

The 31st Annual MLK Community Celebration with Shaun King

JORDAN FROST: Basheera Agyeman is a senior majoring in French and Comparative Ethnic Studies and has the distinct honor to be the first campus civic poet for Washington State University.

[APPLAUSE]

A collaboration with the English department and MLK program. Basheera will be performing "Time's Up" in honor of the MLK community celebration and Shaun King's visit to WSU. Basheera Agyeman.

[APPLAUSE]

BASHEERA AGYEMAN: I love you, too. Hi, everybody. I just have to say, it is such a dream come true to be performing here in front of Shaun King right now. Like totally fan-girling a little bit but-- so this poem is called "Time's Up."

(SINGING) Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around. Turn me around. Turn me around. Ain't gonna let nobody

turn me into something I'm not. The skin don't come off, this mouth can't lie about what my eyes done seen. This blush, it rinses off at night. These prayers have been whispered before by those before whose ankles almost adapted to the persistence of chains, who didn't know there were ripples of change and yet they loved us through the promise of time.

But time is now. Time is not on our side. Time is not letting us mourn. Bodies are still falling, have fallen into the chest of history of time. Time is beckoning us forward. Saying come, come and be still. Come, we are going on the bayou. On the brink of remembering, reliving bodies floating in rivers and oceans, through air and through space and time.

Every movement and moment ever made was preparing us for today. If you could only see how your existence is an ode to revolution an ode to mankind. This is an ode to my peers, skin kin, family and foes to the man who asked me how it was I knew so much about Africa.

This is an ode to our freedom dreams and as we imagine them, I am seizing on this dawn for you and I. Wherever you go and bleed, I will cry out too. And the sun rays will build links between our hands and our movements will be intertwined as we are. We are the manifestation of possibility you and I. We are emotionally intelligent. Our anger can no longer be stigmatized.

You and I, we fill each other's glasses with hope. You and I want to write a poem about absolutely nothing and still be the standard. You and I know the world was not written in English. Your native tongue is safe here, is welcome here, is preferred here. Speak it while we are waiting for this dawn to break, while we are waiting for that White House to be painted the shade of the bodies that built them. While we are working, while we are praying, while we are holding each other together, while we are holding ourselves.

As for myself, I never wanted to be superwoman, not even a black one. Never envied her or her cape. But I'll go thrifting for one if I have to. I'll keep spilling out on this page for as long as I have to. Ignorance is only bliss when carcasses aren't washing up on your own beaches. And although there's so much that I still don't know, I won't be stopped. I can't take no freedom, can't take no. Freedom is not on nobody's time but time is telling me to tell them about themselves, about ourselves.

Tell them I know so much about Africa, because it is an entire continent worth knowing about. Tell them you can try to take away my internet but you can't quench this thirst to know. Tell them we are decolonizing, that we will not be conforming. Tell them we can't be watered down or withered away. Tell them they never should have been trusted to set the standard any ways.

Tell them love is our standard any ways. That it is a new day and we are a new age and we are unafraid. Strengthened by the call of liberty drums, we are the dreams our mothers never knew they were having. We are having a moment worth seizing. We are the moment itself. And what are we going to do with this moment? Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

JORDAN FROST: Thank you, Basheera, for your inspiring performance. Shaun, it's our hope that you enjoyed Basheera's piece on behalf of Coug Nation. And now I have the honor of introducing Shaun King.

Shaun King has written extensively about the Black Lives Matter movement covering discrimination, police brutality, the prison industrial complex, and social justice in the wake of violence in New York, Baltimore, Cleveland, Ferguson, Missouri, Charleston, South Carolina, and other cities.

He is now the Writer-in-Residence at Harvard Law School's Fair Justice Project as well as a columnist at The Intercept. In his position as Senior Justice Writer at the New York Daily News, King wrote over 630 columns. He is a regular political commentator for the Young Turks and the Tom Joyner Morning Show and was formerly justice writer for Daily Kos.

Widely known for his use of Twitter and Facebook to tell micro stories of injustice, King's social media updates have influenced how the world knows about those most affected by racism and police brutality. A strong advocate for families, Shaun has become an extremely visible fundraiser for victims of injustice.

As a social entrepreneur, King worked as a CEO and founder of both TwitChange and HopeMob whose social media footprint grew to become one of the 10 largest of any charity. King is the author of The Power of 100! And has spent much of the past 15 years raising nearly \$10 million for charities across the country and the globe.

King is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Epoch Humanitarian Award and the Hometown Hero Award from the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Onstage he draws from his oratorical skills developed in part from the 15 years he spent as a local pastor.

WSU community, please give a very, very, very warm cougar welcome to Shaun King.

SHAUN KING: Hello. How are you? So good to see you. Thank you so much for having me here. Wow, I have so much to say and so little time to say it. I'm thankful that you all came out. I'm sorry that we have some people in overflow and sorry that we couldn't squeeze you in here without breaking the fire code.

Before we get started I just want to-- first, I want to remember the young babies who won those arts awards. Where are some of those kids? I'm going to check your art out here in a few minutes but we're so proud of you. But everybody put your hands together for them.

But this is far away from New York. When I got the invitation to speak at Washington State I did not know that Washington State is in Idaho. This is basically Idaho and it was hard to get here. And so since I'm here, I'm going to squeeze every bit of value out of the time. I'm going to tell the truth, no matter how hard it is.

I'm really honored for all of you who have just been pouring your heart and soul out. For all of you who have won such great awards and honors for your dedication. I'm grateful. You may have said you're grateful to share the stage with me but I'm grateful to share the stage with all of you.

And Basheera, thank you so much for your wonderful spoken word. Just--

[APPLAUSE]

let me tell you, I'm a speaker but I could not do that. I had the thought I am not an artist and so the art that you all made, I couldn't do. I'm not a singer. If I was a singer, I would sing all the time. But I can't even hold a note and I definitely could not do any spoken word.

But it takes a lot of people to pull an event like this off. And I know many of us who've put together events know how hard it is. But most of you, you just show up and the event is here. But I just want to give a shout out to all of you who helped pull this off and I'm thankful for you as well.

So many-- you all have done something wonderful tonight and I can't name everybody. But it's a wonderful thing to honor people while they're still alive. And I'm grateful to see so many young people. Staff members and professionals feel like OK, this is paying off. Because any of you who are doing this work, the work is hard and you rarely see the fruits of your labor.

And I'm glad that some of you were able to get-- listen, that certificate, or the plaque, or the award it matters. And so I'm grateful for the university, that you've continued this program. Very few things last for 30 years and it says a lot about the university.

Listen, I know Washington State is not perfect, I know it's several grades below that and I know there are problems here. And I've spoken to students, from first year students all the way to the president. And I do want you to hear something from me though.

I've spoken now 35 states over these past three years and many colleges and universities don't even have a program like this. That's not to say all of these problems that are here aren't here, they are. But it is to say there's still some beautiful, wonderful things going on here as well. And finally, I want to give a shout out to the Black Student Union.

[APPLAUSE]

Y'all are doing amazing work and also a shout out to your student body president as well. I was a student government president. It's a hard-- listen, it's a hard job. And I told him when we first met, if I could go back and be a student gov-- when I was a student at Morehouse, I think I did two things well and like 100 things wrong. And if I could go back I would tweak so many things. But for all of you who are student leaders, the experience that you get.

I even asked him right before I came up. I was like man, have you ever emceed an event before? He's like no, man. It's my first time and man, you've done a great job, right? I say that to say in a few years as you leave this place, my hope and dream for you is that you leave here not just with a degree--

Please get your degree, right? Bass line, don't leave here with student loans for a university in the middle of Idaho without a degree. Get your degree but I also want you to leave here with practical experience. It's a hard world. I want to dig in to how we got to this place that we're in right now as a country. But I'm encouraged because I'm increasingly convinced that so many of you are going to go out into this world and make a significant difference.

I believe in you, you have the skills. And I can tell you, there are a lot of us in the room who are from an older generation. We see you and we're encouraged by you so put your hands together one last time. I have a lesson that I want to teach tonight. Is that all right?

I don't know if you knew this, but the United States has gone crazy. If you don't know, I'm wondering where you've been for the past few years. If you don't know. No, no, no, let me think of it. If you didn't know it was crazy, you crazy. Maybe you were part of why it is so crazy.

But I doubt that if you're that crazy you would be here with us tonight. I'm not so sure maybe a few of you but I'm not sure.

It's not just crazy, that's insufficient. It's disturbing, it's problematic. And even that feels insufficient. It's frightening. Every day brings a series of troubling statements, decisions, horribly offensive statements, lies, bigotry, racism.

And I want to break down for a few minutes how we got here. And I want to point to how we get out of here. And show you what has to happen in the middle, OK? Is there something I need to do to put up this slide here? Go to the next one. Let me see.

Now I know it may surprise you to see at a presentation of somebody from the Black Lives Matter movement to see a big, hairy, white man on the screen. Who looks like maybe he was born and raised in Pullman, I'm not sure. He's from Pullman, I'm pretty sure he's from Pullman.

My undergraduate and graduate degrees are in history. And what's funny is a lot of you know me-- I told this joke, I have five kids, we have two daughters who are in high school. And I went to my daughter's high school and I saw some kids who knew me and they were whispering. And they said, there's @ShaunKing.

And it was funny to me because they now see "@" as like a part of my name. I swear to you, I'm 38 and most of you have only known me for a few years, right? And when I look in the mirror, I don't see @ShaunKing, I'm really a historian by training. And my first job out of college, when I finished Morehouse, was as a high school history and civics teacher.

And I find myself, as many of you may find yourselves now, I find myself in this troubling time that when just going back to what I know. And because I'm a teacher-- so much of what I do, you experience my teaching through Twitter or Facebook, or you read my articles, or maybe you see a video, or something like that. But really all of this, for me, is about teaching and that's what I was trained to do. I went to a teacher training program when I was an undergrad.

And I find myself-- sometimes when things get this disturbing you just got to do what you know how to do. So if that's spoken word, it is art, if it's music, when it gets deeply disturbing you just have to say, I'm just going to do what I know how to do well. And I hope you next to me do what you know how to do well and we each just do what we know how to do well. So tonight I want to do what I know how to do well. I want to teach you a complicated lesson about how we got here.

This man on the screen, he's not from Pullman, he's not from Washington, or Idaho. This is Leopold Von Ranke. And he's actually a man of enormous consequence. He is seen by a lot of people as the father of the study of history. And if you Google his-- I know for some of you, somebody's not real until they have a Wikipedia page.

Although my Wikipedia page kind of sucks. So if all you know about me came from Wikipedia-- the behind the scenes thing that Wikipedia is really weird and they're always trying to put lies and stuff about people on their page. He actually has a good Wikipedia page.

And Leopold Von Ranke is seen as the father of the study of history. In great part because in the mid-1800s in Europe, he helped pioneer some of the first training programs for historians where they were giving degrees, a bachelor's and a master's, in history. People have always written about the past. People in certain fields have always talked about the past.

But Leopold Von Ranke had the thought that we need to actually figure out a way-- hey baby, it's just fine. It's just fine. We need to figure out a way to train people how to study the past. And I've got to go back in time just a little bit. I'd never heard of him. How many of you have heard of him before? You lying. You just lie, you just lie so much. Let me-- put your hands up again. All right, I believe you, just a few of you, all right. You might be lying. I'm not sure, I don't know you well enough.

But in the spring of 2015 I was in grad school. And I kept it secret the whole time I was in grad school because things were so crazy in the movement that wherever we worked, whatever we were doing people would attack us wherever we were. So I was in this masters of history program and I got to this class called the Introduction to Historiography.

And one of the first pictures I saw was this picture of Leopold Von Ranke. And I'm just going to tell you how it happened, I saw Von Ranke and my first thought was this man has nothing to teach me. I even found myself to be very frank, which is not my nature. I'm an optimistic person by nature.

I found myself looking at this picture this hairy, old, white man from the 1800s. And I even found myself hating this man, which is weird, right? He did nothing to me. And he was by all accounts a pretty decent person, although we're finding out more and more and more that the people we think are decent often are not as decent as we thought they were.

And I did what many people do in a class that they don't want to take, I went to the registration website. Oh, but these babies are comfortable. I love it, they confident. I went to the registration website to see how I could drop the class. Are you still in the ad/drop period or has it passed? It's passed, are you still in it? You don't even know. Yeah, it should be ending soon.

So I went and I was like, I'm dropping this class. This class is so-- have you ever been in a class and you're like, my god this class is irrelevant to the life, to the actual life that I'm living right now. And so I was like, I'm going to drop this class.

And I don't know how it is here at Washington State but at my university there's only like three woke professors in the whole department and their classes fill up right away. And so I tried to drop the class but the only good class left was full and there was advanced badminton or something random there.

And through no ingenuity of my own, I was stuck in this class. I wanted to drop it, I didn't see how it was relevant, and it was not a good decision on my part, I was just stuck there. And I kid you not, the lessons I learned over the next few weeks changed my life. And I want to explain to you why I had so much trouble with this man.

The spring of 2014 came after the fall of 2014. And how many of you were here in the fall of 2014? A few of-- maybe a few of you just starting out. Well in the summer of 2014 and the fall 2014 was a really pivotal time in the history of our country. And before you had ever heard of me, I was working at a charity called Global Green. And I was the Director of Communications for that charity and it was a real cushy job. It was a job that I had just because it was a job. And you will understand as you graduate from here, sometimes you just take a job because it's a job and you need the job to pay the bills.

And this was one of those jobs, it was still decent but it wasn't my calling but it was decent. And we were fighting for green energy and a clean environment. It was in Southern California, it was on the beach in Santa Monica, which is very different than Idaho. And so it looked great but I got an email that changed the entire direction of my life.

And the email was so random and I'm convinced in so many ways that had I not gotten this email, you probably wouldn't know me. When I was a student at Morehouse, I was very much an activist. I wasn't an activist like you're an activist. I was the activists that was-- however woke is woke enough, I was two steps past that. I was the super con-- I owned my own megaphone, I was that guy. OK?

And I was the campus-- I was the mascot for activists on my campus. And we were protesting, which is sad. We were protesting police brutality back then. This was in-- I was student government president in 1999 and the NYPD shot and killed this young brother, I've come to know his family, named Amadou Diallo. And Amadou was an African immigrant who came from a wonderful family who had lived and traveled all over the world and moved to New York for him to get an education.

Amadou was coming home one evening, had never broken a law, no warrants for his arrest. No gun, no knife, nothing wrong. Police claim they were looking for someone else. They claimed he looked like Amadou, he looked nothing like Amadou. They see Amadou going into his doorstep and they say Amadou pulled out his wallet. Some people even dispute that he did that.

And the police, five police, said his wallet looked like a gun. Shot Amadou 41 times right there on his doorstep, in the Bronx. And it gripped the country. It was what the death of Mike Brown was to us in 2014, it was, to much of the country, in 1999.

And as we were protesting the death of Amadou Diallo just a few months later, the NYPD, again, shot and killed a young man named Sean Bell. Who was literally leaving his bachelor party, 12 hours away from marrying the love of his life. Police, again, in a case of mistaken identity, really is just code for racial profiling, said they thought they saw a gun in Sean's car, he

did not own a gun. There was no gun, no knife, no weapons. Fired into the car 50 times and killed the man on his wedding day. We protested these things.

And when I finished Morehouse, I got married right away. I did something that is strongly inadvisable. My wife and I got married and had a baby in college. I don't regret marrying my wife, I love her. She and I definitely don't regret our baby but if you think college is hard now, have a baby.

After we did that, which was so dumb of us, like I knew how babies were made and all of that. But yet we weren't-- we did not-- it was not a smart decision. It was hard, we barely made it out of college after that. And when I got out of college, in a lot of ways, I stopped being an activist. It was a deep part of who I was but I had to work right away. I was working, not only was I teaching, I was working two or three jobs.

And right away I became a father. It was hard to graduate but something weird happens and you'll experience this. A lot of the people that you become friends with on social media when you're in college, when you leave this place they will always know you for who you are right now. Like all of these people in the room, no matter who you become they're always going to know you as a spoken word poet.

Like 20 years from now, you could be a real estate agent and they're going to see you as a spoken word poet. And that's what happened to me. I left, I'm not proud of it but I left activism behind entered the workforce and my primary responsibility was being a husband, a father of five kids. We adopted two nieces and we were moving all over the country just struggling to make ends meet.

But every few weeks for 15 years students from Morehouse who knew me as Shaun the activist would always say, Shaun have you seen this? Shaun, have you seen that? And in the summer of 2014, I'm at my cubicle in California and I get an email from a buddy of mine. And it's more relevant today than it's ever been.

He says, Shaun, on a street corner in the middle of Staten Island in New York, there was something horrible that happened. And you have to understand, there was no Facebook Live yet. You could not even upload videos to Twitter yet. He said, Shaun, there's a video on YouTube and there's a middle aged black man, we didn't know his name. Said there's a middle aged black man and he's asking the police, leave me alone. I didn't do anything. What are you doing?

And he says, Shaun, all of a sudden an officer comes up behind him and begins choking him. They pulled the man to the ground and he said Shaun, you can hear the man on video over and over and over again saying I can't breathe, I can't breathe. He says, Shaun, right there on the video the man dies on the sidewalk.

I clicked on the video and it was just as my friend described. And I can't explain what happened to me in that moment. But in that moment I felt like, why am I at Global Green? I need to be helping this fam-- I need to do something. I didn't know what to do, I didn't know how to share the video with my friends, I didn't know how to take that video from YouTube and put it on Facebook. I just didn't know what to do.

I found out how to illegally download videos from YouTube and I taught myself how to edit videos and put captions, just little things. Like right that night I was going and doing tutorials and I shared it. And many of us shared it and in a few days we all learned who that man was. That man was Eric Garner.

A man who I became good friends with his daughter Erica, we campaigned across the country together for Bernie Sanders. And Erica became this fierce defender of her father and fighter for justice for her father. And as you may have seen Erica herself, just 27 years old, a mother of two young babies, passed away.

And Eric's case just ripped my heart out and I couldn't shake it. I actually tried, I tried to move on tried to think about other stuff. And thankfully, I signed up for direct deposit at Global Green and I stopped doing anything remotely quality for them. And that direct deposit still hit my account for at least a few more pay periods.

And it was awkward because they definitely wanted to fire me but they saw what I was doing and they didn't have the nerve to fire me. Because they saw what I was trying to do to help the family of Eric Garner and they paid me for about two more months. And so I give Global Green a shout out every time I speak somewhere because I did not deserve even one of those paychecks over the final two months.

And we started fighting for justice for Eric Garner. Three weeks later, I got a text from a friend of mine who lived in St. Louis. And he says, Shaun, here's a link to a Livestream video. And he said there's a kid who is I'm laying right now on the middle of the street. He said, in a neighborhood called Ferguson.

And he said police shot and killed this boy. He said, Shaun, when you click on the link, he said, people are losing it. I clicked on the link and people weren't angry they were hurt, they were scared, they were bewildered, people were crying.

Sure enough, there was a boy, I'd been told he was a teenager. In fact, we learned he had just graduated high school, went back to a summer program. Blood was still flowing in the street. And I had the thought, oh, my god, police in this country are killing people every two to three weeks.

Washington Post ended up winning a Pulitzer Prize for creating a database of police violence. But a few days after that, I learned that police had shot and killed a man at a Wal-Mart in Ohio

named John Crawford. And then I came to the conclusion, no, this isn't every two to three weeks, this is every two to three days.

A few weeks later, we learned police were not killing people every two to three weeks or two or three days, they were killing four or five people a day, we just didn't know it. It had not gone viral, we had not made a count and most of us had never even heard of Ferguson before.

And we started fighting for justice for Mike Brown, for John Crawford, for Eric Garner. And then in November of 2014, police in Cleveland, Ohio shot and killed a 12-year-old boy named Tamir Rice. We began fighting for justice for Tamir. And then in December, a lot of ugliness started happening that we didn't expect. And I made a key mistake. Now I regret it but in the time I thought I was right.

I looked so many of these families in the eye and just as sure as we are together right here I looked these families in the eye, I said listen, we're going to get justice for your family. I just knew it. You could not have told me-- because for most of my life if I put my mind to it, and that's how my mother raised me. If I put my mind to it and fought like hell for something and if I was organized and diligent and surrounded myself with other people who were organized and diligent-- for most of my life, if I didn't get exactly what I wanted it was something like what I was fighting for.

So I would look these families in the face of say listen, we're going to make this right. And then we found out starting in December of 2014, there would be no justice for Eric Garner. Not even a little bit of justice. They didn't even fire the officer who killed him, even though it violated department policy. There'll be no justice for the family of Mike Brown, no justice for John Crawford, for Tamir Rice.

And I found myself, in January, after getting all of that bad news, I found myself in a deep funk. Maybe you've been there before. Having thought for so much justice with almost nothing to show for it. And I had signed up for this class and I'm like you hairy, old, white man you have nothing to teach me.

And it wasn't him I was mad at, I was mad and I was mad at America. I was mad at this country, this world. And I wanted to drop the class. I wanted to evade and elude my own anger and frustration. And I got stuck with this man. Ended up being a great moment for me because the lesson that I learned is a quick lesson and I'm going to teach you.

Changed the way I saw what happened in 2015, changed the way I saw what happened to Freddie Gray and Sandra Bland. It changed the way I saw what happened to Terence Crutcher and Alton Sterling. It changed how I saw what they did to Philando Castile. It gave me context for how in the world we could see a public rise of white supremacy in the election of Donald Trump, it made sense.

I want to teach that lesson to you and then I'm going to-- somewhere I'm hanging out and then taking a lot of selfies after this. And so after I'm finished, we're going to hang out for a good while, OK?

This is Leopold Von Ranke, he's seen as the father of the study of history and let me tell you what he did. He built what many people call the first detailed time line of human history. This is the 1800s. Just think for a moment, when you want to verify if something's true-- like do you remember last week when, excuse my language, there are kids here.

It's an abomination that we can't repeat what the president says because there are kids in the room, bottled just FYI. But isn't that crazy? Isn't that crazy? I've been losing weight so my pants are a little too big. And so I became a vegan and while I've lost like 10 pounds right away-- I needed to lose, I had just let go of myself.

And when I first heard that Trump said what he said, think about when you first heard it. What were you looking at? Just say it out loud, you were look at what? CNN, Twitter, Instagram? Yup, right. But we all found out through technology, most of us. And if we heard about it, we wanted to learn more. Well, imagine if none of that existed.

What Leopold Von Ranke did in the 1800s was enormously difficult. I know you know this, but you have to imagine there's no Wikipedia, there's no internet, there's no Google, there are no computers. There are no international communication systems. Even international travel was hard and difficult and literally people would die on the journey.

Countries in the 1800s were highly local. And what he sought out to do was to build an annotated timeline of human history. So this picture that you see here it's just a picture of thousands and thousands of people throughout history. For those of you that are in the back, if you look really closely, there's a picture of Chewbacca on there. I laugh that Chewbacca's on there because one of the things-- there's also Rerun from What's Happening!! and what's sad to me is most of you are too young to even know who Rerun from What's Happening!! is.

And if you don't know, later you should go to YouTube and search Rerun, What's Happening!!, dance. Put the word "dance" in there and it will be worth coming to see me tonight. Do you want to get up? You want to break it down for the whole-- you just gave me a little preview right there. So she'll do it. All right, hey, that's right.

So Leopold Von Ranke would sometimes learn about legends, myths. And he would struggle to find out, is this fact or fiction? So he began collecting all of these stories of heroes, villains, presidents, artists, warlords, kings and queens, monarchs, inventors, creators. He began assembling all of these stories and he found something right away that disturbed him. He had assumed-- and what's crazy is to this very day, most historians and even most scientists--

I'm going to get down on the ground just for a second, hope my mic still works. I'm going to break it down over here. I told you, I'm a teacher. OK, so I have to go to my chalkboard. Everybody can see me? I'm sorry if you're behind the pillar back there.

Leopold Von Ranke had assumed that over history-- imagine right here, imagine these are the early humans, OK? This is a timeline of human history. Imagine these are the early humans and let me see if this works. Imagine this is us today, in this right hand corner. Leopold Von Ranke and even a lot of scientists, even a lot of Darwin's theories are based on this idea that over time human beings got better and better and better and better and better.

And Von Ranke found something that shook him. When he began assembling all of these stories and when he put them in chronological order what he found was technology throughout time. He said, listen, this could be 10,000 years, this whole thing could be 1,000 years, or it could be 100 years. He said, no matter how long the time was technology was always getting better, and better, and better.

I am old enough to remember when there were no cell phones. I remember when there was one phone in my mother's house and it was tied to a curly cord in the kitchen. And when I wanted to talk to my wife, who was my girlfriend-- like whatever juicy stuff you want to say, you had to say it in the phone in the kitchen. Like the stuff that y'all do with phones now, there wasn't even-- we couldn't even do all that. We wrote letters, handwritten letters.

Because in our lifetime, the technology has gotten better and better and better. Even you who are college students here, there was a time when you couldn't watch Netflix on your first cell phone. I heard somebody say, I can't watch it now. I heard somebody say that.

And what Von Ranke found was he had made a mistake. That over time technology did improve. He talked about how medicine had improved over time, he talked about how transportation and modes of transportation, he talked about how the refrigeration of food-- that for most of human history when you killed an animal, you had to eat the animal that day or take it through a complex preservation process or it would spoil. And he said, wow, we're finally beginning to be able to store food in refrigerated methods.

And here's what he found, technology is getting better and better and better. But when he put it all in chronological order, what he found was that humanity looked more like this. That sometimes human beings were great and sometimes human beings were absolutely terrible and it did not unfold in chronological order.

The terrible human beings would sometimes come after the good human beings. And then they would get good again and terrible again. He found entire periods of human history, I don't mean days-- and it's harder and harder for us to imagine this, he found entire periods of human history where human beings got along. Can you believe that?

That sounds-- in contemporary American context sounds like a fairy tale. I don't mean that there were no problems but he found decades, generations where there was no war. He found generations where there was no famine, where countries and nations respected borders and boundaries. Where people lived in relative peace, I don't mean perfection, I mean peace.

And then all of a sudden the bottom would fall out of it. Now I'm not saying that peak is Barack Obama because we have a way of exaggerating things. And I'm not saying the lowest low is Donald Trump but I may be saying the second peak is Barack Obama and the next lowest low is Donald Trump. I don't know, I don't know. And here's why I don't know because it's hard to understand where you are in history when you're in it.

Now I want to tell you here's what I know. Let me give you all a little bit of love, hold on. Let me come to this side. Let me tell you what I know you know already, here's what I know you know. I know for sure that we are not right here. This cannot-- I know that right now, in this moment, in 2018, we are not at the peak of human history. Listen, Republicans don't even believe that, OK?

And I know that we're not here, I know we're not here. We're somewhere down here. It's hard to know where but let me explain to you how I know that we're down here. If this is how time unfolds how do we explain this? This is a diagram of the transatlantic slave trade. If you ever get a chance to go to the Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC, they have the actual original version of this there.

This was created by an entrepreneur whose business was the selling, trafficking, and trading of human beings. And that entrepreneur wanted to understand exactly how many human beings can now fit into this ship. Let me break that down. This diagram-- we like to think that this right here took place back here. But if this is the beginning of early humanity and this is us today. In the scheme of human history, this right here, it took place about right here.

There was a woman who voted in this past presidential election whose father had been enslaved. That's how recent this is. If we're getting better and better and better how do we explain this? How do we explain the wounds on this man's back? If we're getting better and better and better, if this is how time works how do we explain this? These are survivors of the Holocaust.

I live in New York City, which has one of the largest surviving populations of men and women who endured this and are still alive. We like to think that this took place way back here somewhere. There are people who experienced this who are still alive. And what's troubling is many of them-- if you don't follow the Anne Frank Center, many people who experienced this now see echoes of it in our own society.

If we're getting better and better how do we explain this? This is at Auschwitz where thousands and thousands and thousands of people died and their bodies perished but their shoes are still there. Why are the shoes there if we're getting better and better and better over time?

If we're getting better-- if we're right here right now, if we're doing so amazing, how do we explain Rwandan genocide, which happened when I was in middle school? This is at a Rwandan genocide museum and to this very day, they continue to find skulls and fragments of skulls where a million people in 90 days were hacked to death. Almost none shot and killed, most of them were hacked with machetes.

I've gone back but we don't have to go back. There are horrible atrocities happening right now. And if this is how time works, how do we explain this and this? We explain it because this is how your iPhone works. It is true. I don't know why they skipped iPhone nine. I'm still stumped by-- they got the eight and then they the 10 is the X. So they didn't quite nail-- they fumbled that a little bit. But the iPhone gets better and better and better and better.

This is how gadgets work but it's not how humanity works. This is how humanity works. And I want to present to you and I think I'm telling you something I believe you already know. We are either here or here. Let me press my case a little bit more. If we are so great why were 102 fully unarmed black men, women, and children shot and killed by police last year?

Does anybody know who this is? There's a clue in the bottom left hand corner. Who is that? It is McKinley. I spoke at a middle school and a child yelled out, Jimmy Carter. And I said, oh, man. No, this the 25th President, this is William McKinley. You would have to go back to 1902 to find the last year, in America, where 102 or more African-Americans were lynched.

What is lynching? Lynching is when somebody serves as judge, jury, and executioner. In an essence, modern day police brutality is just a new form of lynching. These 102 people, I'm talking about these people did not have knives, guns-- there was a man who was shot and killed by police who had a serving spoon, we took him out of the number. These people were unarmed.

If this is how time works and we're getting better and better and better how do we explain this? Just the rise of mass incarceration in America. Who would ever say this is us getting better? I implore you, if you have not yet read *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander or if you have not seen the documentary *13th* by Ava DuVernay.

They really are partners with one another and she could have called *13th*, *The New Jim Crow* the documentary. She, Ava DuVernay, an amazing filmmaker, it's on Netflix. And if you don't have Netflix, borrow somebody's password. Check it out, it's must see. She could have called it *The New Jim Crow* because Michelle Alexander's throughout the documentary. And what they break down is how this explosion happened.

It did not happen on accident, it was well designed. That's why everywhere I go I have to communicate to people that you should not say that the criminal justice system is broken. Because that suggests that it was well designed and has somehow deviated from this beautiful, well intentioned, well designed system. No, this is exactly what they meant to happen. It's not broken, it was built to work this way.

If we're getting better and better and better how do we explain this number? That the United States has the highest rate of imprisonment in the world. Not only do we have the highest number of people in prison, total number, we have the highest percentage of our citizens in prison as well.

We have a higher percentage of citizens in prison right now than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. That's problematic. And what I know is we can't be at the pinnacle. This is how our gadgets work, it's not how humanity works. This is where we are.

I want to press this case, before I close, that we are currently in a dip in the quality of our humanity in this country. I'm not being partisan in what I'm about to say. But when 15 women come out and say there's a man running for president and he either sexually assaulted or grossly sexually harassed me.

Then, a recording comes out where he openly admits to a buddy how and when he has sexually assaulted women and he still wins the election. That happens when you're already in the dip like let me give that context. There is a mistake we're making-- Donald Trump is a symptom of the fact that we were already in the dip.

He exists as president because we were already there. He could not have been elected if we weren't there. His election, and history will judge this, his election only happens if we're already in the dip. I remember thinking the first time I thought, oh, he's done is when he mocked John McCain being a prisoner of war. Because he had already mocked Mexicans and Latinos, he had already mocked and tried to criminalize black folk but people get away with that. But then when he mocked a white man who was a prisoner of war, I said he's done.

Then he said he thought Megyn Kelly was asking him tough questions because she was on her period. I thought, oh, he's done. You can offend white women in this country like that. He's done, he's done. No, I did. I was like, this is it. One of these other candidates is going to beat him. You can offend a lot of people, but you can't offend a prisoner of war and a popular blond haired, blue eyed white woman on Fox News, he's toast.

We realized it didn't matter and he realized it. He literally said, I could go out-- see, I live in New York, Fifth Avenue is right outside of his house. He said, I could go out here on Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and my supporters would still stay with me. He knew it, he was spot on. For about 35% of his supporters, it literally doesn't matter what he says or does. They're there no matter what.

That's because we're in the dip. There are two things that frighten me about the dip, and if I didn't tell you this I would be doing you a great disservice. It's easy to get in the dip but it's very hard to get out of it. When you find yourself in a horrible period in human history, it is hard to get out. And if your conclusion is that defeating Donald Trump, alone, is what gets us out of the dip then I am disturbed by what you think the dip is.

Because the mass criminalization of black folk and people of color in this country, that happened on the watch of Democrats as much as it did on the watch of Republicans. Dips are easy to get into and hard to get out of.

Here's the second point: sometimes these dips lasts for a few years, sometimes they last for a few decades, sometimes they last for a century, if you think about Jim Crow. Then, if you think about the transatlantic slave trade, sometimes the dips can last for a couple of hundred years. We could very well be in this dip for a few more years, right? I hope that's it. But we could be for a few hundred years.

There's a quote that people attribute to Harriet Tubman where she said, in my life I freed thousands of slaves and she said, I would have free thousands more had they only known they were slaves. And if you've ever studied slavery, the quote is powerful but it's painful. And the truth of the quote, some people say it was a saying that was used during that time but it wasn't her. It's hard to know.

The truth of that quote is some people had been in the dip for so long that they didn't know there was any other kind of way. What I never want you to do is to adjust to the dip. We do not belong there, you do not belong there. And we, here's the thing, throughout human history not just American history people always find their way out. It takes a lot of effort.

Here's my last slide. I like to joke, somebody design this slide for me and then I designed this one myself. So the quality went down drastically. I want you to be able to-- and I'll close with this. I want you to be able to detect when the dip is coming, OK? I want you to have this as a tool.

And you can look at any point throughout human history. Let me come back down real quick. One second. So this blue line here this represents the status quo, OK? Just follow me for a second. This represents whatever is normal in America. Normal could be bad, good, whatever, it just represents the status quo.

Whenever somebody introduces an innovation that disturbs the status quo, there's always a horrible backlash. Three examples. The first is the transatlantic slave trade. In the United States we had the Civil War, the 13th Amendment, the 14th Amendment, and the Emancipation Proclamation. We introduced, in this country, an innovation that disturb the status quo. So guess what happened after that? The launch of the KKK and mass lynching.

There were, and this is shocking, there were more laws about how valuable black lives were during slavery than there were after slavery. There were horrible penalties if you violated or had violence, if you did not belong in a particular plot of land. If you violated the life of somebody you had to pay a price. Literally, there are hundreds of stories of people going to jail for what they did to the property of someone else, all right?

Slavery ended and then all of a sudden we have the rise of the KKK and widespread lynching. There was no KKK here, there was very little lynching here. It exploded here. Here's another one, we have Jim Crow, which is about 100 years after slavery of 400 years.

1964, 1965, and '66, there is the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. Guess what happened in response? Mass incarceration. And then here's the last one, we have 43 of these, anybody want to guess? White presidents. A little more particular, white, male presidents.

We had 43 white, male presidents, over 250 years of them. 43 white, male presidents and then right here we had to go and get real innovative. We decided we've done white, male presidents before. This time, we're not only going to elect a black man but his name is going to be Barack Hussein Obama. Now for you, right now, maybe that just rolls off your tongue but when we first learned of him-- literally, it was like, what is his-- what's his name?

And I remember the first time I asked somebody, I said, where is he from? I mean, it's a reasonable question. I said, where is he from? And they said, man, he's from the south side of Chicago. And I was like, man-- in real talk, you know, the Nation of Islam is headquartered in Chicago. I was like, what did he convert to Islam? Where-- how-- what's his story?

And they said yeah, but he's not really from Chicago, he was actually born in Hawaii. I was like, oh, wow, that's different. And I was like, still I'm not understanding. And they said, yeah, his mother was a white hippie. And I was like, wow, did she name him Barack Hussein Obama? And they said no, his father was a young scholar from Kenya. I was like, oh, wow, that's different.

And then when his mother, who was an eccentric lady, his mother then moved him, when he was a boy, to live in Indonesia. We said listen, we've done 43 white presidents let's go ahead and elect the most peculiar black man in America. I mean, there is literally no one like him in the country. And guess what happened? It absolutely happened. We had the status quo, we have 43 white men as president. We said, let's shake it up a lot.

Barack Obama-- you should Google Barack Obama's first interview, New Yorker. He did an interview, it was the first interview he did after he left the White House. It's a painful interview where he said he's just seen the election of Donald Trump. And he said, I'm starting to wonder if I was elected 20 years before this country was ready. I think he's wrong. I think, had he been elected 20 years from now, we'd have still seen this. We'd have still gone here. But he's just wondering.

And here's what I know. 43 of these, we elect Barack Obama, and guess what happens? Eight years straight hate crimes increase year over year over year. And here's what's crazy, as I close, is to be fair the main thing that's radical about Barack Obama is his humanity it's not his policies.

Policy-wise, he's actually very moderate. those of us who had hoped he was going to be like a ultra liberal, progressive-- that's not who he is. He was kind of a down the road Democrat who

just happened to be a black man named Barack Hussein Obama, who invited Kendrick Lamar to the White House, who was married to a wonderful, black woman. The most radical thing about Barack Obama was his blackness and his dignity in the face of a lot of horrible stuff. But it irked a lot of people. And it particularly troubled one person. It's not fictional, it's true. He tweets everything that comes to his mind.

The election of Barack Obama for no reason other than his blackness it disturbed Donald Trump. And he began tweeting it, still he doesn't delete anything. He began tweeting that Barack Obama was not even an American, which is peculiar because no one disputes the Ann Dunham was his mother. And if you are an American citizen and you give birth to a baby anywhere else in the world, your baby is still an American.

The whole argument was a farce from the beginning and it's also ridiculous. Are we really saying that 50 years ago someone hatched a conspiracy knowing that this royal baby would someday become president? Is that what we're saying happened? And even to go a little deeper, John McCain actually was not born in the United States, Ted Cruz was not born in the United States but nobody really had a big problem with it. This was about blackness.

And so here we are in the dip. There was a man who was released from being a prisoner of war, not Bowe Bergdahl but another man, who spent almost three years as a prisoner of war. And when he got out and found out that Donald Trump was president he literally thought his family was playing a practical joke on him. And when they showed him-- no, they pulled it up on a website. He literally thought-- it's the first question he said is, who designed this for you all?

He thought his family had gone so far that they had actually created a fake web site showing them that Donald Trump had been elected president. And it took him a few minutes, he's like, you're serious? He's president, he's president because we're in the dip.

I used to always wonder who I would be if I was alive during the Civil Rights Movement. Would I march? Would I protest? Would I do sit-ins? Would I be a Freedom Rider? Sometimes we wonder, wow, if I was in the civil rights movement would I be conservative or would I be a part of something more radical?

We wonder those things and I don't think we have to wonder anymore because the truth is the truest indication of who you would be if you were alive in this age, in the '60s or '70s, the truest indication of who you would be back then is who you are right now.

This really is my final thought. If you find yourself doing next to nothing about injustice in America right now, that's who you would have been in the '60s. You'd have been that guy who watched it all go by and said nothing. You'd have been that woman who watched it, might've been a little bothered by it but you didn't do anything about it. That's who you would have been. I'm sure of it.

If you're looking at all that we're experiencing right now in this country from mass incarceration, to police brutality, to economic inequality, to horrible even violence that women are experiencing in the workplace and beyond, if you look at all of that and you're just putting it on the game and living your life, that's exactly who you would have been in the '50s or '60s.

That's who you would have been. That's why I'm deeply encouraged to see these young men and women who are saying listen, I can't be in this dip and act like I'm not in it. It's going to take every single one of us to find ourselves out of it. I don't know what that means for you in particular but you have to get to work. Because we could be stuck here for a very long time. There's no hero figure, no savior figure coming. It's you, you have to step up.

Listen, I believe in you all, thank you so much for having me, for inviting me. God bless you, glad to see you. Take care.