

An Interview with Shelby Steele

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Moderated by Tom Giovanetti

TG: Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us. My name is Tom Giovanetti. I'm the president of the Institute for Policy Innovation. The Institute for Policy Innovation is a 33-year-old free-market think tank based in Dallas.

I'd like to thank you all for joining us today for our Zoom interview with Shelby Steele, the noted author, columnist, documentary film producer, and cable news TV personality.

We were very fortunate to be able to host Shelby Steele in Dallas last fall before all of the shutdowns and before the world went crazy; so, Shelby, we're delighted we were able to get you in, in person in the fall before everything shut down and went crazy.

When we had Shelby Steele with us in the fall, we obtained a number of one of his most recent books, *Shame, How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country*. And we still have a few copies of the book left over; so after this event, if you would like to obtain one of those copies, just contact us. Contact Addie Crimmins at IPI, and we'll be happy to hook you up with one of those books.

Our guest today is Dr. Shelby Steele. He is the Robert J. and Marion E. Oster Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. Dr. Steele specializes in the study of race relations, multiculturalism, and affirmative action. In 2006, Shelby Steele won the Bradley Prize. In 2004, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal. In 1991, he won an Emmy award for his documentary *Seven Days in Bensonhurst*. In 1990, he won the National Book Critics Circle Award. And Shelby Steele writes regularly for a number of major publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and he is a contributing editor at *Harper's Magazine*.

So with that, Shelby, we'll start the program. We do sincerely appreciate your making some time for us today. I know that you're very busy working on a documentary. Can we ask what the documentary is about that you're working on?

SS: Sure. How much time do you have?

TG: Well, we have lots of questions to get to. But tell us a little bit about the project you're working on.

SS: Well, it's a documentary. The title of it is, *What Killed Michael Brown?* We sort of used that event in Ferguson, Missouri that happened about six years ago now. A black teenage male shot by a white cop, sort of a common scenario at this point in American life. Big international explosion and very controversial as to how he actually died. Was he murdered? Was this almost suicidal? What was the source?

And our very broad take is that it was a series of liberal political public policies that created the kind of world in which Michael Brown lived that ultimately led to his demise, that it was not an act of mindless racism by a cop gone rogue. The cop really was defending his life and had no other choice in the matter; and to save himself, had to shoot Michael Brown.

And so our point is that coming together in that moment is a kind of accountability to history, to the 60s particularly, where a lot of the public policies evolved that began to erode the black family life in America, began to undermine the educational system, and so forth and so on.

And, so, we try to look at this event, this tragedy, as an American phenomenon. It's very revealing about the kind of social forces that are in play around an event like this.

TG: You know, I have been peripherally involved in a couple of documentaries, and it's one thing to make a documentary; it's another thing to get it shown, you know, to get someone to—you know, the marketing of it, right, and the selling of it. And you've been very successful at this in the past. But I wonder, do you anticipate any problems getting a documentary like that shown, that is actually so contrary to the narrative that is going on right now?

SS: I sure do. Yes, it will be difficult. Interestingly, what's happened in the news recently with the George Floyd case in Minneapolis, the killing, has sort of brought back the issue and brought back the race issue generally. So that, I think, works in our favor. I think people are interested at the moment. I hope this will be revealing. We actually talk a little bit about George Floyd and his situation in the film.

We try to give an account of where race relations are today in America. Where are we really at? It's pretty clear where we were back in the 60s; but since that time, we've not really, I think, looked carefully and deeply into what drives our race relations.

So, anyway, you mentioned films I've made in the past; and, yes, I used to work for *Frontline*, and I do documentaries for public television. Politics sort of, eventually, put an end to that, and that side of things hasn't been represented there for some time now. It's too bad.

TG: Yeah, you know, my first question was about the documentary, and I viewed that sort of as a courtesy question; but it turns out that's a perfect setup for our whole discussion today because so much of what we want to talk about today is related to the George Floyd killing and the aftermath and all of that. So that turns out to be a perfect setup.

The George Floyd killing—we at IPI have worked for several years on issues of justice reform. We've looked into the problem of the way police unions protect cops from internal discipline. We're really sort of in an uproar about qualified immunity and the way it makes it almost impossible to bring a case against a government employee—of any kind— not just police officers, but really any kind of government employee.

So when we look at the George Floyd killing, the justice reform and the qualified immunity factors are really obvious to us. But it's striking how the George Floyd—I mean, people were very worked up about the Michael Brown killing. But the George Floyd killing seems to have really set a match to a wildfire across the country in many, many cities; and I wonder if you have any thoughts on why the George Floyd killing seems to have touched off so much protest and so much anger.

SS: The difference, I think, is that in Michael Brown's case, there was what we call a “poetic truth,” which is a narrative that comes out of an event like that that usually is designed to ultimately bring one power. And in the Michael Brown case, Michael actually precipitated this confrontation with the policeman, Darren Wilson: hit him in the face, wrestled him for his gun, was shot, ran away, turned around, and charged back at the policeman again, who then, finally, to save himself, to save his own life, shoots him.

In George Floyd, boy, there's no ambiguity. There's no poetic truth. This just an absolutely horrific—it's unbearable to look at. And the power of it, the clarity of the evil was so explicit that I think it just simply an image that went around the world.

I mean there were demonstrations in Norway and France and everywhere in the western world. So it had its own innate, inherent clarity. Michael Brown was more ambiguous. Who precipitated this, and grand jury investigations, and it went on for months and months to finally realize and finally accept the fact that the policeman had acted in self-defense, and there was no racial element in it at all.

So I think just the clarity of the event had a lot to do with why the George Floyd situation got so much international attention. And the other reason, I think, is that in events like this, when a white male kills a black male and one is a teenager and the other is a policeman or whatever, when that kind of thing happens, it seems to put the lie to our whole sense of what race relations are in in America today. And, therefore, in those events, there is an enormous amount of power.

I mean, if you look at George Floyd, right away the sort of demonstrations just popping up, again, all over Europe, everywhere, not just in America, but everywhere, in reaction to it. That's a lot of power.

Next thing you know institutions, Corporate America, is saying, you know, we have to basically come up with some sort of politically correct image that they have to create. They're going to make their company do this, and they're going to do that; and they're going to be on the side of innocence.

Well, you know, the murder of this one man has the power, in that sense, to transform institutional America, to liberalize it, to reevaluate all of its standards. Universities have been completely transformed by this power; and they're not the same institutions they were before this series of killings happened, culminating in George Floyd.

So one of the reasons that they create, again, this explosiveness is that they create a kind of feeding frenzy. Who's going to get in there and get that power? Who's going to use that event to fulfill some objective they have over here in another area of American life?

Police reform is going to be ubiquitous across America at this point. Educational reform is going to be profound: public education, universities. Corporate America now has, again, made all sorts of gestures for liberalizing and so forth.

So George has caused a lot of social change already in American life.

TG: But I guess the question is, how much of that is good, right? I mean if we actually can focus on what went wrong in that situation—and, again, not to beat a dead horse, but I've already talked about the problem of police unions and the problem of qualified immunity and things like that. But it's also possible that after an incident like that, as a reaction, wrong policies can also be adopted as well, right?

SS: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, my sense is that, for the most part, bad policies come out of this. I've been in universities all my life. It's hurt them profoundly. It's politicized them, and it's altered the way civilization and culture is transmitted. All, of course, in the name of the good, in the name of social justice and so forth.

So it's done. It's been a power that's been used negatively for the most part. And, no doubt, there are some positive things in the mix, but not many, not many that I have noticed at all.

The worst problem, of course, it seems to me, is the fact that when events like this happen, they distract us, divert us, from the problems that keep us from having real equity in American life. One of the biggest problems we have, for example, that is my little pet peeve: when people go through four centuries of oppression, they don't come out of it on the same ground as everybody else. They're underdeveloped.

The biggest problem we have in black America today is under development. No mystery whatsoever how we got there: four centuries of denial and oppression will do that to a people. Do we deal with the problem of underdevelopment, or do we say, "Let's defund the police"? Or, "Let's have another African-American studies program," or something. And all of these sort of dilettantish, almost, issues take over, and the real problems never even get looked at.

Why has black America made so little progress in the last 50, 60 years so that we're further behind whites than we were in the mid-60s when the civil rights bill passed, and so forth? Why? Profoundly important question that America has to answer if we want to have a future that amounts to more than just quibbling over lightweight issues.

TG: And it does seem—on your point of under development, and understandably so—it does seem like what's being advocated right now actually would take black America in the wrong direction. I'm thinking about that website that was put up by the National Museum of African-American Culture and History last week or a few days ago, when they were literally saying that things like hard work, deferred gratification, intact families, saving money, and things like that were associated with whiteness. When you see something like that, it's like, you know, these are all the characteristics that allow families in a free society to better themselves, one generation to improve on the next. I mean, one father never goes to college, but his kid goes to college; and then that kid's kid gets a gets a graduate degree, and those sorts of things.

And it was so disheartening to see this document come out that associates those very characteristics of the development you are talking about sort of being deflected away and saying that this a reflection of whiteness.

SS: It's one of the most appalling things I've ever seen.

TG: They've taken it down, but it came from somewhere.

SS: It came from somewhere. It's out there. I'm one of those people. My father had a third grade education and pulled himself up, taught himself to read and write, made a life, and had all of those values and believed in them and that was the end of it. And to think that

now, you're ascribing that to somebody other than yourself almost out of a kind of braggadocio. You're proud of that.

That suggests in whatever consciousness that those ideas came from, that's a suicidal impulse. That's an impulse that really hurts your own people, that tells them that living in this way is a betrayal of their race. And so you're saying your identity depends on you rejecting values and principles that are guaranteed to give you a full life. That's a lost people.

And there are segments—don't get me wrong. I don't believe most of black America is lost. But I believe we have a young, elite element in black America that is utterly lost and consumed with this idea that we're still victims. We have to be different than white people. They're consumed with the idea of race.

I'm not. Race to me is something that should not be important. It is an emptiness. What is it? What does it mean? It means nothing in itself. You don't build your future on an idea that has no substance whatsoever.

TG: When I was reading that document, it struck me that what they were talking about was the American Dream. I mean, this is why people voluntarily come to this country, right? So their children can do better than them.

I mean in my own family, I was the first person in my family to go to college. And, you know, I'm now very much pressuring my son to go on to get a master's degree because I want him to better himself.

Those characteristics they were describing, those are the reasons that immigrants come here from India and Pakistan and from the Middle East. And it's why people from Nigeria and Ghana come here voluntarily today. They see that as opportunity, not something that is affiliated with white supremacy.

SS: Yeah. It's a voice that is just lost. Why are they allowed to be that confused?

And this brings up the other side of the equation: I think the answer to that question is white guilt. I think white guilt in America, which I'll be happy to explain or talk about;

but white guilt in America enables that kind of delusion, that kind of silliness. It encourages it, really, in blacks.

What is white guilt? Well, again, white guilt, I think, is not a feeling of guilt about race or about blacks in the way they're treated or whatever. White guilt is the fact that if you are white in America, you're born white in America, you are born into a race that has a reputation for racism. And, so, at birth, you become accountable to that reputation. And as you grow up and mature, you act as though you were guilty, even though you're not. But you know you're being prejudged as a racist.

And, so, you wear it on your sleeve. You become defensive. And you look for opportunities to show that you're not racist. And so you say, "OK, I'll go along with affirmative action. That's fine. If that's what they want. I'm not racist! I'll go along with this because I'm not racist. I'll let somebody put up a list of beautiful principles and say they only apply to white people. I'll do that so that they won't say I'm racist. I will go along with things that I know are blatantly untrue so that they won't say I'm a racist."

Corporate America, the NFL, now, they're going to all kneel. That's white guilt. What they're saying is we need to go along with that to show how innocent of racism we are. We're going to kneel.

So, race relations today are a symbiosis between whites and blacks; and blacks, then, feel that getting whites to do these silly things, they think that's black power, and they have the power to manipulate this. It's what we call the whole grievance industry that runs our whole society, racially, in those terms.

So it's the whole society that is involved that agrees, at this moment, that it's a good thing for whites to use blacks symbolically as proof of their innocence; and it is perfectly fine for blacks to use their race and their past victimization to get power and influence in American life, which they're doing more and more and more in more and more areas of life.

So it seems to me that—very, very broadly speaking—is where we're at.

TG: So it strikes me that every country has guilt of some kind. I mean the European countries have colonial guilt, right? And they've had to deal with that over their history. We in America, we have the guilt about the true offense of slavery as well as the true offense against native Americans; and, if you want to really drill down, the Italian-Americans weren't treated terribly well, and the Irish-Americans weren't treated terribly well, either. And you wrote a whole book about white guilt, also, which is also a book that we would recommend that people get a copy of, if they can.

But a lot of the things you've described, the way white Americans deal with white guilt, are not constructive and, indeed, very insulting, I think, to black Americans. And this was not one of my questions, but I'm intrigued: What are the most constructive things that we could be doing? What are constructive outlets of white guilt, of legitimate guilt? It strikes me that, frankly, embracing Martin Luther King's vision of a colorblind America and a colorblind society is somewhere in that neighborhood, but that does that doesn't seem to be the neighborhood of solutions that are being advocated right now.

SS: I think everything that's being advocated right now is going to be like everything that's been advocated since the 60s. It's going to fail. I can't wait. But we just keep—this can get a little complicated. I don't want to get overly complicated. But, race, I think, has to be understood as a means to an end, not an end.

Any time we pick up race, we're trying to get somewhere, we're usually trying to get power. And we use race to do it. Racism created slavery. The fact that they're of a different race, it's all right for us to use them as slaves.

Today, the fact that they're of a different race, it's all right to give them a preference in getting in a university. Well, there's no qualitative difference there. In both cases, we're honoring race as though it had meaning. Race has no meaning beyond the biological. It is nothing. Culture attaches to it. Culture attaches to all sorts of things.

Again, race is always a means, always of weapon.

Well, my feeling is that's where we ought to go. The dream that Martin Luther king talked about, the content of our character rather than the color of our skin, that's the

human ideal is to get to the place where race becomes—I'll borrow this word from the French existentialists—where race becomes a nothingness. It has no meaning in society.

The fact that grass is green is nothingness. It's there. We recognize it. That's the end of it. Race, I think that's where we ought to be trying to evolve to.

I think blacks could understand that if whites would give up this guilt, would find moral confidence in themselves, in the greatness of American society. You know, this the most phenomenal country that—it is the center of the world, for good reasons! And it's good reasons that have liberated America from race and racism to a large degree. And it seems to me that we need to go back to that.

What's important about Shelby Steele is not that he's black. It's that I'm a citizen of the United States of America. I want to be considered that way. I want to relate as a citizen to my fellow citizens. And the fact that I'm black constitutes a nothingness.

TG: So that takes me into another of my questions which is sort of related to meritocracy because it seems to me that a large portion of American society has sincerely embraced Martin Luther King's vision of people being judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. And meritocracies are certainly not perfect; but I think most Americans kind of feel like giving everyone a level playing field and letting people accomplish whatever they're capable of accomplishing, whether it's some combination of hard work and intelligence and determination or whatever, and that we want to judge people based on their merits.

But I'm really struck by the degree to which the “woke” crowd and the Black Lives Matter movement are really pushing in the exact opposite direction of a meritocracy.

I heard just the other day this example that symphony orchestras—and I happen to be a classical music nerd, so I came across this. Symphony orchestras for decades have adopted what they call the blind audition process which is that if you're auditioning for a position in the orchestra, you audition behind a curtain.

SS: Yeah, I like that.

TG: And you walk in on a piece of carpet, so they can't tell if it's a woman wearing high heels or a man wearing soft shoes. And they're judged purely on their musicianship, on the sound they're able to produce from their instrument. And that strikes me as a perfect accommodation to this idea of not judging people based on their looks or their gender or their race or whatever, but purely on their merit. And now symphony orchestras are being pushed to do away with the blind audition process because what's being asked for now are preferences, race and gender preferences, rather than judging people based on their merit.

So it seems to be very ironic that the folks at the leading edge of the civil rights advocacy right now that's going on, they're not pursuing Martin Luther King's dream. They're pursuing a dream of preferences and set asides and specifically judging people based on the color of their skin rather than the content of their character.

SS: Yes. They're reinventing America's original sin of racism in the name of curing it. It's amazing to behold. But race and racism are so tempting because they're so effective as a means.

If I'm a racist, just wave a hand and that whole race is no longer relevant to me; and, wow, what power that gives me.

So, people, when they think they're going to now integrate their orchestra or whatever, they're going to not do it by merit. They're going to do it, as you say, by skin color and so forth; and what's the difference between that and what the slave owner said? And what kind of moral advance does that constitute?

I want the merit, no matter what; and it's difficult because that means that maybe there won't be a single black person in the orchestra. As long as I know the orchestra has been selected by merit rather than skin color, I'm happy with that. So that when I do make it, when I do pass the audition and get a seat in the orchestra, you believe me. You know I got there the honest way.

Well, Affirmative Action has stigmatized black American youth across this country in universities, medical schools, law schools as inferiors. You go to those institutions, you

find that blacks have the lowest grade point average and the highest dropout rate of any student group in America. They're doing horribly!

They have what I call an M&M track, a minority mediocrity track where you bring in minorities to your university, and they don't take classes with everybody else. There's a whole set of ethnic studies mumbo jumbo that they take. And then they get a degree at the end.

Well, OK. Now I'm going to go to a doctor. I don't feel well. Something's wrong. And that doctor is black. The point is, [that doctor is] stigmatized. I don't want to be [a doctor] if I haven't earned it via merit. Over time it corrodes the whole institution. Academics, universities in America have been weakened profoundly by their attempt to integrate and achieve diversity. The worst idea ever to come into academic life. It has no connection to merit. And universities are inherently about merit.

TG: So not to belabor the symphony orchestra illustration; but it is a good transition to my next question which is that I have no doubt that in the past symphony orchestras did discriminate. I have no doubt that they discriminated against blacks, probably against women, probably against Jews in the awarding of positions and things like that. But when you go to something like a blind audition process like that, it strikes me that you are eliminating structural racism in the symphony orchestra hiring process. And, so, this takes me to my question about structural racism.

The justification for a lot of what's being demanded right now is this idea of structural racism. And, again, I have no doubt that we had structural racism in our society in the past. I have absolutely no doubt about it. You can look at photographs; I'm not old enough to remember seeing a water fountain that said "whites only," but I can look, and I can see photographs that show me that; and, so, I know it was true.

But it seems to me that we have through law and policy and through cultural change eliminated that kind of structural racism. It would be tough, I think, right now to find true racism in any law or policy on the books in any American state or at the national level. But, yet, we keep hearing that that our entire system is characterized by structural racism. So, I mean, what do they what do they mean when they talk about structural racism?

When I think of *structural*, I think about law and policy; but as an employer, you bear a heavy burden right now if you're even suspected of using racial discrimination in your hiring processes or something like that. So, what do they mean by structural racism?

SS: They mean one thing and one thing only: Structural racism, systemic racism expands entitlement. If racism is what killed George Floyd, then, OK, that's not nice. But it's one guy. Systemic racism is vast.

And, so, as a black American, my entitlement to justice, to pay off of one kind or another, is also vast. You really owe me.

And so the only purpose of “structural racism” is to expand their entitlement, what America owes me given its racism.

So once you once you grant racism, it's a power move. If I can get America to go along with “systemic racism,” then I have that much more power. And, again, white America still pays that off. It says, “OK. We’ll go along with you.” And, thus, the symbiotic corruption that race relations are today.

And blacks know they have that advantage to play. All whites want to know is what's the price to get you to be quiet and not stigmatize me as a racist.

TG: This why you'll hear, sometimes, white Americans say things like, “OK. Let's go ahead and pay reparations,” right? Just because of the lure of “Can we be over with this now?” I mean if there is some price that buys us freedom from all of this, just tell us what the price is, and we'll see if we can possibly manage to pay it.

SS: It's white guilt. They're pinched by white guilt, and so they want to know—I'll do anything! What do you want? And you get all sorts of crazy things, vast amounts of money and so forth.

Reparations particularly bother me because you see the corruption there. My position on reparations is even if you give three million dollars to every black person in America, I'm not going to take it. You can't pay me for what my father went through, for what my

grandfather went through. You can't just buy—what am I going to do, buy an ice cream cone or something?

What we as a society have to do is live with the knowledge that we're human beings and that we make mistakes, and that racism was a was one of the worst evils of all time. It's right up there at the top of the list. And we have to be aware of how we fell into it, of how were seduced by it, and so forth. We have to grow morally.

I'm not going to let America buy its way out of that by giving me—what, a \$20,000 payment? I won't even be able to buy a Volkswagen.

TG: Shelby, one of the scariest things, to me, that's happened in the last few months has been to see how quickly the term “white supremacy” has been redefined and expanded. In January, if someone had used the phrase “white supremacy,” they were talking about fringe groups of uneducated losers, probably in rural areas, who attributed their failures in life to minorities somehow disadvantaging them. And they were fringe groups, but no one really took them very seriously.

Fast forward three months, and all of a sudden, now, the phrase “white supremacy” is being used to describe the entire American experiment from the founding on, and that white supremacy thoroughly infuses everything. And I know that language changes slowly and gradually over time, but I'm not sure I've ever seen a term so redefined and expanded in such a short amount of time. And this strikes me as just toxic to America if we adopt this idea that somehow America, at its core, is nothing more than an example of white supremacy.

SS: Right. White supremacy is exactly the same thing as systemic racism, structural racism. It's a way to expand entitlement. You didn't know how vast and complicated and insidious white supremacy was. Well, it is much bigger. And, therefore, my entitlement to redress in American life is much bigger than you even thought. Now you owe me even more! And I want more help! And I want more social programs! And I want more racial preferences! And I want this, and I want, I want, I want!

And so it's a term that blackmails white America. It says, "We're holding over your head your moral reputation, and unless you agree that white supremacy is a problem, then you're a racist because white supremacy is in everything." And so our power extends to everything. If I'm playing golf then, damn it, I should have some entitlement there as well!

The key to the whole thing is the idea of black people as victims of racism. Any way you can stretch a narrative to point in that direction with blacks as victims, you win. You're entitled. And it's a tragedy because, again, look at the message that gives to blacks. It says excellence is not important. What's important is your race and your victimization. Believe you're a victim. That'll get you ahead. And it will! It will! That's not good for black America. We need our dignity more than that. We need to say no thank you, no preferences. If I don't cut it, I don't cut it. I'll go back and work harder. I'll take that as a message that I have to develop more.

But, no, you cut me off from that, then I just get weaker and weaker. We have to really unentangle ourselves from each other and stop holding each other hostage to these stigmas of racism or inferiority or whatever.

TG: Shelby, in order to reserve time for some of our participants' questions, I'm going to have to set some of my questions aside; but I will ask you this closing question, and that is I have to say, personally, I'm more pessimistic today than I was six months ago about race relations in the country, just seeing how everything's been playing out. Are you pessimistic, or are you optimistic? Is there reason for optimism, seeing everything that's going on right now in American society, for us, again, to get back to Martin Luther King's vision of a colorblind America?

SS: I have a lot of faith in black America. We have been through the worst occasion of human oppression ever in all of history. We survived it. We endured. We developed a family life. We developed one of the richest cultures in the world. We transformed music on the planet. We produced in the twentieth century one of the great written literatures of the world. Things that we've done—particularly given, again, the oppression—are amazing. I have every faith in in that and in our excellence.

I want people to get out of the way of that, to stop seducing us with the idea that our victimization is the horse we ought to be riding. No. For example, in the NBA, we don't claim to be victims there. We compete with everybody there. And wherever we're allowed to just have fully open competition, we do well. It seems to me that we did we need to really get back there.

One last point I would like to make. What I ask of America is one thing: In order to get past this impasse that we have, America has to say to black America, "Your fate's in your own hands. You have to be responsible for your own advancement. And until you are, you won't get anywhere no matter what the larger society gives."

We don't have a single politician that I'm aware of brave enough to say that today, to say that even though blacks were unfairly oppressed, their fate's in their own hands. We have to overcome racism as the society; but blacks have to overcome underdevelopment, and only they can do that.

TG: Thanks so much, Shelby. Here's the first audience question: "I've recently seen data saying that Nigerian and Guyana immigrants to the U.S. have higher incomes than even than whites, not just higher than blacks. One, is that true? And then, what's the explanation? How do people who push the narrative that the U.S. is such a racist place respond to that?"

SS: It is true. It's absolutely true. It's funny, Harvard University practices affirmative action, like as all universities do; and, so, they have a certain quota. At least eight to nine percent of every freshman class has to be black. Well, of that eight to nine percent of blacks, the vast majority are from the West Indies or from Africa and from outside of America where they have been raised in cultures that ask for excellence.

And so Harvard cannot meet its quota with black Americans. It has to go to other groups to do it. And, yes, they're higher on every socio-economic measure than whites. They own more businesses, more home ownership, higher marriage rates, lower divorce rates. Across the board, they're higher in this society that's supposed to be systemically racist.

But, again, people need their innocence. Universities want their innocence of racism so profoundly that they're willing to just look away from a truth like that, a statistic like that. It has no impact because if they stand by the reality and say foreign black students are doing much better than American black students, then people are going to say, "Well, you're just supporting white supremacy." And, so, they don't do it.

And, so, the institution as a whole weakens. Harvard university, no university is what it was 20 years ago.

TG: It does seem, Shelby, that anytime data is brought to the discussion, it's dismissed as "race science," as if it's impossible to actually bring any data to these discussions, as if somehow that is essentially just racist in and of itself.

SS: That's what white people do to us! They come around with these numbers!

TG: Our next audience question is, "If you had a group of CEOs in a conference room, what are the top three things that you would say to them?"

SS: Well, the number one thing I would say to them in terms of their employee relations is that they work the by merit, and when minorities don't cut it, don't ignore them. Say, "Look, here's what you're going to have to do." Help them along. Help them realize what they have to do to pass the bar, as it were, so that the standard is upheld. And at the same time you're being friendly and open and encouraging of people. That's just sort of common sense, but it's almost that simple.

Regarding them immediately wanting to donate to black causes, I'd say, "Do you really personally feel guilty? Do you get up in the morning feeling guilty?" I understand that there was once a great deal of oppression heaped upon the poor Eskimos way up north. I don't get up on Wednesday morning and feel guilt over that. I don't. I don't believe that that many people do because in private people say, "Well, you know, my ancestors came here a hundred years after slavery. I didn't have anything to do with that. Nobody in my family had anything to do with that."

Why are you—? "Thou dost protest too much."

White America has to find a way to believe in itself again. Just generally speaking, as a black who grew up in Chicago in segregation, every aspect of my world was segregated. I know what segregation is like. Living in America today is—I never dreamed this would be the case. I never dreamed I would have this kind of opportunity. I still have segregation flashbacks. I walk into a hotel lobby, and, whoa! I can remember when I couldn't do that.

Well, America needs to brag a little bit about its moral progress in this area. And corporations and institutions have to begin to say, "You are not going to corrupt us! You're not going to make us lose our standards and throw them out just so that we can get the right mix of skin colors." It's going to hurt your corporation. It's not going to help the people you're trying to help. It's going to ruin the country.

Make sure the standards are fair. Make sure there are not hidden biases of some kind. Really work hard at that. That's where I think the real focus and effort ought to go. How do you really make a fair judgment understanding human beings are imperfect?

But that's another thing I think that they ought to do. I think one of the things that human beings want and need more than anything else is witness to what they've been through. And white America is so busy trying to buy its way out of the rap that it's racist, it doesn't stop and look at the people, look at blacks who are who are sitting there pounding the table demanding this and screaming about this grievance and that. Here's a little witness: "I understand your people went through this and this. They suffered. There was suffering of an unparalleled kind over centuries! It's inconceivable! None of us can imagine it. And yet here you are, and it's an honor. You should be proud. But that doesn't mean we're going to lower the standards because then that's saying we don't have any faith in you. That's saying we don't believe in you. And how does that serve anybody?"

So I think those are three tones that would make a lot of sense. A CEO who communicates that way—or for that matter, a politician—I noticed in the Mount Rushmore speech, President Trump did give a little witness. He mentioned some people like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman and talked about the suffering for a moment. Wow. I think it was the best speech he's given so far. He's witnessing Americans. Blacks

are Americans. Their experience is the American experience. And it should be witnessed. It should be accepted as a part of the whole thing, which I think would help us get away from all these corruptions by which we sort of try to buy innocence.

TG: Shelby, we really appreciate your thoughts today. Thanks so much. We appreciate that. These can be difficult topics to talk about, but maybe that's why we should talk about them more because they're difficult for us all to talk about.

We wish you very well in your work and with your documentary. We're excited to see that. I know projects like that always take longer than you think they're going to take, but we're eager to see the fruit of your work at some point.

SS: I hope so. I hope soon.

TG: With that I'll thank Shelby one final time. Thank you all for joining us.