

Courage My Friends Podcast Series III – Episode 11, Part 2
Telling Black Histories: Writing, Recuperation and Resistance

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

[music transition]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: I was already worried about my job, food and housing. So now I have to worry about healthcare as well?

STREET VOICE 2: Seems like we wanna jump back to normalcy so bad that we're not even trying to be careful at this point.

STREET VOICE 3: This is a 911 kind of situation for global climate crisis. This planet is our only home and billionaires space-race is not a solution. The earth is crying for survival. It is time for action.

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: How are the writing and telling of Black and Africadian histories also acts of recuperation and resistance? How decolonized are we... really? And what do we need to understand about power and White supremacy if we are truly to change the world for the better?

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In this two-part episode of The Courage My Friends podcast, *Telling Black Histories: Writing, Recuperation and Resistance*, we are very pleased to welcome the 4th Poet Laureate of Toronto and the 7th Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate, George Elliott Clarke.

In part two of this episode, Clark discusses past and current struggles against white and Western supremacy, the meaning of decolonization and shaping effective resistance in Canada and beyond.

As we pick up the conversation, Clark continues to reflect on his style of writing, his influences and finding his voice in the unique cadences of Black African English, or as he writes, in an English "that ain't broken, but blackened".

Here now is George Elliott Clarke.

You say in the disclaimer "George and Rufus Hamilton always lived outside boundaries, including knowledge, including history, including archives. They're 'encompassed' here only by unrestrained imagination." In terms of the language, you go on to say that, the English of this novel, "the English ain't broken, it's blackened."

And as somebody who doesn't come from the African experience, but does come from the English Caribbean experience, I can't tell you how important it is to hear that. This language that we speak in all parts of the world, that is just sort of off the center, or is the marginal dialect of the proper English - in the Caribbean would say "proper English". To hear you describe it as not broken, which is the way we always describe it, but it's blackened.. Gives it such a legitimacy, such a pride. It's not broken.

GEORGE: Resh, I wanna thank you so much for that. Because I was also trying to write in a way that my own community would feel a way to enter in. And hear themselves, hear our stories, in our way of speaking. And not be turned off by an overly, I wanna say "proper English" along with the notion of proper English. Because there's also a class aspect to this of course, in terms of the imperialist vs. the colonized and the upper class vs. the lower class.

In *The Tempest* Shakespeare gives those great lines to Caliban: "You taught me your language, and my prophet on it is I know how to curse."

RESH: And then Aimé Césaire took in a different direction. Right?

GEORGE: Aimé Césaire, beloved Caesar, beloved Caesar, to give it the English translation of his great name.

You were asking me about poets who influenced me earlier and I gotta say Aimé Césaire in writing French in the way that he did - and he was so inventive, an extremely learned man and I hasten to add a communist. I gotta emphasize it. Beloved Caesar was a real fire breathing communist. Yay!

RESH: Yeah.

GEORGE: Along with that, he was also someone who was extremely learned. The guy knew Latin. Latin! Along with of course proper French. But he grew up in

Martinique, in the capital. And being exposed to "the vulgar French" of the underclass, of the Black peasantry, the Black underclass, the Black lumpen proletariat.

And then when he comes to write his great epic poem, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, published in book form 1940 with an introduction by André Breton, who was a serialist, if not quite a communist.

Anyway, this was a model for me, although I certainly don't do it as well as he did it. He splices together the underclass French, the lumpen proletariat French, the peasant class French, the slang and jocular expressions, and so on, with very formal French. And with Latin!

And then in his later works, he deliberately invents new French words and actually also new Latin words while also still using Black slang, Black French expressions. So he puts together this incredible melodic melange in creating his masterful works of poetry.

He also has an extremely excellent play, *The Tragedy of King Christoph* based on the actual history of one of the first dictators of Revolutionary Haiti, Post-Emancipation Haiti, Henri Christoph who made himself an emperor and was extremely despotic on the level of a Caligula.

And then of course... Oh, Resh! I was speaking about it last night in one of my classes at University Toronto. *Discours sur le colonialisme. Discourse on Colonialism* published, I think early 1950s. Around the same time as Franz Fanon published *Black Skin White Mask. Peau Noir, Masque Blanche*.

Discourse on Colonialism! Oh, my, my! It's a work of prose, very poetic prose. But most importantly, Aimé Césaire devastates, he demolishes, he destroys European imperialism.

RESH: Yep.

GEORGE: Western imperialism, white supremacist imperialism. He destroys it. Boom! And he destroys it by saying, when you talk about imperialism, you're talking about Hitlerism. When you talk about French imperialism in Africa, you're talking about French little Hitler's in Africa. When you talk about British imperialism in Africa, in the Caribbean, in India, all around the world, you're talking about British Hitlers doing the same thing Hitler did. Doing the very same thing Hitler did. Although they had more time, they had centuries. The oppression, the exterminations, the brutality, the enslavement, the robbery, the rapine, the absolute oppression of entire societies and peoples and so on.

Hitler did all that in only six years and basically contained to Europe. But the British and the French and the Dutch and the Spanish and the Portuguese did all that for hundreds of years. Hundreds of years! And they have never been called to account.

Where are the war crime trials for them? Where are the trials for their crimes against humanity? Where are they?

When are they all gonna go sit in the little glass boxes in the Hague along with the African dictators and the overthrown Middle East dictators. And European dictators - not very many of those though, get to go sit in the Hague. They get to retire to the French Riviera.

Where are the reparations that we deserve? Where are our reparations for those centuries of looting, those centuries of torture and murder and massacres ...and genocides attempted and actually executed. Especially when we think of Indigenous people in the Americas. And all the millions of Africans who drowned, thrown overboard or jumped overboard from slave ships during the Middle Passage, during the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

What about all that?

Is the record suddenly wiped clean, we don't want to talk about that anymore?

When the West, the so-called West - Europe and its satellite states, which include Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and other White European dominated enclaves around the world- that's what we mean when we say West. When we talk about the family of nations, the community of nations. That's what we mean.

Because they are very clear that that does not include people of color.

Trying to get into the west as immigrants, as refugees even, don't have a very easy way to get here. And if they do get into the West, they get deported as fast as possible. Or imprisoned in massive numbers.

I remember there was an invasion of Iraq in 2003 that was supposed to like, make all oppressions disappear in Iraq. And I'm not gonna say anything more about that except I wonder if the Iraqi people believe that those mission objectives were actually attained.

And what about liberating South Africa? Back in the days of apartheid, where were the American and the Canadian and the British Armed Forces then in terms of taking down an extremely oppressive apartheid regime? No, we wanted to do business. We even fought against the idea of sanctions on South Africa. to get rid of apartheid. We didn't think it was a good idea, cuz you gotta have business, right?

Cuba sent troops. Cubans died to liberate South Africa.

We didn't do that. No, because they're part of the W,st. They're our friends. We're not gonna do anything against apartheid regimes.

The West has no right to talk about human rights or civil liberties even. They got no right to talk about it. I don't wanna hear them talk about it. Cause they're a bunch of hypocrites.

RESH: Yeah. And I was having this conversation with Vijay Prashad, last year. They're also only 12% of the world, this Western world, which leaves the rest of the 88%.

And it's interesting what you're talking about. Because one of your poems in volume three of your epic poem, *Canticles*, really sort of captures this voice, but historically And I wonder if you could read it, *Statement from Hegel 1807*.

GEORGE: Vijay Prashad. And I gotta say, I'm so happy his voice is there. Your voices are there. Because I think it's really important that we understand this. And it's gonna maybe surprise some people because I'm gonna say it so succinctly. But I'm also give some credit to Vijay for this in case anybody wants to blame me, they can start by blaming him. But here's the statement succinctly: The West is planning a war on China.

The west is planning to go to war with China as soon as possible. And they may try and do it in a proxy way by basically provoking the Peoples' Republic to attack Taiwan.

Now, why should they want to do that? Well, what we all need to understand about the 12% that runs the 88% of the world, what we need to understand about that 12% is that they like it. They like our world being with this situation because it's been this way for 500 years.

We gotta remember this! Ever since Columbus got lost and ended up on a Bahamian island in the Atlantic and thought that he had reached a passage to India. Ever since 1492, that 12% of the world has run the entire rest of the world, the entire 88%. And they did it for 500 years.

They did it even when they were fighting each other. Even World War I was a struggle about Africa, about who was gonna have colonies in Africa. World War I, the Great War, which helped set up conditions for World War II; which was basically Germany saying if we can't have colonies in Africa, we're gonna colonize the rest of Europe, which is exactly what they tried to do.

So he applied to Europe, what the other major European empires had done to the rest of the world, to people of color.

So for 500 years, Europe and its satellites have dominated the rest of the world, economically, but also militarily. Because what they learned very early on is that if you're able to loot and rape the rest of the world, you can build up very sophisticated and powerful militaries to continue the oppression.

For the first time in 500 years, a nation that is run by people of color, the Peoples' Republic of China is at a point of actual contention for being the number one economic power in the world. And possibly even overtake the United States.

I believe that the West is desperate to somehow stop the Peoples' Republic of China from overtaking the West, both economically and militarily, and that they will stoop to war as a means to try to prevent that from happening. And for anyone who doubts what I'm saying or thinks that I'm crazy in saying it, I want you to ask yourselves, when was the last time you heard any positive news about the world's most populous nation? There's got to be some good news amongst those more than 1 billion people. There's got to be some good news there.

Our mainstream media have been demonizing China, demonizing China every chance they get. And I think it's tied into this effort to try to build up hostility to make us all want to go to war with that nation. And we should all understand that a war against the People's Republic of China prosecuted by the West, even if they use Taiwan as a provocation, is very likely to be a war that will be resolved with nuclear weapons.

I hate to say it, but that is my deepest fear right now, that the western economies, the western governments built on looting and savagery, savagery against people of color all around the world for 500 years, want to maintain their privilege by somehow degrading immensely the Peoples' Republic of China.

And now I'll read the poem. *Statement from Hegel, 1807*

Africa can never triumph over Europa, / for they are de Hunde - black dogs, whose souls are as invisible as is their Innocence. / But the subsequent remains untested, for the realms are jungles - natural, green ruins.

All of Africa is a slimy and grimy prison, / and their Eternity looks dusty, / perceptible only as fossils..

One cannot spy in Africa / even the deformities / of our pagan divinities.

Where is the evidence that Africans can even char or scorch wood / let alone score and chisel metal?

Their barbarously babbling priests enact a soiled Sensibility; / They're a clack of rabid gravediggers. They're a clack of rabid gravediggers.

Written in St. John New Brunswick, 6th of November, 2015.

RESH: Thank you for reading that because it does align very much with what you are saying about the state of global politics. And it's interesting how an historical, colonizing, racist voice really resonates with what's happening now.

And the reason that I asked you to read that poem is because when I read it, I immediately thought of the words of the Foreign Policy Chief of the European Union, Josep Borrell, who last year gave a speech about Europe being a garden while the rest of the world is a jungle, and basically that Europe has to keep the jungle at bay. And it was almost as if it was a continuation of that poem.

Have we moved that far from the colony, how post-colonial are we? What does decolonization mean to you, George?

GEORGE: We haven't actually decolonized enough. We have not. Because as soon as former colonies became self-governing nations, they were immediately enmeshed in global capitalism. Which in its triumph over the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, early 1990s; instead of acting with any humility, decided that actually now is the time to ramp up to hyper-capitalism facilitated by electronics.

As I like to say, in extreme shorthand: Capital flows, but labor pools.

In other words, capitalists figured out through electronic mechanisms that they can move their capital at the touch of a button anywhere around the world in a second. And thereby deprive economies of capital needed for their growth, development or to fund social services or what have you. While at the same time, labor remains trapped in national units, and governed by governments that are themselves hostages of markets thanks to neoliberal practices and the decay of labor movement, unionization, and so forth. So that some people no longer even believe that the taxes paid by the people should be spent for the people's betterment. But rather have to go offshore to fund someone else's capital development or prosperity.

So I think a real decolonization ultimately has to involve absolute redistribution of income. Absolute redistribution of income. And has to be a system of actual sharing. And it also has to be a system where societies that were built on rapine and looting, will have to give up - for the sake of the environment of our planet as well - have to give up some of the ill-gotten gains that were reaped off the backs of mainly people of color from around the world. And to have that wealth transferred to all the places where it can actually do some good. Especially as we face massive climate change as a result of the over industrialization, overdevelopment of the so-called North and the West. And make sure that the Global South and the East, where the bulk of the planet's humanity is located, actually get to have an ability to live comfortably, with a decent share of the world's wealth and the world's resources.

That's the only way to maintain a planet that is environmentally sustainable and also a planet where war will disappear because there will be no need for conquering in order to have resources. Or conquering in order to have -to use the Nazi term *Lebensraum* - which the Europeans actually prosecuted by colonizing and sending their peasantry to Turtle Island and other places, which is how they solved their class problem between peasants and aristocrats 500 years ago. You send your peasants to the Americas, where some of them can then become slave masters, lording it over enslaved, chained and transplanted, transported Africans,

So when we look at the world today, it's a result of those 500 years of massive criminality. I don't care if people want to talk about the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. I don't want to hear about people talking about the glories of the American Constitution. I don't wanna hear it. I don't wanna hear any of that malarkey, because I quote Hegel again. "World history is world judgment".

I don't wanna hear about the western belief in democracy and human rights and civil liberties; because 500 years of world history have told us that that's a big lie.

Oh yeah, we believe in this. No, you don't. Because the way you've practiced your actual beliefs around the world shows us you don't believe for a second in any of these things that you try to preach to other people.

RESH: Indeed, and you've written very much about this global history as well. But right now we're hearing voices from Africa, Asia, South, and Central America saying, no! Enough. This is our time. We need to move away from you know, this unipolar order of just having one center of power within the Western and White world and move or, or move back to a Multipolar world perhaps for the first time since colonization. So how are you seeing this?

GEORGE: So I would just say folks, understand your history. Look at your history. You wanna know where the world is going? Look at where the world is. Look at where the world has been.

What that tells me, and I hope I'm wrong, is that the West will not accept having a Multipolar world.

When the Soviet Union existed we did have at least a bipolar world, which was known as the Cold War as both sides jockeyed for their position. Often using developing nations former colonies of one empire or another as the places where they fight their proxy wars to try to establish who was really gonna be the dominant power. But once the Soviet Union collapsed, the West had again a unipolar world and decided that that's the way it should be. And that there's no need to placate the "jungle outside", if we can just lord it over everybody, while constantly reminding them that we are the sources of justice and liberty and equality, and always have been. So we deserve to be the dominant persons on the planet and everyone else will have to dance to the tune that we call.

As Malcolm X said, "you're a bunch of hypocrites". You're trying dress it up with all kinds of Judeo-Christian, goody, goody talk. At the same time, you're expressing all these, nostrums and parables of your supposed virtues; you are armed to the teeth. You are armed to the teeth.

You are building jails to house masses of people seeking relief from the oppression that you have engineered in their home countries. They're seeking relief from the oppression that you have engineered and that you back in terms of the despots and tyrants that you prop up. And then these oppressed peoples flee for the refuge of your democracy and your attitude is to let them drown in the Mediterranean. Your

attitude is let them drown in the Atlantic, especially if they're Haitians fleeing variations of despotism that have been aided and abetted by the so-called West. And partially imposed by the French demand that the Haitians pay for their Emancipation. And the turn around and say, we're the land of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.

What about Algeria? And what about Vietnam? Where was your Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité then, in those nations where people had to fight vicious civil wars in order to get their emancipation.

I don't even wanna start talking about the British or the Americans.

But then there's Canada, a nation I love and I truly do. I am a patriot. I don't mind saying that. I am a patriot for this country.

On the other hand, how can we call ourselves decolonized when we still have a foreign monarchy as the ultimate power in this state. And I know people are gonna say, but it's only on paper. It's a constitutional monarchy. They don't really have any real power.

And I say, oh yeah, tell the Australians. They got a constitutional monarchy and in 1975, the Queen sacked their democratically elected Prime Minister, Goff Whitland, who was the first labor, that is to say the first left leaning Prime Minister of Australia. Was making noises of closing down the CIA base in Australian. That didn't go very far. Queen Elizabeth II, removed him from office.

I don't think that King Charles today is just a cute figure on postage stamps or on the money as he soon will be. King Charles is the Head of State in Canada today, along with the Queen Consort Camilla.

Whether you like it or not, that's the way it is. And if you don't like it, what are you gonna do about it? You gotta have to change the Constitution. And why not change the Constitution? Because, how beneficial is it for you to have a foreign monarchy as your ultimate power?

And yes, you can vote in whoever you want in the cities and the provinces and the federal government. You can vote in whoever you want. That's true. But the ultimate power is still with a foreign monarch. And if you don't like it, you gotta change it.

RESH: So in terms of genuine decolonization, what are some of the changes you'd like to see?

GEORGE: I've got a whole list of changes that I would like to see happen.

The first one is displace the Crown. They call it the Crown for a reason. You got Crown lands for a reason. Cause it's a monarchical state. And I would argue that we should replace the Crown with Indigeneity. Indigenous culture would then become a primary culture, as British and French cultures are now.

We like to say we're a multicultural, diverse country, and we are. But it doesn't change the fact that once you have two official languages, and one of them is the monarchical power in the country; you have one ethnicity that is superior to others. Because the closer you are to the Crown, the more status you have in this country.

So if you want to have a truly egalitarian society, you have to displace the Crown.

And I would say that it should be replaced with Indigeneity. In which case then everything in the country, all the laws in the country, the Supreme Court of Canada, everything has to change to reflect Indigenous principles. Indigenous principles would then become the primary means of governance, not British principles. Or in Quebec the code civile.

Canada would then become a non-Western country?

Did I just say that? Did I just say that if we displaced the Crown with Indigeneity, we would cease to be a western country. We would become a country indigenous to the Americas. Right now, Canada is not indigenous to the Americas. It's a British structured monarchy that is an imposition upon the Americas.

We have to change the Constitution. It is not a neutral thing.

I wanna remind people that the first sentence of the second paragraph of the original BNA Act, the original Constitution of the Dominion of Canada, says Confederation is happening "to further the interests of the provinces, but also to support the interests of the British Empire".

And that sentence is so clear. It's so clear in what it says about Canada and its connection to Britain, that when Laurier was Prime Minister, he had it removed from the Constitution, 1911, he struck it out. As a Francophone Catholic he could not abide. But even though that sentence got taken out of the Constitution in 1811, the idea is still there. The idea is still there.

Pierre Trudeau was the only Prime Minister in my lifetime ever, kind of like said mm-hmm. Especially the Falklands war. He said, oh, we're not going to help the British take back the Malvinas from Argentina. There were people right here in Toronto who were upset with Prime Minister Trudeau. " We gotta help liberate the Malvinas or the Falkland Islands and return them to British control.

It would be interesting to see if his son, could be as independent-minded as his father was, at least in some circumstances.

RESH: It would be interesting. And I think we wait with baited breath. I have, I have two more. I have two more questions for you, George.

You've spoken about this judgment that is a long time in coming.

In the last couple of years, we have seen in Canada the bringing down of monuments, changing of names of public buildings, changing school curriculum. Black Lives Matter, Truth and Reconciliation, systemic racism coming into the public discourse. Does this moment give you hope?

GEORGE: As wonderful as it is to see movements of people dedicated to bringing about better lives for Indigenous and Black people, Muslims in Canada, for Muslims, Hispanics and Blacks in the United States, and for women in the United States for crying out loud. Look at the victories that have been won and whether or not they were able to be sustained. And if they were not able to be sustained, why weren't they able to be sustained?

We've got lessons all over the place to understand this.

The Americans fought a civil war and slavery. And they did, great. But within a decade, African Americans were forced into peonage in the South and maintained by Ku Klux Klan terrorism to deprive them of their constitutionally granted rights to exercise democratic rights without losing their lives, being strung up from a tree somewhere from a railway bridge.

That's real life, that's real history.

It took a hundred years after the Civil War, before Black Americans were able to vote in the South. And then 50 years later, those rights are being taken away by their Supreme Court. Even by a Black Supreme Court Justice. Clarence Thomas saw sitting up there saying, you don't need to have voting rights.

Some of the people who voted for Trump were voting for 1950s America, they're voting for McCarthy to come back. They were voting for Negroes to come back and stay in their place. They're voting for women to go back into the kitchens and living rooms of their homes and not be in the workforce. That's what they were voting for. They were voting for turning back the clock. 50, 60 years.

So if you don't want that kind of regression, you've gotta put in rights and laws, constitutions that will be watertight, that will not allow for regression on any of these areas. Nor for the expansion of the Neoliberal, Right. The Reaganite Right. The extreme Right. The fascistic Right, who are always waiting to come back to what they think of as being the good old days of God-granted patriarchy, white supremacy, evangelical Christianity.

I look at the treatment of police in terms of their history of violations of Black and Indigenous, especially civil liberties and human rights for hundreds of years. And I say, it's right to protest their oppressiveness. It's right to demand that families, be given justice and proper compensation for the loss, the unlawful loss of loved ones due to hyper-policing.

But I will also say in the next breath that you will change nothing.

You will change nothing ultimately, unless you put in place unquestioned civil authority over police forces. No police force wants to have strict civilian oversight. When I say strict civilian oversight, I mean strict civilian oversight.

I don't want a society where Black and Brown people have to say, we can't breathe. I want a society where the police say they can't breathe. And the reason why they can't breathe is that the civil authority is such a tight leash that they cannot use force unless it is truly lawful. And that if they are ever guilty of any unlawful use of force, that the penalties will be swift and severe. So swift and severe, that police unions will be deprived of their pension funds, forced into penury. They would be unable to afford the lawyers to tie up civil complaints about police misconduct forever, and forever, and forever with their endless supply of funds.

The civil control of police should be so powerful, that in a city like Toronto, there would be no question that the police would get \$50 million because they wouldn't get it. It would go to housing. It would go to healthcare. It would go to addiction healing centers. This is where we would be sending the money. We wouldn't be sending it into police forces who have proven that they cannot deal with persons who are addicted, persons who have mental health issues, persons who have other social challenges; because their first resort is force, which is not a resolution. Except for the fact that it leaves someone grievously injured or worse, dead. Or thrown in prison forever for a relatively minor infraction. Or for an infraction that might have been prevented if there, in fact, had been programs in place to help a person who needs help.

Whatever it is that we want, we want to end police killings of unarmed Black men and Indigenous men and women and youth? Oh, we can do that, but we're gonna have to vote in place governments that will put in place very strict regiments on police forces, which again, should be so harsh, that the policeman dreads, strapping on the holster, with the taser, the baton, the gun.

Fearful, not because someone's going to attack them, but because if they use that force and they get it wrong, then they will face severe penalties. So tough they dread going out the door in the same way that Black people sometimes dread getting in their cars or dread going outside their doors or dread walking into a shop because some security guard is going to come and pester them or accuse them of something simply because of the fact they walked through that door or they walked into that building or they went into that student residence, when in fact they are a student who resides there.

I love my brethren and sistren who put forth the protests against these kinds of injustice. I understand the appeal of the cry of "Defund the police". But I think the cry that should go up is where is the civilian control? Where is the strict civilian control of police?

When the police are saying, we don't want civilian control, that's when you say you're gonna get civilian control. When they say, we don't want public interference, that's

when you ensure there is public interference. Because they're telling you what will work.

You should listen to them!

And if they say, oh, we don't wanna do this job anymore. Great. Let 'em go. And bring in people who are willing to be democratic enough to accept civilian control of their ability to use lethal force.

Yes, I have hope. I gotta have hope. I'm also a realist. And my argument to folks would be, if you really want systemic change, then you not only have to change the system, you have to put in safeguards to ensure that there won't be any backsliding. That folks are gonna wake up and say, well, you know what? It's okay if women don't have abortion rights. It's okay. We can turn back the clock on it. No, you gotta have safeguards to ensure that the clock cannot be turned back. Because the forces of reaction are always, always waiting to turn back the clock.

RESH: Yeah, so basically we can have hope, but we need to be realistic about it. Change isn't easy or simple.

GEORGE: In 1970 John Lennon and Yoko bought billboards all around the world, expressing their opposition to the Vietnam War.

The slogan was beautiful.

The more I think about it, I can see just how ingenious the slogan was. And it was simply this, "War is over." In large letters " War is over", and then in smaller letters underneath, in brackets was this very simple slogan, four words, " if you want it".

"War is over ... if you want it."

What I love about that slogan is that it says to everybody who read it that, especially in a democracy, whatever it is that you, the people want, you can have it.

Whatever it is that you the people together, collectively want in a democracy, you can have it. You can vote yourself that.

You can have an end to war. You can have more distribution of income and wealth. You can have it. It's not impossible. In a democracy. you can actually vote yourselves this. If you wanna have healthcare, you can vote yourself more healthcare. You want more environmental regulations, you wanna reduce hydrocarbon extraction and usage, not a problem. You can vote yourselves that if you want it.

You want to make sure that there's Indigenous management of lands and resources? We can vote ourselves that. We can vote to get rid of the Crown. We can

change the constitution. This is not hard. All we need to do is put in place governments that will actually do what we want them to do, which is what democracy is supposed to be, right?

So I say to my progressive brethren and sistren, whatever it is that we collectively want, we can have it.

So what's stopping us? Well, actually nothing is stopping us, except our own blind obedience to the way things have always been.

RESH: Right. So, a blind obedience on one side or a type of myopia on the other, an ahistorical, perhaps too narrow understanding of change. Which is a point made in *J'Accuse!*

GEORGE: *J' Accuse!: Poem Versus Silence*, is a critical read of the excesses of so-called Cancel Culture and the failures of cancel culture, which I can say very easily amount to this.

The woke/cancelers have power to destroy individuals, which they can do, and they've done it. And they may continue to do so. And even individuals who in their minds deserve to be punished in the public square, destroyed online or what have you, that's possible, they can do that - the cancellers and vigilantes.

On the other hand, as they have also proven, they cannot destroy oppressive institutions. How nice it would be if they could, but they don't have that ability. They can destroy individuals, but not institutions. I think that's a problem.

Because to go after individuals, any mob can do that. But to go after institutions, a mob isn't what you need. You need a revolutionary movement. You need a revolutionary movement.

A mob can lynch an individual, but a mob can't bring down an institution. So I would remind folks who consider themselves woke to really wake up to this fundamental fact of political action.

I'm going to read this poem, which is called XXXIV in Roman Numerals.

But to that tumultuous Panic, I was in incognizant / for moonlight chopped at my silhouette / on my grape-splattered bib of earth / with a slop of blush - Rosato - plus mythic giblets / add-on splashes of white vino and a dash of anisette / of wallet-shattering Worth / at spiffy Locando Montin Antico / where iffy Pound had sought shelter from Suspicion.

Was not the right thing left for Pound to do only to confess? / To figure the signature luminary professing, blaring his ineffaceable Fascism / echoing a technique of Candour {compatible with his truth / tabulating how the swastika caught him - taut - in its black, tarantula tentacles}? / Truly was this koan telegraphed - compassed / by

The Pisan - partisan - Cantos, {nothing half-assed}. / Meanwhile, I limped - a gimp - about that pirate marsh - Venice cuttlefish-ink-dark / scuttling, outfitted with harsh cephalixin and indomethacin, parked in my jaw, swallowed with phlegm.

{And Pound one more the poet exemplar- since Ovid - since Lorca - since Mandelstam - since B.C. {Before COVID} - since Malcolm X - since Aesop {th' Ethiope} - since Sappho - since Juvenal - since Wilde - since Sade - since Cicero - since Dante - since Moloise - since Riel - since Euripides - since Saro-Wiwa - since Brodsky - since Socrates - since Khashoggi - since Céline - since Ould al- Wahid - since "Angela" - since Gramsci - since Eddy Said - since Neruda - since Akhmatova - since Zola -to run afoul of regime after regime of attempted regimen of the Soul.)

RESH: Oh, wonderful. Thank you, George. A powerful rebuke to currents of divisiveness and as you say, destructiveness that don't necessarily endanger institutions of power but may even, and if unwittingly help to uphold them. When what we really need is solidarity to challenge power.

GEORGE: So that's why despite noble acts of resistance and renaming and reclaiming, and resurrections and rhetoric of improvements of this, that, or the other thing, I again look at world history. I look at Canadian history, I look at American history. And I say, as Frederick Douglas said, Power concedes nothing without a struggle.

But once you have actually won or you think you have won, you cannot afford to rest easy on your laurels. Because as soon as you think you have won and you begin to relax, you begin to demobilize. The forces of reaction will slowly but surely begin to reemerge. And with time will actually corrode, erode, overthrow the changes you thought you had won.

I'll just give one quick example of what I'm talking about here. Voting rights in the United States, was the greatest struggle of the Civil rights movement. Martin Luther King's greatest gift to the American Republic was the Voting Rights Act, signed into law by Lyndon Johnson, 1965.

With that Voting Rights Act, Black peasantry in the South, Black oppressed people in the South were able to launch an electoral revolution. They were able to elect Black politicians for the first time since Reconstruction, since slavery.

By 1968, within three years of the passage of the Voting Rights Act, thousands of corrupt, racist white, Dixiecrat officials were thrown out of office by a tsunami of Black voters. Unleashed, who threw all those crackers outta office, threw them out on their asses, on their butts, on their heads. Just tossed them out! And put in Black and often progressive politicians who did progressive stuff for everybody. Black, white, brown, red, yellow - Progressive stuff for everybody.

Martin Luther King's electoral revolution to get Black voters in the South, the power to vote, and therefore to alter their circumstances, and it was successful.

Then 2013, Barack Obama, first Black President in the United States is in office when the Supreme Court, which was backed by Republican appointees begins to corrode the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

And which Trump noticed. Oh, the Supreme Court, they're willing to corrode voting rights, which is gonna impact Hispanics and Blacks, especially. And the Southern states ran quickly to take advantage of the corrosion of voting rights and threw up roadblocks for Muslims, Hispanics, and Blacks to be able to vote.

And that's one reason why it was easier for Trump to be elected, even though he actually received fewer votes than Hillary Clinton. But he did win in the Electoral College and became 45th President as a reaction to the number 44, Obama. And then Trump further stacks the Supreme Court, who then overturned abortion rights for half the American population.

The effect of that judgment was to say loudly, loudly to half of the American population that you can be enslaved by the prospect of forced impregnation, to carry an unwanted child to term. This should send tremors and shockwaves through everybody, especially every American who considers himself, herself, themselves, patriots and believing in the American constitution.

How can you call yourself a progressive nation that believes in equal rights and liberty and justice, and you're gonna condemn the Taliban in Afghanistan, you're gonna condemn patriarchal tyranny in other nations all around the world, when your Supreme Court has just said, we're okay with patriarchal tyranny against half of our population, half of our voters, we are prepared to order them to carry a pregnancy to term.

You don't have any legs to stand on. You got no right to go anywhere and talk about anything. You can't talk about gender equality. What's wrong with you? Are you crazy? You gonn. Get up in the UN and condemn somebody else? No. Everybody in the US got stand up and condemn you. Everybody in the UN has got to stand up and condemn you.

Even when progressive folks win victories, it doesn't matter unless you can sustain a consensus and a collaboration to ensure that that victory remains unchallenged.

In 1943, Tommy Douglas won healthcare for the province of Saskatchewan. And over the next 20 years, various provinces under pressure from their populations decided, yes, we should have healthcare. And yet, not a day goes by practically in this country. When somebody, even Premiers, are saying, we can't afford this, we can't afford that. And seniors are dying in emergency rooms in Nova Scotia or can't get a family doctor in Ontario, and we say we believe in healthcare.

Well, if we really believe in healthcare, we would make sure the resources were there. We would make sure that we would allow foreign trained doctors and nurses to be able to practice without hindrance. And we would put the resources there

instead of spending how much money for how many jet fighters to be used against who or whom?

The people must be the dominant force in a democracy.

That's how you solve it, folks. That's how you do it. It's not gonna be achieved by changing a name on a building or even putting in a Black police chief or Black deputy police chief. Or even a Black person sitting on a council somewhere, does not guarantee that you're gonna have any better policing. You got a Black man and now happily, luckily, a Black woman on the Supreme Court of the United States. But their mere presence doesn't mean that you will have progressive decisions.

I'm happy that we now have an Indigenous woman appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. That is excellent. However, this Indigenous appointee will still have to interpret the laws according to the Constitution of Canada.

So just by putting people that you think might properly apply judgment that will be helpful to racialized minorities and marginalized communities, doesn't necessarily mean that that's what will happen.

Women might have wanted to celebrate, for instance, the election of Margaret Thatcher in Britain. She's a woman. But progressive? Of course she's not. So how much of a benefit is she actually to women, even as a symbol?

I hate to say it, but even with our first Black President Barack Obama, and yes I know that he had a Republican dominated Congress that made life hard for him. But one reason why he ended up with that Republican controlled Congress is that when he came into power he demobilized. He demobilized all the people who put him in power. He demobilize and told them to go home. They went home. Next thing he knows, the forces of reaction have mobilized the Tea Party against him.

So instead of keeping a progressive coalition together, he disbanded that progressive coalition. And worse, even though Wall Street had perpetrated one of the greatest frauds in world history crashing the global economy in 2007, 2008, who went to prison? Who went to jail? Only one person went to prison. The capitalists who crashed the capitalist system, they still had their yachts, they still had their mansions. They still had their golden handshake, pensions, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Nothing happened to them.

For the mom and dads of the working class and middle class who lost their homes and were hopeful that President Obama would give them some kind of relief. Got nothing. Got nothing.

And he also became the first President to bomb Africa when he bombed Libya with NATO .

RESH: And to militarize Africa as well. I believe he was the first one to put in US military bases on continental Africa.

GEORGE: Yep, he was. The African Command.

So there's a guy, people say, oh, progressive, progressive, progressive. He was as progressive as JFK was progressive .

RESH: So more female does not mean more feminist and more racialized does not mean more anti-racist.

GEORGE: Oh, nicely put.

RESH: Okay. Now, on your website, georgeelliottclarke.net, that features your work and reflections, you conclude your introduction to the site by saying "I hope you find it an incitement." George, what do you hope to incite?

GEORGE: A lust for justice and a joy in creativity.

RESH: Then George, send us off on a note of joy.

GEORGE: *Haligonian Market Cry*, in my book, *Blue*.

Haligonian Market Cry, I dedicate it to the late great Africadian poet Maxine Tynes. It's based on a Black Market crier in the Halifax Market, as I remember it as a boy.

I got hallelujah watermelons! - virginal pears! - virtuous corn! - Munit haec et altera vincit! / Lucious, fat-ass watermelons! - rump plump pears! - big-butt corn! Le gusta este jardin?

Come-and-get -it cucumbers - hot-to- trot, lust-fresh cucumbers! / Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?

Watermelons! Go-to-church-and-get-redeemed watermelons! / Un bacio... un bacio ancora!

Good God cucumbers! - righteous pears! - golden Baptist corn! Lieben wir alle nicht die Sinneslust! I got sluttish watermelons! - sinful cucumbers! - jail-bait pears!-

Planted by Big Mouth Chaucer and picked by Sugar Shakespeare!

Planted by Big Mouth Chaucer and picked by Sugar Shakespeare!

RESH: That that has to be the most illicit grocery list I've ever heard. That's brilliant. Thank you so much, George.

GEORGE: Thank you, Resh.

RESH: It has been an absolute pleasure having you on this podcast. So thank you again so much.

GEORGE: Thank you so much and happy Spring. May it arrive soon!.

RESH: That was George Elliott Clarke, acclaimed poet, novelist, and 7th Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate.

And this brings us to the end of our Fall/Winter series.

Please join us for our Spring series beginning later this month.

This is The Courage My Friends podcast. I'm your host Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to the Courage My Friends Podcast, a co-production between rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College and with the support of the Douglas Coldwell Layton Foundation.

Produced by Resh Budhu of the Tommy Douglas Institute, Breanne Doyle of rabble.ca and the TDI planning committee: Chandra Budhu and Ashley Booth. For more information about the Tommy Douglas Institute and this series, visit georgebrown.ca/TommyDouglasInstitute.

Please join us again for the next episode of the Courage My Friends podcast on rabble.ca