact, I regularly never answer my phone! I wait to see if there is a message, I wait to see if there's a text. In fact, Gary Younge might be one of the only two or three people I will actually answer my phone to speak to! So, you know, I think about that in terms of how conversation has been complicated. The way that we rely on texting as a form of communication, I think the way that even political conversation and debate is mediated through social media platforms, the quickness with which we block people on these platforms or just even mute them, which in some ways is even more humiliating, having someone talk without the capacity to actually hear them, without them knowing that they have been blocked.

And so I think about this in terms of how other features of maybe – and this is, again, from my position in the United States – the culture of the left, I think, has contributed to – at least in the United States – to a reluctance to dialogue, a reluctance to talk, because of a dynamic of intense moralism that accompanies many of these conversations, that if there is debate, if there is tension, that a lot of times, it's not mediated through politics, but is mediated through personalisms – that there is either something wrong with you that has led you to a different set of conclusions that I have, and a kind of underlying hostility to difference and debate in a way that would be foreign to someone like bell hooks, who loves to debate, to disagree, to be argumentative. Not necessarily for its own sake, you know, but for the sake of clarity, for the sake of distilling, perhaps, a greater truth. And so there is a kind of... I mean, I'm of mixed emotions about the ultimate outcome of this conversation, that perhaps we can talk more in detail about, but I do think that what I found refreshing about it was the level of political engagement, which is something that I think is just very difficult to achieve in our political culture today, both because of a reluctance to talk in general, you know, because of the tools that we have that kind of disallow us to talk, but also because of the difficulty that we have in dealing with sometimes the tensions that arise around politics.

Aasiya Lodhi

So much to unpack there, and I'm sure we're going to go into that, the sort of technical parameters around conversation, the hollowing out of the art of dialogue and the art of political conversation, the speed at which things are being done as well. The mechanisms of muting and no-platforming, shadowbanning and so forth. Gary, I do have a question I want to ask you from the British perspective, but before we do that, I think you want to come in and just respond directly to what Keeanga's just said, is that right? I think you're on mute, Gary.

Gary Younge

OK... It actually said the host had muted me! I thought I had been blocked or muted myself! I just wanted to add to what Keeanga said, which is that what you see in the conversation, there is a level of generosity in the conversation that I think is often lacking, and here I'm primarily talking about the left and progressive circles, but there are several moments where Hall in particular, but otherwise... but also hooks will say, "Yeah, so-and-so will kill me for saying this," or, you know, "I don't know if I'm saying this quite right," or whatever it is, and then launch into the thought that they had, which is... ..which is often quite difficult now. The kind of parameters for being curious, for making small mistakes, particularly mistakes of a kind of... Of a naming kind. "We don't call it that any more, we call it this," and then a holding you up to account, a kind of... ..often a narcissism of small differences that undermines any chance of a kind of honest conversation, and that is also true because – it's paradoxical, given what we're doing now – but everything is public. Everything is public, everything's recorded, and so your space, the space to be candid, unscripted and... Obviously not offensive – that's not what I'm after – but to be candid and unscripted, to be curious, to talk things through that... That space is severely limited now in a way that it wasn't then, which I also have... You know, I think it adds to what Keeanga was saying.

Aasiya Lodhi

Well, can I just press you a little bit on that, in sort of diagnosing perhaps some of the reasons why we've ended up here? I've just wanted to locate Hall, which I think I've done repeatedly throughout this series and last year's series as well, always as possibly the eminent face, if you like, of 20th-century black British intellectualism, not least because of his sort of media presence in Britain. But he talked a little bit here with hooks about the pressures on him which could be seen in a patriarchal way, in a founding father kind of way, and I wondered how much was that around when one occupies a space in sort

of elitist spaces, which I know you're writing about. How much of that is about other pressures on the left or other pressures on intellectualism, or is it coming from within? How much is it we've done it to ourselves, and is that around other types of politics which we're going to talk about on the left?

Gary Younge

I think that particularly... I think particularly racially, but also on the left, where there are... Where we are underrepresented, where black intellectuals or left intellectuals are underrepresented, then one is often called upon to be a spokesperson. You know, in the past, white people had MPs and black people had community leaders. And this is a version of that kind of community leader... you know, "be our griot, explain to us what they are saying and thinking." And there are some people who run willingly into that space, that they want to occupy that space. Much like Hall, who says, "I kind of really don't want to do that," it is that kind of, I feel, well, nobody... Nobody elected me. I'm not literally democratically accountable to anybody. But I do feel a responsibility – that James Baldwin called the burden of responsibility – and I do feel accountable to something. I mean, this community that I'm not accountable for did also produce me, and I have ties to it. And there is a stress there. I think it's similar but different if one takes race out of the equation and then just talks of left intellectuals, that if one were to say – and I'm suggesting this as a hypothetical – if I were to say, "Yeah..." There's a new left party, Keeanga, which is forming outside of the Labour Party. Were I to express reservations about this new left party, in a world where there are all too few left intellectuals with a platform, then that in itself could become an issue, whereas maybe I'm just kind of working through things, or maybe I'm just saying, well, you know, I have reservations, but it's fine, or maybe I want it to succeed but I don't know that it will.

There are a range of things I might think, but the burden, when so few are allowed through, comes for you to speak for more than just yourself, and that on the one hand can lead to real intellectual dishonesty, where you are kind of trying to ventriloquise what you think should be said. There are moments, though, when I think, well, I... ...I can get this in the Guardian, I can write a piece about this, when large numbers of other people can't, and I feel a responsibility to do so. I think that I can't just sit on the capital that I've accrued and say, well, you know, I'd rather do my nails tonight, or just, you know, Netflix and chill. So there is... And to me, that's an honest tension, and it's a particularly acute tension in this moment, I feel, what with all the things that you mentioned before – the rise in authoritarianism, the extreme right, the attacks on black and brown people, the erosion of our rights. To think through, well, what is our role as intellectuals, as academics, and then particularly as black intellectuals and as academics who consider themselves progressive – what do we do? Not what do we do in the most banal sense, which demonstration do we go on, which placard do we... But

what is our role, what is our function? How do we best, most effectively intervene? Where do we have the authority, moral or intellectual or otherwise, to intervene? And I feel that quite acutely at the moment. I don't know about you, Keeanga, whether you feel that.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Yeah. Let me just say, because I wanted to say, one thing about… …where some of this culture comes from, in terms of what Gary is talking about, the difficulty that I had raised initially, the difficulty of having some of these conversations, because of the way that everything you say feels like it's being parsed over, and that often… You know, this friend of mine who studies the right – I mean, I've found this to be quite interesting – He went to a… You know, he had been working on a book about the growth of the kind of young right, the people of colour, black and Latino people in the US who had been attracted to Trump's ideas, young people in particular. And, you know, he went to a conference of the right, but this friend of mine who does research on the right and young people of colour, young men in particular who are attracted to them, talked about how welcoming this conference was, and that the atmosphere was one of collaboration, of conversation, of connection, and, you know, he and I and others were talking about how sometimes – not always, but sometimes – when you go into a left space, you often feel like instead of welcoming and searching for a connection, that people are looking to parse through everything that you have to say to find the thing that you don't agree on, or to find a thing that is wrong and to get hung up on that. Now, where does that come from?

To me, in some ways, I get that. I think that when you are in a position of powerlessness, that the one thing that you can control is the environment that you're in. You can control the people around you. And to me, in some ways, this is an expression of that. It's really an expression of the powerlessness of the left and progressives, so that we end up policing ourselves as the only kind of meagre expression of power and authority that we do have. So there's that. I think in terms of the pressures of representation, I mean, it's interesting, and, you know, there's obviously conversation about this within the dialogue, and trying to understand and interpret the role of the black intellectual, which at this point, in the mid-1990s, is both emergent in the US, is emergent, is controversial. There's a well-known article that was written by Adolph Reed that is very critical of this kind of developing group of black intellectuals, who were seen as the "black interlocutors", in the US, and he writes basically that this is a group of people that aren't particularly attached to anything, but are constantly called upon to represent the black community, to talk about the black community. And, you know, I think that there are aspects of Reed's critique that are acerbic, which is what makes them a Reed critique,

in many ways, that, you know, there is some truth to that. You know, who is being called upon to speak for black people? But then also, who are those people accountable to?

And I think it's becoming a conversation that is much more fragmented and fractured, and often, those fragmentations and fractures aren't represented among the group of people who are being called on to represent black people. And so, in the American context, it is becoming increasingly difficult, or it should be increasingly difficult to call upon representatives of the black community to speak for the black community, because it's like, well, what black community are you talking about? 19% of black America is either immigrant or the first generation of immigrants, and this is really a new phenomenon, at least within the last 60 years of black life, that immigrants, black immigrants have been this prominent a section of black communities. Are you talking about professional black people, upwardly mobile black people who may have a different set of concerns from black working class people? So the point is that the black community in the United States have become increasingly more complicated, in ways that it becomes difficult for representatives to truly represent that, and I think that that is... It was a developing phenomenon in 1996. It has become a full-blown phenomenon by the time we certainly get into the second decade of the 21st century. And, you know, I think that that is part of the complicating nature of what representation means in this particular moment.

Gary Younge

I mean, there are parallels. It's not the same, but there are parallels, echoes of that, here with the kind of... Really, a crisis, if not a full-blown collapse in the notion of what representation means and is for, where we've had now the last two leaders of the Conservative Party, the previous Prime Minister was of African/Indian heritage, and the current leader of the Tory party is of African heritage, and... ..and those people, and I remember this from when I was reporting in the States during the Obama years, and trying to... ...kind of establish a clear blue line between the symbolic and the substantial, and to say, look, this is... It would be wrong to deny the symbolic importance of this, but it would also be wrong to mistake it for substance, and that, you know, when my son was born the same weekend that Obama declared, and people would say to me as I pushed him around in a pram, "This will be great for your son." And I would say, "Why?" Like, is he going to reduce the likelihood of him going to jail, or is he going to increase the likelihood of him getting a job or going to university? If he is, then great. Otherwise, I can see what it does for Obama, but I can't see what it does for him. And there was a real resistance to that. Kind of like, "don't be such an Eeyore, this is an awesome moment, get..." You know, "get behind it." And... And I felt it was an important line to hold for precisely the reason that we have now, which is like, well, if you just think having a black leader is a good thing per se, well, here's Kemi Badenoch. Why don't you

like her? So... And also a sense on the left that... ...particularly... well, yeah, on the left, not just black people, of saying, well, you know, "she's a sell-out." And I think, well, I don't think she is, actually. I think she's...

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Was she ever sold in?

Gary Younge

Yeah! I think she's absolutely faithfully representing the interests of her class.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Right.

Gary Younge

And... Not that there aren't contradictions in there. One minute she says there is no racism in Britain, the other minute, she's complaining about the amount of racism she's facing. So there are contradictions, but that kind of... In a moment, or in a period where there is a class fragmentation, then the question of representation, which... this was always the question, but it becomes acute in this moment, is, what is it for? That you say you want black representation. What for? And that if you can't answer that, then don't say that. If it's just so it looks different, then what you've got isn't equal opportunities, you've got photo opportunities, and that's what we've... That is what some racial conversation has kind of reduced to, in a sense.

Aasiya Lodhi

If I can just jump in, Hall and hooks, you know, it's so important the way... The fact that Keeanga's reminded us how long ago it was, three decades, but there are so many bits of this conversation that just strike me as so pertinent to today and still so relevant. So there's a bit where they're talking about Paul Gilroy's work, The Black Atlantic, or they're talking about these issues around representation and ideas of cultural authenticity, but I think there's a moment where they are... They come at it from different approaches and they disagree, but there is a consensus on the fact that no, we haven't found an expansive political conception that comes at it... you know, it hasn't brought together a political vision. It's too much concerned with ideas of symbolism and other forms of

representation that take us away from focusing on the sort of nitty-gritty, if you like, of material political culture, and in that way... I don't know. I think again, coming at it from now, where we are, where we see Trump's attack on migrant communities, we see the Labour government has all pretty much just moved so much to the right on issues, and it promotes this sort of really unhelpful discourse around small boats and strangers and so forth. In many ways, that still sort of rings true, I think. Yes or no?

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Yes, I mean, I would say that... At least when the problems that both Hall and hooks were pointing to, to me speak to a larger problem of the kind of development or emergence of the particular strains of black intellectualism that they are looking to outside of any real black movement, and so really, by the mid-1990s, where you have in the US really the ascendance of this kind of academic black intellectual, whether it was Manning Marable, Skip Gates or Henry Louis Gates, Cornel West, bell hooks... this really powerful group of people who are seen as experts on the black condition, and who certainly had great expertise on the history, politics, culture and condition of various black Americas. But again, what does it mean for that kind of relationship to develop outside of any real political movement? So that then you get the problems of almost expertise for expertise's sake, that is not connected to any particular struggle to transform any of those conditions, and so I think that today, there are different phenomena at work.

One is, again, the social media culture that we have allows for all kinds of public spokespeople to develop. It allows for a kind of almost freewheeling public intellectualism, because really, anyone with a platform can espouse whatever they want, and depending on the level of creativity, time and reach, can actually develop quite a large following, and can be heard. This was one of the kind of perplexing democratising effects of social media that made something like the Black Lives Matter movement very distinct and different. And so you have that developing not like the '90s, outside of the context of a social movement, but almost in parallel to Black Lives Matter, which itself is an expression of all of these kind of new perplexing conundrums, so the impact of social media, the questions about not just representation but political accountability – what kind of movement is this, a movement that eschews leadership, that really distances itself from political responsibility and leadership, and, yeah, then provides a platform for all sorts of people to say, "I speak for black people. I speak for black women, I speak for black trans people, I speak for my own kind of subset of the black community." And so these are kinds of new developments that go much further than the questions about essentialism and Afrocentrism, but really point to a fragmentation that is in some parts about class, but I think there's something else underneath that that has created a particular set of issues for the progression of a black

movement today that just didn't exist 30 years ago. And so I think that some of these questions persist about representation and who speaks for whom, and there's still the big question about how do we transform the conditions that really constrain different parts of black communities, but they're much more complicated right now because of that fragmentation.

Gary Younge

Yeah, I think if there's a thread through this, there's this bit from Stuart Hall where he says, "Very often, social movements can only advance by constructing an apparently unified, apparently centralised, apparently homogenous identity on behalf of which claims have to be made, because that's the only way you can conduct a struggle, but within that, you occupy fictional space, because the actual space in which that identity becomes a site of agency and desire actually is much more diverse. And I don't think one has to undermine the politics of the claim. It's better to rethink the nature of the identity or identification which is called on." And I think that there is a through line there between their conversation and now, which is the kind of… you have a determined group of people – that have been around for a while – who insist that identity politics is wrong and bad without really ever meaningfully identifying or defining what they mean by identity politics as such, sometimes meaning identitarian politics, sometimes just meaning women or black people, gay people or trans. So it's not entirely clear. When people say that, I always say, yeah, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and the suffragettes were real disappointments, weren't they? Because they worked through identity. But the point that Stuart Hall is making here is, how do we leverage this thing for something bigger without indulging and submitting to it?

And that is the thing that we kind of still haven't figured out, and on top of that, I would say, and this is – I don't know, I'd be interested to know Keeanga's view on this. This feels maybe more true in America than it is in Britain, because we've never had many long-standing institutions – is our capacity. Our capacity to… We have a proven ability, I think, on the left and even among minorities to clear political space, to make arguments, to make winning arguments, but we also have a proven inability to hold that space and to build on it. I feel that is the legacy of 2020 in some ways, and I think it's different in America, because there have historically been more institutions, even if it's just the church or, you know, the older institutions, the kind of fact of segregation which makes even local organising, local black organising, more concrete or whatever, whereas in Britain, we have organisations for a little while and then they kind of come and then they go, but that.. I don't think this, by the way, is confined to race. I think it is a general problem.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Totally. Yeah.

Gary Younge

I think one could relate that to Occupy Wall Street.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Yeah.

Gary Younge

Or MeToo. Because they have an existence in the social media ether which relates to material conditions, but somehow they don't manage to meet the material with the kind of ethereal, and so we end up making lots of noise, clearing space, having them build on it, usually, and then going back and then clearing more space somewhere else.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Here, with Black Lives Matter, it's like you have a social movement that also has very few entry points for people to… People who wish to do more than go to a protest but who would like to have an ongoing relationship in this unfolding movement and maybe even help determine what the direction of the movement, what the demands of the movement are, and that was just really difficult. I mean, Black Lives Matter produced a proliferation of very small organisations, many of which were not particularly open, or didn't really know how to open themselves up in a way to absorb any significant layer of people who had been drawn into activism. And not to say that that is an easy thing. I think it's a very complicated thing to do. But one of the things that struck me about the conversation with Hall and hooks that relates to this is really the absence – and I don't know enough about the British context to talk about this in reference to Stuart Hall – but to me, it's part of the problem with the black intellectual model. But with bell hooks, there's almost no engagement with this question about organisation.

In fact, there is a kind of reversion – and I think that she and Hall recognise this – into the self. And so at one point, hooks… They're talking about the defeat of the movements and what happens with that defeat, and for bell hooks, it's an invitation for introspection – it's an invitation to, quote, "go to the couch". And while I do think that there is something to be… You know, it's not my favourite place to go, but I think there is

something to be said about this. And Eddie Glaude, who is a colleague of mine, who wrote a book about James Baldwin a few years ago called Begin Again, he wrote something about Baldwin and Baldwin's observation that, you know, as someone who had been a long-time organiser and involved with all sorts of campaigns – I hadn't given much thought to this, but what Glaude talks about is Baldwin's observation that there is some aspect of ourselves that we have to change in order to change the things around us. Do you know? Like, we can't just be completely fixated on how we transform the material conditions without any real thought, let alone conversation, about how we actually change ourselves. And there's a Marxist sleight of hand, where we can talk about, you know, changing the conditions allows us to change ourselves. But there is a way in which... This, I think, is what hooks is trying to get at.

So her conversation about love, her conversation about the introspective, is really posing this bigger question about, how do we change all of this without changing the way that we relate to each other? And it's a good question, but I also think there's a way in which politics can change people, and it can change our relationships with each other, but we have to help to constitute the conditions under which that happens, and that means that we actually do have to take up the conversation about organisation and about what is it that we are trying to build. And it's surprising to me, I guess, that there wasn't much about that in this dialogue, especially in the 1990s, where in many ways, you could say that it's a historic low point on the question of black politics and black organisation, and ways that I think is part of how we can understand the power of the Million Man March is because the Nation of Islam, even in its broken, fractured, largely marginal state to black politics, did represent some kind of organisation, some vehicle by which the aims of... not necessarily Farrakhan's aims, but the aims of unity and community could be achieved, and so of course, you know, I was certainly politically active in 1996, during the Million Man March, and I had a sea scroll full of critiques of Farrakhan and the march, but one thing I do remember is the power of seeing that gathering of black men in DC. That there was something powerful about that. And that part of that was just a reflection of the kind of deep pain in black America that, you know, however many years after the height of the civil rights movement, 30 years after that, our communities had been ravaged by the police, ravaged by mass incarceration, ravaged by low-wage jobs and economy, and no-one was doing anything. It was, you know, these awful black elected officials who are voting for the Crime Bill, who are scurrying around trying to curry favour with the Clinton administration, and who are making many of the same kind of racist appeals to law and order.

And so in the absence of any kind of left organisation, any kind of real left organising... ...it wasn't a refutation of that, but it offered a different vision that people were attracted to, which was one of community and unity, and not blaming black people in the same kind of way. Blaming black people for other things, but not in the same kind of way. And so there's that lingering question that still has not been really resolved in any way, and I

think that we are suffering the consequences of it all over again with the kind of rapid devolution and really destruction of the spirit of Black Lives Matter in the United States, as we had the Supreme Court just yesterday in this country basically signing off on the racial profiling that the Trump administration's immigration officials have been engaging in, as well as all of the other kind of openly racist, white supremacist ambitions of the Trump administration. Yeah.

Aasiya Lodhi

I'm just going to jump in to just say... and thank you for that. So much in there, so many rich thoughts to dig into. But I just want to pull that together a little bit with some of the things you both talked about, leveraging in moments of fragmentation, and this is a time of fragmented political unity. But I'm just going to go to a question now, because we've got quite a few questions that are speaking directly to the things you're talking about. Before I do that, Gary, there have been a couple of people who would like to know, what was the quote you were reading from? I think you were just reading from Uncut Funk, is that right?

Gary Younge

Yes, page 76 of Uncut Funk.

Aasiya Lodhi

OK. Which is published by Routledge. It is called A Contemplative Dialogue, published 2017. We'll put all the details on the website. OK, I'm just going to jump to this question here from Anonymous Attendee, saying, "Bearing in mind what you've just said, Keeanga, I was wondering if you had any thoughts on how we might individually and collectively frame our conversations with others generously in a time when it isn't very popular or fashionable to do so? Is there a limit to how far we should extend our generosity within our conversations..." – I guess that's within the left, within black communities, within the wider community – "..or whether they take place inside of our communities or outside of them?" So, either of you, if you would like to jump in there.

Because I think we've diagnosed quite a lot of the problems, but I suppose people from all different sort of positions, from working inside academia, working as activists, as organisers and so forth, or just working in everyday contexts, how do we actually practise this sort of ethics of generosity, if you like, if that's a way, and try to convert that into leveraging something. Because the way I was hearing it, Keeanga, you were saying that possibly love is also a retreat, right? Love can be a retreat from... Although it can

also be at the bedrock of a certain kind of community, I guess, unity, like the Nation of Islam, perhaps, arguably. But love in the hooks frame could also be seen as a way to retreat too much into a softening, if you like, and a turning away from the rigours of actually having to go through the labour of organising through our differences in order to work together. I don't know. Gary or Keeanga?

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

I mean, I think it can be. I think it's also... It's impossible to be an organiser, an activist, progressive or on the left or whatever without that. Do you know what I mean? Like, what is it that motivates someone to want to spend their time, if not their life, fighting against oppression and exploitation? I mean, there has to be some existential love for humanity. King talked about love as justice. And so, in that sense, it's a powerful call to action. I was referring to... To me, the context within which hooks is bringing up the need to be introspective also happens to coincide with this kind of low point of black activism and also at a high point of a kind of neoliberal reactionary attack on black life in the US. This is two years after the 1994 Crime Bill is signed in the United States. It's the same year as Bill Clinton's championed Effective Death Penalty Act is signed, and it's the same year as the anti-welfare bill, the bill that ended welfare as an entitlement in the United States. All of this happens in 1996. And so there's that. Just quickly on the limits – to me, the limits are the limits upon which... How effective do you want your movement to be? Do you know?

I think that we have become so comfortable talking to ourselves. We have become so comfortable talking to people who agree with us, and, you know, I like to talk with people that I agree with as much as the next person. But if we do want to begin to build movements and organisations that extend beyond the bounds of our friendships and the bounds of the people who think and agree with us, then we have to be willing to be uncomfortable and to have uncomfortable conversations, and most of all, and I take this from Zohran Mamdani's campaign in New York City, we have to be willing to listen. And that, you know, as a kind of long-standing person who's been on the left in the US, that's not necessarily a characteristic that we always embrace, is the ability to stop talking and listen when there's a nice juicy wrong argument there to correct.

Aasiya Lodhi

Yeah. The policing of the sort of... Yeah, the purity politics and so forth. Gary, I'm going to have to bring you here, then. Are you agreeing or are you disagreeing here?

Gary Younge

Well, yeah, I mean, I'm agreeing. I would add that... I mean, one way to think about these things is that you can seek points of connection or you can seek points of difference, seek them out. But if you don't seek out points of connection as well, then it's just fight club, you know? And there is... At the end of the conversation, it might be that there are insufficient points of connection. It might be that the points of difference and contention are too great or too monumental to really kind of go forward, but you can... Very few conversations that start with "You're a racist and I want to convince you why you shouldn't be" end well. It could be that the person IS racist. Almost certainly, that's not the only thing that they are, and if the first time they see you is when you turn up to call them a fascist, then you're probably just not going to get very far.

Now, I'm not saying have tea parties with the extreme right. But I do think that, yes, you start by kind of trying to see if and what you have in common, and the other thing is to kind of... Just to lay down your purity tests for a while. So this new party that is coming into being, Keeanga, which does not have a name yet, does not... They're calling it "Your Party", and they're saying, "Well, we're going to..." Jeremy Corbyn is involved, and another young MP, Zarah Sultana. The party doesn't exist, and people are already saying, "I'm not joining the party that doesn't exist, that you can't join anyway, unless it is anti-Zionist." Or "unless it is" this or that as opposed to, like, you don't want to wait and see what it's going to be, see if you can influence it? There may be things, there may be arguments that you might be able to win. Or do you want the party to be born – and this isn't an argument for or against the party, it's just the purist thing that I'm talking about – or do you want to wait... Do you want to kill it before it's born, or do you want to see if you can mould it? And there are some people who would rather feel right and be small. And they are no use to us in this moment. They are worse than no use, actually, because...

Aasiya Lodhi

Can I just... Sorry, carry on.

Gary Younge

We've got fascists knocking at the door.

Aasiya Lodhi

True.

Gary Younge

When you're... There was a great quote when Le Pen came second to Chirac in, I think, like, 2002, something like that, and a guy who was a communist was going to vote for Jacques Chirac, who was a Conservative, and he said, "When your house is on fire, you don't check and see if the water's clean or dirty, you just throw the water on the fire." And there is a kind of level of maturity in that that we are not seeing in this crucial moment.

Aasiya Lodhi

I suppose the worry – I'm just playing devil's advocate here – is that perhaps people feel, going back to this question of the leverage, yes, and why have we not leveraged a breakthrough, if you like, into longer lasting political change, meaningful political changes, that some people might argue that it's about the co-option, it's about when – to use the title of a book – elite capture, or when corporate interests, perhaps, nowadays, or when institutions take up your ideas and take up your momentum and either give you material resources in order to channel them into certain ways or also just co-opt your ideology. So that's always the sort of... That's a line that everybody is negotiating on a daily basis, aren't they? But I just put that forward because I think that some of the people, some of these comments – there aren't always questions here – but some of the audience members are just putting forward lots and lots of really thoughtful comments drawing on their own experiences, which sort of speak to this, I think.

So Shola Adenekan – sorry, I hope I've said that correctly – "Could it be that due to the Eurocentric nature of academia in which many black intellectuals have passed through, we've lost our ability to have meaningful conversations with those outside of academia? I mean conversations that are organic and continuous, which is a way of building concrete platforms to transform the material conditions you're all speaking about."

Nadia says, "Keeanga's point about the absence of a focus on organising in hooks' work is an important one. The need to repair and heal oneself has to be made with a sense of the collective. I find this an ongoing thread in the work I do. It requires a sense of courage and mutual support. This helps move from the passive to the active."

There's two questions here about cultural workers in the arts, which I'm just going to go to now and I'll jump back to some of the other questions which might relate to this. Payton Johnson asks, "What role do cultural workers play in this moment as well, alongside scholars and organisers? I lead a discussion series that focuses on these three groups and wrestle with this thought all the time." And then another question, relatedly. Anonymous Attendee asks, "What, if any, do you believe is the role of the arts,

visual arts, theatre and literature in particular?" Would either of you like to comment on that at this point?

Gary Younge

I mean, I think it has a huge role, the arts have a huge role, and cultural practitioners do, because it's about building a narrative and an imagination as to who and what we might be, and... I don't know if this is particularly Britain. My guess would be that this is true for America in a different way, but that the dislocation from our history, particularly our colonial history, the stories that are told... I mean, if we think of the right, and at the moment, Keeanga, there is this upsurge – It's difficult to tell quite how big it is, because it's heavily mediated – of people hanging flags everywhere, Union Jacks, which are the UK flag, and the English flag and now the Scottish flag...

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Why?

Gary Younge

Well, I mean, it's a curious thing. I mean, it's definitely been driven by the far right, and the claim that I have seen often is, "I'm not ashamed to be English, I'm sick of being ashamed to be English, I'm going to put my..." It's a provocation. And they're drawing the English flag on crosswalks, on zebra crossings and so on. And the truth is, nobody ever stopped anybody waving a flag in this country, that nobody... You know, but it's a familiar thing of the right claiming victimhood while exercising extreme provocation. Many of these flags are being waved at attacks on asylum seekers' hostels and mosques and so on. But you can look at that as a major cultural project, actually, if you like.

And so, we have to kind of be asking ourselves, well, what's our project? What is our... How are we seeking to counter that culturally? We look at the opening of the Olympics in 2012, which told a story of Britain that most kind of progressive people felt quite comfortable with, and that was quite rare. So I think that helping us imagine a story for this country and our place in it is really important.

And the last example I'll give is, just because I did some work with it, or around it, is Steve McQueen's Resistance exhibition, which is 100 years of British resistance in pictures. Which got... And it was shown in Margate, which is an area of Britain that's now been won by Reform, which is the hard right. I'm sure that most of the people who came didn't come from Margate, because there were too many of them. But they had way more visitors than they've ever had before. The people were crying out for this kind of

presentation, and that these – Or I could also think with Steve McQueen's work about Small Axe and others – are really important interventions, so I think that the role of the cultural sector is actually quite central.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Yeah, I would just really add to that quickly that in the US, there's no question that cultural workers, artists, have to find ways to be involved in organising whatever opposition is being cohered against Trump, because they're often at the centre of these Trumpian attacks. I mean, the Trump administration is attacking museums. The African-American History Museum, one of the only of its kind in the United States, that actually distils the history of American slavery, Donald Trump complained two weeks ago that it was too negative about slavery, only talked about the bad things involving slavery, and is threatening to pull its funding if they don't change the focus of the exhibitions. This is an administration that is suspending grants, tens of millions of dollars in grants that previously were dispensed by the federal government for writers, artists, visual artists – you know, people generally engaged in the arts, because they were, quote-unquote, "woke". And so tens of millions of dollars in grants just gone. And saying that those funds will be redirected to people who can say positive things about American history. And this is on top of what has now been two or three years of book bans, of efforts to really change what is taught in schools in the United States about the history of the United States, the very kind of visceral attacks on colleges and universities right now, particularly when there's any programming that mentions diversity. So there's no place to hide in the US. Every sort of… You know, anything that is deemed progressive, that is deemed anti-racist, that is sees diversity, multiculturalism as positive, is under attack. So, yeah. Everyone… This is the whole point about, how do we build large movements and not small ones that are kind of contained to just people who agree with us.

Aasiya Lodhi

OK, I'm going to come back to these broad questions which have been asked by the audience. The sort of fundamental question, I think, which is, what is our project now, which Gary has alluded to, and Keeanga as well. You've just said, you know, fascism is knocking at the door, we've got to get our stuff together, as it were. But I'm just going to read a couple of questions out. We may not be able to answer them all, but I'm just going to cluster some together so that people have at least had a chance to have their question put forward in the public space.

Stephanie says, "Given the complexity, disparity and fragmentation of lived black experience within the construct of white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy, where

do we go next with black identity? Is it a values-aligned movement that emerges that considers the need for healing from our collective traumas, or do we stick with it?"

Fernando Herrero asks a question about the flip side of that, which I'm not sure we're going to have time to go into, but I thought it's related, which is, "Please develop how this right-wing attraction amongst minority groups works in the US, i.e., why are they pro-Trump, and is there an equivalent to that in the UK towards Farage?" ..who leads the Reform Party that Gary was just talking about.

And then I'm going to jump to... Sorry, I'm jumping all over the place! Warren Critchlow says, "The left, like the black community, is complicated. Complicated and complex alike. Perhaps the right..." Is that a question? I'm not sure. "The right is singular, reactionary and dogmatic, an essentialised identity within its own constructed ideological fictionality. Rather than a complex point of view within which complex debates take place, the right is a simple, well-policed orientation with a single target, a single enemy and a single way of dealing with identified enemies. It's hard to imagine the right as being welcoming in an uncomplicated way. Unlike the left, it seems to me, the powerful draw of the right is a certain absolutism that requires no introspection or even thinking, just following. Do the speakers think that the so-called left and the black community ought to become more like right-wing and reactionary politics in order to achieve effective political organising?" Wow, what a question! OK, I'm going to pass over quickly just for some brief comments, because we've got a whole pile-up of questions here. Gary, would you like to go first?

Gary Younge

Sure. So, I mean, just to say that in the conversation – this is 113 in the book – they talk about William Julius Wilson's book The Declining Significance of Race. So this has been an ongoing and evolving situation. I interviewed Angela Davis, I think in 2007, and she was saying, "I'm not even sure we can talk about black community any more, and that's not the basis from which" – I'm paraphrasing – "I necessarily see progressive politics coming from," and this speaks to something that Stuart was particularly really brilliant at, which was... ..which was maintaining an intellectual engagement in motion that kind of... That's what The Great Moving Right Show was about. It was about saying... Using his intellectual capacities in the conjuncture, in the moment that you work, to kind of understand the particular context.

So in this case, particularly, say, in Britain, trying to make the distinction between xenophobia and racism before actually kind of insisting on the ways in which they overlap, because that helps us understand why there might be some people from minorities who are involved in right-wing politics because they're not migrants, and that is there kind of... That is their essential kind of understanding. But what this demands,...

I'm not going to talk smack about academics, because I'm barely an academic myself, having only been a professor for five years. But a versatility of thought and application which I think certainly the left finds difficult, I think. And the last thing I would say is, I think, actually, the right is as complex as the left, actually. I think there are competing narratives in there, there are different people wanting different things, there are fissures which we could well exploit just as they have exploited fissures in the left, so I don't think they're simple and we're complicated. I think they're winning and we're losing.

Aasiya Lodhi

Keeanga, would you like...

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Yeah, I think that one advantage in the US that the right has is that its politics, its ideas often cut with the grain of the powerful and wealthy, and so they just face fewer obstacles, institutional obstacles in that way, but I would say that the right in the United States is riven by conflict and is very fragile and unstable, and in many ways, they've faced little challenge, because they also... because of their ideas going with the flow with the wealthy and powerful mean that they are awash in money and actually do have organisation, and lots of it, in ways that the left is just so completely and thoroughly disorganised here that it has been difficult to cohere a response. But, you know, Trump is deeply unpopular. Most of his policies, if not all of them, are deeply unpopular. But the kind of formal opposition to Trump, the Democratic Party, is perhaps even more deeply unpopular than Trump is, and because the Democratic Party for so long has tried to play the role of having a very large tent, that it's trying to congeal vastly different politics and ideas in such a way that it has rendered itself incoherent and it is not able to offer any kind of real substantive opposition to Trump right now. So it creates the impression that everyone's just going along to get along, but that's not true.

And just the last thing that I will say, and again, from an American context, is that this idea about a black community just doesn't make sense any longer. It doesn't mean that there aren't black people who have allegiances and connections to each other and all the rest of that, but the idea that there is a kind of black community organised around a black agenda just doesn't make sense in real politics. You have different groups of people who have different interests that often put themselves in conflict with each other. I mean, Washington DC is a perfect example of this. Washington DC has a black woman who is the mayor of the city, a mostly black city council, which is the local governing body, and, you know, the black woman who's mayor, who's a registered Democrat, has welcomed Trump's siege, has thanked him for helping them clean up the

streets of Washington DC, and in doing so has effectively given cover to the racism of Trump, who said that everyone who's been arrested in Washington DC was a born criminal, would be a criminal for their entire lives. Almost 90% of the people who have been arrested are black. And so... and as well as giving cover to the authoritarian, illegal use of the fucking military to pick up people for... Most of the cases that people have been arrested for are public consumption of alcohol and possession of marijuana. That is who the military is being used to police, and this woman who is the mayor has signed off on this.

So, you know, the idea that there is some kind of united black agenda or community, I mean, it doesn't even stand the test of Washington DC, let alone the governor of... the black governor of Maryland, which is right next door to Washington DC, has said that in order to keep Trump and the military out of the streets of Baltimore, we're going to have our own surge of police go through poor and working-class black communities to arrest people. And so, really, we have to begin to deal with the complexities of black politics, and really, you know, Black Lives Matter, in the US, can help uncover and expose the degree to which racism dictates and constrains black life, but a black-only movement does not have the capacity to transform those conditions. And so this is a moment in which we have to begin also thinking about different and new political formations that can create the political capacity, and really the physical capacity, to confront the fascist and to actually transform these conditions.

Aasiya Lodhi

Thank you. Just to say that in this incredible last few minutes, both of you have sort of contributed in answer to a lot of the questions that are already there, for example, what do you both see our project as, and so forth. But Anonymous Attendee asked, "What should we be looking at? Should we be looking at our past, for example, in Britain, things like political blackness, which again in some ways are tied to issues around identity politics", quote-unquote. But, you know, was there sort of politics of solidarity and anti-colonial politics of solidarity between mostly those of South Asian heritage and those of African and Caribbean heritage? Ben Carrington says, "Great conversation. Can I..."

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Hi, Ben!

Aasiya Lodhi

I don't think he can say hi back! He's probably waving at you. "Whilst we're speaking about the state of black studies today..." I'm not sure we're going to be able to go into all the details here – some of the people Ben is talking about are the people, Keeanga, you already mentioned – Cornel West and so forth, Hazel Carby, who's in fact British, but is based in America. The question is, "What is black studies today and what can we learn from the earlier legacy?" But he says, "I mean that in a meaningful sense of being insurgent and interventionist."

Another Anonymous Attendee said, "Just following up on the arts, is there anything left of beauty and hope and love in these kinds of stories that we are hearing, or we're talking here about trauma and violence?" I'm just going through as many questions as I can here. And just to say, I'm not sure we're going to have time to talk about this, but Sonia wanted to talk about how to effectively protest about Palestine, which reminded me of sort of... In very different contexts, but the Met Police in London – Metropolitan Police – who have just arrested nearly 1,000 people over the weekend for showing their support for a proscribed organisation, Palestine Action. So that's the ways in which there are some parallels there with some of what you were saying. Are any of these questions, are we able to just touch on them very, very briefly, in about... seven minutes?! Or a bit less? Anybody want to have a go?

Gary Younge

Keeanga?

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Yeah, I'll say quickly about black studies that, you know, I think it's possible to learn a lot about the insurgent moment of black studies, and one of those things is that it shows you what is different about black intellectualism that develops out of an actual social movement, and that really is a product of a social movement in the late 1960s and early '70s, which, in the United States, coincided with... It helped to usher in a kind of mass movement of young black people into colleges and universities, that created a foundation for demand for black scholarship. That moment can't be recreated. In fact, what we're now dealing with is the institutionalisation of black studies, and the insurgent moment can't be recreated in this long period of institutionalisation and what that means. I do think that that institutionalisation exists in some places, and in other places it doesn't, and so what we're faced with now is a kind of backlash against black studies and ethnic studies that has the potential to create struggle, but I think is very complicated in this moment because of the institutionalisation and what that has done

to people, many people connected to black studies, and creating many more barriers to struggle than runways.

Aasiya Lodhi

Thank you. Gary?

Gary Younge

Well, partly moving on from what Keeanga's saying there, one of the sort of interesting innovating things about this moment is the degree to which we have been forced to defend things that we ourselves had a severe critique of, and that we weren't that pleased with ourselves. So DEI was not... you know, the kind of "black faces in high places", "look different but act the same". There were a range of ways, there are a range of problems with the way that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion was being practised, and, of course, given the broader agenda of what... It's not like they came in with a critique of it. They came in to, like, destroy any chance of black advancement and so on and so forth. I read yesterday that black women in America were the group most severely affected in this moment, the most likely to have lost jobs, the most likely to have fallen into poverty since Trump came, and that's not... That's because of the combined attacks on women and black people. That's not an accident. And so we have to be careful about how we defend these things, but we do have to defend them against the nature of the attack that's coming.

I do want to... The issue of political blackness is an interesting one to me, because it speaks to a versatility. That was what I was raised with – the idea that black is not an actual colour, black is a political colour, you share a history of colonialism and so on. It worked to give us solidarity in a certain moment, and that is no longer widely used, particularly in the younger generation. I think there are material reasons for that. I think the exacerbation of Islamophobia, the rise of Islamophobia in a certain way gave a distinct experience, a distinctly Muslim experience of British racism that was different to black experience. We moved... just temporarily, we went further and further away from the colonial experience. The experiences of black people in the south, in London, were quite different to the experiences of Asian people in the north, because our economy ch... And so I kind of think, yeah, that would be nice, but that's not where we are, and... it's not where we are, and I don't... ..feel the need to fight for that label as opposed to looking at what that label was intended to do and fight for that, which is, it was an effective way of describing a certain kind of solidarity. It's the solidarity that I want, not the name. And that kind of particularly now, going back to Black Lives Matter, where in the demonstrations, most of the demonstrations that I saw, the majority of

people were white, that we need a multiracial multi-generational movement that can take on the things that we have. So we don't actually have the luxury of looking backwards or looking inwards too indulgently.

Aasiya Lodhi

OK, thank you. On that note, I'm really sorry, but we are going to have to draw today's conversation to a close. There were a few other questions around algorithms, around intersection and so forth. I'm sorry we couldn't get to everything, but thank you so much to Keeanga and Gary for sharing all your insights with us, and time quickly for some other very, very fast thank-yous. My thanks to Tayyab Amin for producing this event. Thanks also to our funders, Comic Relief, the Hollick Family Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and to Words of Colour, Pluto Press, Soundings and Taylor & Francis, and finally, a massive thank-you to all of you for joining us. Recordings from all of this year's Reading The Crisis events will be available next month. In the meantime, you can watch last year's series, featuring contributions from Priya Gopal, Ilan Pappé and more, in the Explore section of our website, along with many additional resources. A reminder that there are two months left to submit an entry, should you wish to, for the Stuart Hall Essay Prize. And last but not least, we are recruiting at the Stuart Hall Foundation a new chair of trustees, so for those of you that would like to apply, or if you know somebody who would like to apply, please submit an expression of interest by September 22 . All the details are on our website, which is, of course, stuarthallfoundation.org For now, thanks again to Keeanga and to Gary, and goodbye.