

Jaylen Brown: Look at those numbers rising. Well, we'll get started in just a minute. We're going to wait for people to finish coming in.

All right! I think we'll go ahead and get started. First of all, hello! Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. Welcome to another episode of Unwritten where expert authors join student hosts such as myself for discussions on the most important current events of our day. Today, we'll explore a very interesting topic but we'll explore the history of protest movements in America which is quite timely coming off a weekend of intense protests across the country.

But before we get into any of that, my name is Jaylen Brown. I'm a junior at the University of Central Florida majoring in finance and a campus ambassador for Pearson. I'm joined today by my good friend, LaWanda Stone, director of corporate affairs for Pearson. We'll be moderating our live Q&A so if you have any questions, drop them in the chat. We'll get to them in about 15 minutes. So, everyone, please join me in welcoming Dr. Clayborne Carson, professor of history at Stran -- I'm sorry, Stanford University and co-author of "The Struggle for Freedom: A History of African-Americans."

If you guys weren't here for last week's episode, hopefully you were, but we had the other co-authors of The Struggle for Freedom, Dr. Lapsanky -- Lapsansky, I mispronounce the name all the time, and Dr. Nash. So there was a really great conversation. I'm very eager to hear Dr. Carson's perspective on things but I'd like to begin today's conversation. First, I'm turning it over to LaWanda to explain why we're having this conversation now.

LaWanda Stone: Thanks so much Jaylen, and thank you, everyone, for joining us today. As we all know in this moment, America is finally facing a reckoning in race relations. It's really important that we have conversations like today's because just talking about it is a step in the right direction in first defining and ultimately ameliorating systemic racism.

Education is such a force for equity and change yet systemic racism is holding back black and other ethnically diverse people in a vicious cycle. Learning, as we all know, has the power to shape hearts and minds for generations to come. As an education company, we have a role to play in convening these discussions that lead us all to a better understanding of our world and each other. Today's discussion is a step in that direction. As Jaylen said, we're going to be exploring the history of protest movements. Dr. Carson, with all that has happened and is happening in our changing world, can you tell us why you chose to join us today?

Clayborne Carson: Well, I think the protest movements have always been at the center of my attention. When I was 19 years old, I attended the March on Washington and I don't really think I would be a historian today if I hadn't been at that event and had some sense of the importance of the freedom struggle that was going on at that time and my curiosity about it. And so, I think in some ways that started me on the path to becoming a historian.

Jaylen Brown: Awesome! Thank you for that. I'm really, really excited for this conversation because I love this topic. But let's begin with some news that probably hit home for you in California when it was announced last week that California Senator Kamala Harris was chosen by Joe Biden to be his running mate in the 2020 presidential election. So, would you consider

candidate Biden's act of choosing of a female running mate -- a black female running mate at that to be in its own way an act of protest?

Clayborne Carson: I think it's something that's way overdue. Maybe it should have been done years ago and I think it's more the result of protest rather than an act of protest. I think that there has been a demand. Now, the basis of the modern freedom struggle is the right of people to determine their own destiny. And I think that's what the meaning of the vote is, the idea that everyone should have a role in the decisions that affect their lives. So black Americans have been excluded. Other groups have been excluded. Women have been excluded from governing this country and so, I think it's long overdue that that is beginning to happen.

Jaylen Brown: Awesome! I love that. Just switching gears a little bit, when I studied protest movements in the past, I get the feeling they were just imbibes behind those that were led by legends like Dr. King, Congressman John Lewis, Malcolm X and other trailblazers for change including Black Woman.

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But the culture and energy of those movements filtered down into present day uprisings.

Clayborne Carson: I think the spirit is always the same. I mean, people can vote with their feet as well as with the ballot and I think that sometimes voting with your feet has more impact than going to the ballot box. But if people use that as a stimulus to say yes, we'll use every means possible to make our voices heard. That's in the African-American tradition. It's been going on since the beginning of this country.

So., I think that what's happening now is, to me is the culmination of that. I think young people, when they go to school these days, they learn about the Martin Luther King holiday and that means that now, we can celebrate someone who was a protester, someone who is on the outside and has now become a national holiday. So, I think that they have a different perspective. The young people today have grown up with a black president. That's, for many of them, their earliest memory of the president.

So, I think that they -- it's not a surprise to me that they would be the ones who would respond to the murder of George Floyd by protesting. If it had been left to people over 30 to protest, I don't know if we'd have a movement. But I think young people can look at that and say, we're not going to let this pass, this is not what we've learned in school, this is not the values that we've learned from our parents and we are going to stand up and demand that this end. And while people over that age probably would have said, well, we've seen it before. What can you do? I think young people are more inclined to say we need to do something.

Jaylen Brown: I love that. You actually brought up a great point. I brought this up in another webinar but the whole thing about Barack Obama being like in the earliest memory, that was one of my earliest memories of a black president where I thought it was more of the norm. Whereas, a lot of the older generations we're like, "oh, my gosh, this is brand new" especially

with George Floyd. I've never seen something like that happen before. Of course, older generations might have and they might be a little more accepting to it.

My generation, we would not -- we do not tolerate that so I love what we're doing right now. But actually, that brings me to my next question. Thanks to protest, we no longer see sit-ins at lunch counters for the right of African-Americans to be served or organize bus rides for freedom but we still do see people jailed for participating in peaceful protest and abundant voter suppression. Can you talk about the role of civil disobedience in pushing for change?

Clayborne Carson: Well, I think you're always going to have civil disobedience. The law is not always just and I think that young people at every point in history understand that. They have a sense of justice and they have a sense of what the law is and the law was once about segregation, maintaining segregation. And now, one of the things about the textbook that the three of us wrote, the chapters that I was responsible for, a period since the 1930s, a lot of times, I think in most of those chapters, I started with a young person, a teenager or someone in their 20s.

And that anecdote about the story that I tell about that person shows how young people come to the world with fresh eyes. And when they see something that is disturbing, they can protest against it and often, that stimulates a larger amount of protests whether it's the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930s which wants to free the Scottsboro defendants, a major movement of that period, Barbara Johns protesting against the inferior conditions of the black high school that she was attending, Diane Nash involved in the freedom rights that you mentioned.

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Clayborne Carson: All of these were young people who were saying we're not going to tolerate it anymore and that has to be very encouraging. And that's the reason why I think that the chapter I haven't even written yet about the 2020s. I don't know exactly what I'll say but I do know that it will start with a story about a young person and maybe that young person hasn't even done anything yet. But we've already had enough examples of people who are very young who are taking the lead and building a movement that by the way was much larger than the March on Washington. When I was at the March on Washington, I could not have imagined that people my age would have organized it. I understand now that it was people much older than them who were organizing it but now you have major protest organized by people in their early 20s and in their teens and that's remarkable.

Jaylen Brown: Okay. You're raising so many good points right now but I actually want to ask you a little more on the topic of young people. Throughout history, students like me have led protest movements like "March for our Lives" organized by Parkland students. I was right here in Florida like where I am to protest gun violence and historic moment when John Lewis crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge to protest for voting rights. What can history teach us about why it is taking young people to boldly step up and lead?

Clayborne Carson: I think that that's a very good example of the idea that young people would be protesting against being in school and being careful for their lives and there has to be something wrong with that. And it was really striking that they were able to organize that

mass March on Washington which by the way was again bigger than the March on Washington of 1963.

And just recently, I invited Martin Luther King III and his daughter, Yolanda, to stand for them. And I mentioned to Yolanda and said, "when you spoke in Washington to that crowd of perhaps a million people, you spoke to a larger audience than your grandfather had ever spoken to during his lifetime." And she kind of, "yeah," kind of took it in stride but it was really amazing that her grandfather is a national holiday but in a sense her generation has done things that he would have been amazed to see.

Jaylen Brown: Awesome. Thank you so much for that. I do want to turn it over to LaWanda because I see we have a few questions that are coming in from the viewers. So, LaWanda, take it away.

LaWanda Stone: Thank you. This is such a fascinating conversation. The ties that bind us between history and present day, it's just amazing as we continue learning. So thank you to those of you have already started submitting your questions. We'll dive right in. How can we engage and reach all generations in effective protesting? So, Dr. Carson, you've talked a lot about how the young people have led. How can young people reach across to other generations and vice versa?

Clayborne Carson: I think it's through history. I think that there's a role to be played from educating people about the true history of this country. Now, what I'd like to see is more acceptance of this notion that the right to an education is a basic human right and that we should think of it that way. Martin Luther King talked about inheriting a world house where we all have to live together despite our differences and he's talking about the global world house. And I envision young people preparing themselves to live in that world house. They need to have the tools to do that so we can't just even concentrate on African-American history. We have to understand how African-American history and American history fits into a world history. That's going to be very necessary in order to build the kind of world.

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Clayborne Carson: And he posed the alternatives. It was either chaos or community. Are we going to build a world community or are we're going to have chaos? And I think that in order to have a better alternative, we have to have global understanding. I think that his life, the life of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, so many other exemplary individuals, I call them the visionaries, have given us the roadmap to building a world community. So young people I think are receptive to that and I hope that the -- at 19, I didn't have very much of an education at that point but it inspired to learn things that I didn't know.

And that's why I think it set me on the road to becoming a historian. I wanted to know more about how the March on Washington put into history and how King and John Lewis who I saw speaking at the march. I wanted to know these things and I hope young people have that same kind of curiosity. Older people should also have it because I think one of the really terrible diseases that many Americans have is historical amnesia. We do not know very much about the true history of our own country and particularly, how that country interacted with the rest of the world.

LaWanda Stone: Well, Dr. Carson we have so many questions coming in. We're going to try to get to as many of them as possible but speaking of global solidarity, another question is, what case can be made that this is also a moment of solidarity across ethnic lines and for black, indigenous, and Latinx people to forge better alliances? If you can just spend a little bit of time talking about that and then we'll move on to the next.

Clayborne Carson: Well, I just think that that's one of the things that is very helpful about this moment is that it's not just a few but it never has been just a few. I mean, the freedom writers were both black and white. The people who went to Mississippi were both black and white. I think what's different now is the number and the proportion. And I think that that's a sign that some kinds of educations are getting improved.

The King Holiday is not just used as a free day weekend but some teachers use it as a time to teach about American history and about why King should be remembered. So I think that has showed in terms of young people understanding that the struggle is not just for black people, that we need to have a fair country and that means, everybody has got to get in the struggle.

LaWanda Stone: Which leads to the next question, in a world where there are so many topics worth protesting, racism, climate change, et cetera, how do we prioritize what we want to put our effort towards and which topics can be advocated for in different ways outside of protesting? So, what does history say about how we can prioritize such important topics worth protesting?

Clayborne Carson: You know, I don't really worry about that too much. I think as people become more involved in protests, they learn about the connections among these issues. These are not disconnected issues.

LaWanda Stone: True.

Clayborne Carson: Climate change affects issues like the migration of people. We're going to have climate migration. Climate change affects some people more than other people depending on their economic situation so these issues are not separated. And I think that's one of the things that the visionaries understood is that all of these are interconnected.

So, I don't worry too much about whether someone who is concerned about the murder of George Floyd, well, are they're going to be carrying about the maldistribution of wealth in the United States. I think they will. They'll understand that that is related to why George Floyd was murdered and that's part of the educational process. And one of the things about it is that once you've been involved in a protest, your educational process speeds up because you want to know more about why you are doing this and what does it mean so it'll happen.

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LaWanda Stone: We want to know more about why you're doing it, what it means, and also what affect it had which leads to the next question. Is there a way to evaluate the impact of protests? So, for example, did the protest against guns result in gun control, did university students end the war in Vietnam, did the women's march result in improvement for women?

Is there a way to show cause and effect as to protests? And maybe we need to be more patient and perceptive as things happen.

Clayborne Carson: We don't need to be more patient. We just have to understand that we're not going to always win. I think there is that sense that if I'm dedicated to it, that means of course, I'm going to win. Why else would I go to jail over something? And sometimes you lose. You lose battles and hopefully, over time, you see that the successes are more than the failures. I think history does progress but it does not progress automatically and its sometimes one step forward and two steps backwards and sometimes, two steps forward and one step backwards and we can't know that. So, if you really want to win all the time, don't become a protester. You're not going to win every time. And if that's the motivation, then you're in the wrong field, but I don't think there is very many fields you can be in where you win every time.

And I've seen a lot of change. I grew up in a time when colonialism and segregation, the Jim Crow system, and all those were realities that I had to face. And now I can go into a classroom and try to explain, what was that Jim Crow system that you were talking about, what do colonialism mean again? And so, that's good that I have to explain it that we used to have a lot of colonies in the world and in fact, the United States was once a colony. So, these are indications that history does tend to move in a progressive direction over the long term. That was King meant by the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

LaWanda Stone: We have a few minutes left and we have a few questions left so let's try to get them all in. Very excited about this next question in particular. We have one viewer who just received a news alert about the U.S. Postal Service potentially deciding against overhauling until after the November election which would be huge. This is another example of change that occurred by exposing a problem. The current state of the White House has exposed many problems in America today. How do we keep this movement of change going in a positive direction?

Clayborne Carson: I think it will go in a positive direction simply because just from what I see among the young people. I joined some of these protests. I went to Palo Alto City Hall and saw that 18 and 20-year olds were the organizers of that protest. I had a faith that these are motivated by people who have good intentions and yes, there'll be mistakes. That happens in any movement and sometimes there'll be setbacks but I think that they are learning from the past. These topics that are being used were not invented in our time.

So, I think this is -- they are learning. They are part of a learning process and their learning curve is very steep right now. I'm very encouraged. There has been probably more interest in history in the last six months in a long time because people want to know where did this all come from and they are putting it all together. I think that there are these precedents and they can look back and say, yeah there were other times when teenagers and people in their early 20s came to the fore and sparked a movement and we're doing the same thing that those people in the past did.

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Clayborne Carson: It's one of the reasons why I think that there was so much interest in John Lewis is that he symbolized that. He was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington and he was one of those freedom writers. So, they see him as someone who was long distance runner. He didn't give up. He didn't say, oh I'm tired now. I've been to jail too many times. He kept it up through his lifetime.

LaWanda Stone: Yeah, he did.

Clayborne Carson: And I hope that they recognize him as a role model and that's why he was honored.

LaWanda Stone: Which is the perfect segway into our next question. It seems that black protest and resistance movements are viewed as unpatriotic and violent in real time but over time, they're applauded and revered. In your opinion Dr. Carson, why are protests that are led by whites such as the American Revolutionary, Women's Suffrage, LGBTQIA movements, viewed as patriotic and example of necessary acts giving rise to social change as opposed to other protests led by black people in history?

Clayborne Carson: Well, first of all, I think that patriotism is something that's in the eye of the beholder. I think that Martin Luther King was one of the most patriotic Americans in American history but on the other hand, he was investigated as perhaps subversive. The revolutionaries who created the United States can either be called traitors to their country or they could be called patriots and they were both. If they have lost the war, they might have been shot as traitors. So, in retrospect, I think we can see who are the true patriots.

Some people hide behind patriotism because they don't understand that the first job of a citizen is to correct errors in their own government and that can never be unpatriotic and that's how the country gets better. So, I think it's a diversion and I think anyone who studies American history knows that it's useful in order to crush dissent by calling it unpatriotic but in the long term, sometimes the dissenter turns out to be the most patriotic.

LaWanda Stone: That is beautiful. I think we have time for one more question. Apology to those who have submitted and we were just running out of time but the question is, there is so much misinformation, speaking of dissention, so much misinformation surrounding protests and movements today. How can we battle that and direct people to the right resources that will help them understand the reasoning behind these important movements?

Clayborne Carson: Now, that's an interesting question because I can understand the motivation behind the question and yet I also understand that today, we are flood with information. Our job is to pick out the good information from the bad information but we're flooded with it. Right before, you mentioned an unfamiliar name, I could pull out my cell phone and google it and find out what you were talking about.

So, ignorance is never an excuse to these things. If you want to find out what something is, you can take a free online course and 29:27 like I'm teaching right now, free online course, and it's better than anything I can offer in a classroom at Stanford. So, we are in an age of information. This information revolution that has occurred partly here in Silicon Valley is one of the most important technological revolutions in human history.

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Clayborne Carson: The fact that I can -- and every week, I have a telephone call or a Zoom call and on that call are people in India, South Africa, all over the United States and we're here sitting here talking just like the two of us are talking. And if someone had imagined that 50 years ago, it would have been dismissed as science fiction and now it's just common place. Yes, of course I can get on the phone and talk to somebody and for practically no cost. I can get on my cellphone and have a conversation with someone 10,000 miles away.

So we live in an age of information. There is no excuse for ignorance and I think that everyone who wants to learn anything can learn it and all you have to do is look for it. So that's the hopeful thing that as a historian, you kind of want to be noticed. You want people to look at the work that you do. There's never been a better time. I can do a podcast. I can participate in a session like this. What is it now, 600 people here? That's larger than any classroom I've ever taught in. So this is good and I'm very hopeful about the future because this is the age that young people are going to be growing up in and they've mastered it. That's why they were able to in a couple of days bring together more people than -- or at the March on Washington.

My grandson knows as much about how to use the internet as probably I do and he's I think eight or nine now. The learning curve is getting steeper for every new generation coming along.

LaWanda Stone: Well, fortunately, we all can face that learning curve with the struggle for freedom as we continue remaining hopeful and protesting and speaking up about what matters the most in changing the world that we all live in. At this time, you are all going to see a poll flashed on your screen. We would love to get your feedback about today's discussion. And with that, thank you so much Dr. Carson. Thanks to everyone who submitted questions. Jaylen, I'm going to toss it back over to you.

Jaylen Brown: Thank you. Let me just say, "Man, I love today's conversation." That was good. But thank you again, Professor Carson and I'd like to thank everyone who joined us today as we examine history that hopefully bring a brighter future. I know I learned a lot. I just hope that you guys found this conversation as insightful as I did. With that being said, thank you. You have a blessed day and stay safe out there.

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