**File: AliceGoffman.mp3
Duration: 1:37:50
Date: 29/04/2015
Typist: 710**

START AUDIO

[Background noise 0:00:00-0:06:55].

Howard Wollman: I think we’ll make a start this afternoon. My name is Howard Wollman; I’m chair of BSA. I’m just going to say a very few introductory remarks, just to welcome, as this is our first plenary here. Welcome everybody, to the conference; welcome to Glasgow Caledonian. We’re delighted to be back, at Glasgow Caledonian; we had a very good conference here a few years ago. We’re delighted by everything, apart from perhaps the building works. What a great time to be having our conference, in Glasgow, when so much is happening in Glasgow and in Scotland, and the island just across the way, in Edinburgh.

Who’d have thought that a UK general election would mainly be focused on Scotland, so it’s very timely to be here. A couple of brief announcements, and I’ll hand you over to Eileen, to chair the session. A very boring announcement, which is just clarify, those who have read the programme, very thoroughly, will see that there are two different timings, for this evenings civic reception at City Hall; the correct time is seven o ‘clock; not 7:30, it’s seven o ‘clock, so that’s just immediately following on the last session, I think it’s the screen plenary sessions late afternoon.

The second thing to say is just to say when you finish, the plenary session, our speaker session and questions, please remain in your seats, because we’ll then be having the presentation of distinguished service award, which Lynn Jamieson, the BSA president, will be doing and she’ll tell you all about that and our recipient later on. I’ll now hand you over to Eileen Green, who’s chairing the session.

Eileen Green: Hello, everybody. Can you hear me? It’s my very great pleasure to introduce Doctor Alice Goffman, the first plenary speaker. Alice is an urban geographer –ethnographer - who grew up in Philadelphia and attended \_\_\_[0:09:01] school at Princeton. She’s now an assistant professor, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. As an under graduate, at the University of Pennsylvania, Alice got a job in the company’s cafeteria, where she worked with a group of elderly black women, who managed the lunch and dinner service.

By sophomore years, she’d moved into the neighbourhood, which she refers to as Sixth Street, and befriended the grandchildren of these cafeteria workers. Her book, which many of you will have heard of, On the Run, draws on six years of field work, and documents the ways in which police and prison came to organise everyday life; not only for the young men involved, dipping and dodging the authorities, but also for partners, family and neighbours. Alice is now going to talk about the field work and the ideas behind her book.

Alice Goffman: Hi everybody; how are you doing today? This is the first time I’ve been at BSA; I’m super excited, it’s my first time in Scotland; thank you so much. Thanks to Lynn Jamieson, thank you to Howard Wollman; thank you, I mean, for that really beautiful introduction. Can you all hear me okay? I don’t need a mic?

Audience: Audience agreement.

Alice Goffman: I need a mic?

Female: Use a mic, please.

Female: Can you move to the middle?

Alice Goffman: Move to the middle; okay. How about now? Is that a mic?

Female: It’s not on.

Alice Goffman: It’s on; it’s not on.

Male: This one. You just have to speak into it.

Alice Goffman: I just have to speak like this?

Audience: (Laughter).

Alice Goffman: I’m almost sure enough that’s not even a big reach. Can you all hear me?

Audience: Yes.

Alice Goffman: Is there a mic I could hold? No. Sorry, everyone.

[Pause in audio 0:11:18-0:11:39].

Alice Goffman: How about now?

Audience: Yes.

Alice Goffman: Alright. On the path that American children travel, to adulthood, two major public institutions oversee the journey. The first institution is the one we hear a lot about; college, universities. Some of you may remember the excitement that you felt, when you set off, for university. Some of you may be at university right now, and you’re feeling this excitement, at this very moment. University has some shortcomings, in the US; it’s very expensive, it leaves young people in debt, but, overall, it’s a pretty good path. Young people emerge, from university, with pride and with great friends and with a lot of knowledge, about the world, and, importantly, with a better chance in the labour market, than they had when they started. Today, I want to talk about the second institution that is overseeing the journey, from childhood to adulthood, in the United States, and that institution is prison. Young people, on this journey, are meeting with probation officers, instead of teachers. They’re going to court dates instead of to class, their junior year [bride 0:12:57] is instead a trip to a state correctional facility. They’re emerging from young adulthood not with degrees, in business and English, but with criminal records. This institution is also really costly; $44,000 a year to send a young person to prison, in New Jersey, even more in New York, in California, but here kids are getting a cold prison cell, and a permanent mark against them, when they come home and apply for work.

There are more and more young people on this journey, to adulthood, than ever before in the United States, and that’s because over the past four years our incarceration rate has grown by 700%. I’ve one slide to show, which I’m very proud of because I don’t usually ever have slides, but I have one now, so here it is. Here is the US incarceration rate, about 716 people per every 100,000 in the population; can you hear me? No.

Male: Yes.

Alice Goffman: Here’s the rest of the world and this is new; this is just in the past 30 years. That’s my slide.

Audience: (Laughter) (Applause).

Alice Goffman: What’s more, it’s not just that we’re sending so many people to prison; we’re sending African American young people to prison, and Latino young people; poor young people particularly. So the prison now stands firmly between the young people trying to make it, in the United States, and the fulfilment of the American dream. The problem is actually worse than this, because we’re not just drawing too many young kids into prison, from poor communities of colour. We’re saddling young people, in these communities, with court fines, with low level warrants, for probation violations, failure to appear in court, with court dates, living in half way houses, living on house arrest.

We’re asking them to negotiate a police force that is entering poor communities, of colour, not really for the purpose of promoting public safety, but to make arrest counts. Sometimes, as we saw recently, in Ferguson, to issue citations and extract a whole lot of money that lines city coffers. This is the hidden counterpoint, to our historic experiment, in punishment. Young people are worried that they’ll be stopped, searched and ceased, not only in the street, but in their homes, at school, and at their places of work. It’s this suspect and fugitive life that I’ve been trying to understand and write about, for the past decade.

If the problem is worse than what you imagined, there is also, I think, more cause for hope and that’s because, for the first time in decades, since the build-up of war and crime, and mass incarceration, we’re starting to talk about change. We’re starting a little movement for reform; we’re starting to maybe talk about finding a better way forward; a more human way forward, so I’m going to talk about that a little at the end. How are you doing?

Male: Good.

Alice Goffman: I got interested in this other path, to adulthood, when I was, myself, a college student studying at the University of Pennsylvania, in the 2000s. Pen sits within a historic African American section, of Philadelphia, so you’ve got these two kind of parallel journeys going on side by side. The majority white, private, university kids going to college there, and then kids in the adjacent neighbourhoods; some of whom are going to college, but many of whom are being carted off to prison. In my sophomore year, I started tutoring a young woman, who lived about ten minutes away, from the university. Soon, her cousin came home from juvenile detention, he was fifteen; a freshman in high school. I began to spend more and more time with him, and his friends and his family.

He lived in a mixed income African American neighbourhood, not far from the City Limits. It was part of this larger African American section, of the city, and compared to lots of other parts of this section, of the city, it was a really nice neighbourhood. It was a more middle classed neighbourhood, low crime rates, beautiful lawns, very nice row homes, still this neighbourhood hadn’t escaped 40 years of zero tolerance; war on crime. By the time I moved to this neighbourhood, in the early 2000s, police cameras had been placed on major streets, and police curfews had been established, for those under age eighteen, which meant that, essentially, anybody who looked under 30 could be stopped, searched, and their name could be run.

When stop and frisk came in, that became even more routinized. In the first eighteen months that I spent in the neighbourhood, I took note every time I observed any contact, between residents and the police, just in this four block radius. In that first year and a half, I watched the police stop, search people, chase people through the streets, run people’s names for warrants, pull people in for questioning, stop people in their cars or make an arrest, every single day with five exceptions. 52 times, in that first 18 months, I saw the police break down doors, and chase people through houses, or raid a house, or interrogate people in their homes.

I saw a helicopter circling overhead and beaming search lights, onto local streets, police blocking off traffic while they secured a crime scene or searched for evidence. Fourteen times in the first year and a half, I watched the police punch, choke, kick, stomp on or beat young people with [night 0:20:04] sticks after they had caught and cuffed them. Another way to explain the level of policing, and the fear that this induces, is in the games that children play. The first week I spent, in the neighbourhood, I saw two kids, one a seven year old and the other a five year old, play this game of chase, where the older kid had to run after the other, like cops and robbers.

When the older kid caught up to the younger child, he pushed him down, handcuffed him with imaginary handcuffs, took a quarter out of his pocket, laughing and yelling, “I’m ceasing that.” He asked the younger child if he had any warrants or if he was carrying any drugs. Sometimes I would see children give up running and simply stick their hands above their heads, against a wall, or lay flat on the ground with their hands behind their backs. Children would yell to each other, “I’m going to lock you up; I’m going to lock you up and you’re never coming home.”

Once I saw a six year old pull another child’s pants down, and try to do a cavity search. Bit by bit, I got to know two brothers, Chuck and Tim. They lived with their grandfather and their mother, in a two storey row home, with a front lawn and a back porch. Their mother was struggling with addiction, while the boys were growing up. It was their grandfather’s post office pension that supported the family mostly; since the welfare cuts in 1996, not a lot of support, from the Government, for people who were finding it tough to get jobs.

Their grandfather’s post office pension, it was a lot; it paid the bills, it paid the mortgage, but it couldn’t really pay for clothes and school supplies, and food, for growing boys. The family was really struggling. Chuck, the older brother, was eighteen when we met, in his senior year of high school. Tim, his younger brother, was ten. Tim tagged along a lot with Chuck; they were very close. Their middle brother had gone off to juvenile detention, by the time he turned eleven, so Chuck and Tim were… They were what each other had, and Tim would follow Chuck around kind of day and night. Chuck and Tim shared a small bedroom, on the second floor of this house.

When Chuck was in his sophomore year, he moved out of that bedroom, out of those bunk beds, down to the basement; he brought all his clothing down, he wanted his own space. Tim was eight, when his brother moved down to the basement, and he tried to put a brave face on it. Sometimes, when he couldn’t sleep, he would pad down there and crawl into bed with Chuck. At thirteen, Chuck began working for a local dealer, which meant that he could then buy food for himself and Tim, instead of asking his mum, for money that she didn’t have. This was before I met the family. Chuck told me that when he started working, for this local dealer, this was the first time that he and Tim had steady meals. Once he began working, for the local dealer, he could better regulate his mum’s addiction, because then she came to him, to get drugs, instead of buying drugs from other guys, in the neighbourhood, who sometimes came to the house and caused problems. Ironically, working for this dealer, had a kind of stabilising impact on the household, in lots of ways. So we met when Chuck was in his senior year, of high school. He stood six feet tall, \_\_\_[0:24:18] by basketball and boxing; his two favourite sports. That winter, in the school yard, another kid called his mum a crack whore, so Chuck pushed the kids face into the snow.

The school cops charged Chuck with aggravated assault. The kid was fine the next day; I think it was his pride that was hurt more than anything, but, anyway, since Chuck had just turned eighteen that fall, this aggravated assault charge, at school, sent him to adult county jail, on State Road, in North East Philadelphia. He sat there while his trial dates dragged on and on and on; he couldn’t afford bail, so he sat in jail for his entire senior year, of high school. About a month after Chuck went to jail, Tim stopped speaking. He would nod his head, but he didn’t make any words.

On the phone, in his phone calls home, from jail, Chuck would ask his mum to put Tim on the phone, so that he could talk to his brother, and he would try to make him laugh, he would imagine what he was doing, would make funny stories up, about the other people in the neighbourhood; sometimes Chuck smiled, but he never spoke. In his phone calls and letters home, Chuck tried to convince his mum to bring Tim, to the jail, to visit him. He said, “He just needs to see me, like, then he’ll be okay. He just doesn’t have anybody out there.”

Chuck’s mum didn’t have the ID required, to visit inmates, in county jail. She only had an old voter registration card and a social security card; not a state issued photo ID. Chuck’s friends, including me, tried to bring Tim to go and visit him, in jail, during this time, but he was a minor and his parent or guardian had to go with him, so that didn’t work either. Eight months after Chuck had got into this aggravated assault case, for the school yard fight, the judge, on the assault case, threw out most of the charges and Chuck came home, with only a few hundred dollars’ worth of court fees hanging over his head. Tim ran up the alleyway and grabbed hold of him, and stayed hugging him, through the whole evening festivities.

His mum had thrown this little party outside, on the porch. Finally, Tim fell asleep with his head in Chuck’s lap.
The next few months, Chuck set about the work of coaxing his younger brother to start speaking again. He moved back up to the room that he shared with Tim, in their childhood, so that Tim wouldn’t be alone at night. He stayed home most weekends and played video games, with Tim, on the small TV in the living room. “I’ll get it back,” Chuck said, “He just needs some quality time with me.” Tim nodded hopefully.

The following fall, Chuck tried to re-enrol as a senior, in high school, because he missed his senior year, but the school secretary told him that he was then nineteen and too old, to be re-admitted to high school. Then the judge, on his assault case, issued him a bench warrant, because he hadn’t paid the $225, in court fees, that came due a few weeks after his assault case ended, so then he was a high school dropout living on the run. That fall two really good things happened; Chuck and I went down to the warrant and surrender unit, in the basement, of the criminal justice building, in down town Philadelphia, and we spent about five hours there.

It’s very scary to go there because, if you’ve got a warrant, you don’t know if you’re going to be able to negotiate some arrangement, where you can pay off your court fees or if they’re going to take you into custody. Then if they take you in, if you’re on a probation violation, you could go for the entire rest of your probation or even longer. When you’re waiting in this basement, you see people, like, hoping to get their warrants lifted, but then taken away in handcuffs, sort of one after the other, in front of you. Some people make it and some people don’t, so he did that that day and he did make it. The judge worked out a payment plan, for his court fees, so he came home warrant free that afternoon.

The other great thing that happened was that Tim started speaking again. He still is quiet, he still prefers to communicate with gestures, but he’s speaking again. So home now, from jail, with no warrant and with his brother making good progress, in speaking, Chuck set about the work of looking for a job. With his best friend, Chuck, he went out in the mornings, and applied to jobs at Kmart and PetSmart, fast food places, gas stations. He applied day after day, on this job search, and he used my cell phone number, as a contact, for the employers because his cell phone was getting cut off too much to be, like, reliable.

Every day he would see me or he would call me, and he would ask me if any employer had called, and every day I had to say, “No.” After three months of this, I can tell you that I lost my confidence that the United States is a country of opportunity, where anybody who works hard can make it. Tim’s first arrest came later that year, after he turned eleven. How are you doing?

Audience: Okay.

Alice Goffman: Chuck was driving Tim to school, in his girlfriend’s car, and a cop stopped them and ran the car, and the car came up as stolen, in California. Chuck’s girlfriends’ uncle had brought the car, from a used car auction, in North East Philly. Neither brother had any clue where, in the history of the car, it might have been stolen in California. They had never been outside of Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, let alone all the way across the continent, but, anyway, the police charged… Down at the precinct, they charged Chuck with receiving stolen property, and then a few days later, in juvenile court, a judge charged Tim, age eleven, with accessory to receiving property, and then he was placed on three years of probation.

With this probation sentence hanging over Tim’s head, any encounter with the police could mean a violation, and a trip to juvenile detention, so Chuck sat his little brother down, and began teaching him how to run from the police, really in earnest now. They would sit side by side, on their back porch, looking out onto this alleyway, and Chuck would coach Tim how to spot undercover cars, how and where to hide during a raid; how to run from the police. “What are you going to do when you hear the sirens,” Chuck said, “I’m out,” his little brother replied. “Well, but where are you running to?” Chuck said. “Here,” his brother said meaning, like, “I’ll run to our house.” “You can’t run here, they know you live here.” “I’ll hide in the back room in the basement,” Tim said. “You think they’re not going to tear down that little door?” Tim shrugged.

“You know Miss Toyer,” Chuck asked, “Yes,” “You can go over there.” “But I don’t even know her like that.” “Exactly,” Chuck said. “Why can’t I go to Uncle Jean’s,” Tim asked, “Because they know that’s your uncle; you can’t go to anybody who’s connected to you.” Tim nodded his head, seeming happy to get his brother’s attention, no matter what he was saying. I want you to imagine, for a second, what Chuck and Tim’s lives would be like, if they grew up in a neighbourhood where kids were going to university, not prison; in a neighbourhood like the one I got to grow up in; maybe a lot of you got to grow up in.

“Okay, but, these young people, they’re committing crimes,” you might say, “Don’t they deserve to be arrested for them? Don’t they deserve to be living in fear of the police?” Well, my answer would be, “No, they don’t,” and certainly not for the same things that young people, with more privilege, are doing with impunity. If Chuck had gone to my high school, that school yard fight would have been just that; a school yard fight. It would have ended there; it never would have become an aggravated assault case. Not a single young man that I went to college with has a criminal record right now, not a single one, but can you imagine how many would have, if the police had stopped those guys, and searched their pocked, for drugs, as they walked to class, or raided their frat parties in the middle of the night? Woo; that’s a lot of criminal records.

“Okay,” you might say, “But doesn’t the incarceration rate, doesn’t it partly explain the great American crime decline; crime is really down?” Yes, crime is down, yah, it dropped precipitously in the ‘90s, and through the 2000s and still today. We have the murder rate in the US right now of, like, 1962; it’s amazing, but, according to a committee of academics convened, by the National Academy of Sciences, on the causes and consequences of our historically high incarceration rates last year, the relation between a fivefold increase, in incarceration, between locking up so many young people, and the crime decline is really shaky. It turns out that this great social experiment, in punishment, has had a really dubious effect on the crime rate, and you can see this because, in the States, they didn’t increase their incarceration rates. They also had a drop in crime, in the ‘90s and 2000s, because it goes state by state so, the crime rate, it appears to go up and down, irrespective of how many young people we send to prison. In the US we think about justice in a pretty narrow way. There is right and wrong, there is good and bad. Injustice is about being wrongfully convicted. If you’re convicted of something you did do, you should be punished for it.

There are good and bad people, there are innocent and guilty, there are victims and there are perpetrators. Maybe we could start thinking a little more broadly than that. Right now, we’re asking young people, who have the fewest resources, who live in communities that have the least amount of support, who are living in neighbourhoods where violence is an everyday problem, who are attending the country’s worst schools, who are facing the toughest time in the labour market, the most discrimination; we’re asking these young people to walk the tightest possible line. To walk the line way tighter than the one I was asked to walk, to basically never do anything wrong.

Why are we not providing support, to young people facing these challenges? Why are we offering only handcuffs; jail time in this fugitive existence? The question is can we imagine a new path; can we imagine something better than this? Can we imagine a justice system that prioritises recovery, prevention, and civic inclusion, rather than punishment? A justice system that acknowledges the legacy of exclusion that African Americans have faced, and that doesn’t promote and perpetuate those exclusions. A justice system that, fundamentally, believes in black young people, rather than treating young black people as the enemy, to be rounded up. The good news is that we already are a bit; a few years ago, Michelle Alexander, with the [new gym crow 0:36:19], which got Americans to see incarceration as a civil rights issue, of historic proportions, in a way we hadn’t seen it before. More recently, President Obama and attorney general, [Eric Calder 36.31] have come out very strongly, on the need to address racial disparity in incarceration, and the drug war.

We’re seeing federal sentencing reform, and we’re seeing a number of states; California, New York and New Jersey, in particular, dramatically reduce their numbers of people behind bars, while also seeing big crime reductions. We’re seeing municipalities and states throughout, stop and frisk, as the civil rights violation that it is. We’re seeing the legalisation of marijuana in cities and states; some. A bi-part, as a movement, is building. It’s this totally bizarre coalition between the right and the left, made up of former prisoners and fiscal conservatives, of libertarians and civil rights activists, of young people taking to the streets, to protest police violence against unarmed black teenagers. And older, richer people pumping big money into bail initiatives, and other decarceration programmes.

It’s a political moment that I didn’t think I would see, in my lifetime. After 40 years of zero tolerance, of the war on crime, this is a moment; a real moment that we’re in. I think a lot of people, who have been working on the causes and consequences, of our historically high incarceration rates, didn’t think we would see this moment, in our lifetime. The question is how much can we make of it? How much can we change? Thanks.

Audience: (Applause).

Eileen Green: Thank you very much, Alice, for a fascinating and very passionate presentation. That’s left us quite a lot of time for questions and comments, if people have things they want to ask Alice. We hope we’re going to have some roaming mics; have they arrived? No, okay. Question here at the front.

Female: Do you still have contact with the family that you were \_\_\_[0:38:33]?

Male: Could you repeat the question?

Alice Goffman: Do I still have contact with the family that I got to know?

Female: Yes.

Alice Goffman: Yes. Chuck’s family is one of four families that I got to know really well. Chuck was shot and killed a few years ago. His younger brother, Tim, is now home from prison. His middle brother, Reggie, is also home from prison and he’s raising Chuck’s two daughters, and their mum I’m also in touch with, who I didn’t talk as much about today. Other people, in the book, basically, the answer is yes; a lot. I didn’t think anybody would read the book; nobody reads ethnographies, sociological ethnographies, like, outside of sociology so, like, there was a royalty cheque. That was pretty great; we split that eighteen ways, but it’s hard too because, when someone dies, does the royalty cheque go to that person’s children? Does it go to their partner? Does it go to their mum? Does it go to- those were questions I never thought I would have to figure out, because I didn’t think there would be any royalties. Although, we always said, if there were any, we would split them like this.

Reggie was a really big contributor, to the book, especially when he was in prison. He gave me a lot of advice about writing, primarily, not to make his life boring, not to use a ton of academic jargon, to tell a story, so I’m grateful for that. He still thinks the book is too academic, but it’s better that it was anyway.

Audience: (Laughter).

Eileen Green: There’s a question here at the front.

Female: I’ve read your book and it was excellent.

Alice Goffman: Thank you.

Female: I particularly liked the last chapter, where you go through your methodology and, essentially, how six years of ethnography affected you. I was speaking to colleagues of mine; I can’t imagine a PhD student these days who would have the freedom, to go to field for six years, on a funded PhD; at least not in Europe; could you talk a little bit about that? What made it possible for you to have that long stretch of time?

Alice Goffman: Yes. The question is what made it possible to have that long stretch of time, as a PhD student, which doesn’t seem that likely, in Europe or the US really. It’s because I started when I was an under graduate; I started when I was a freshman in college, and I just stayed living in this neighbourhood, through graduate school. So sophomore year, I met the guys that are the subject, of this book. When I met Mike, I was writing about women and mums, and I had no idea about mass incarceration. That word wasn’t even a thing yet; this is the early 2000s; this is before this research was coming out.

I was writing my senior thesis, and I was writing about mums and their daughters. The idea was- like, at Pen at that time, it was, like, kind of a Chicago school sort of; you go out and study the city, so write about different areas of the city. I was interested in inequality, so I was writing about mums and their daughters, and then I met Ronnie, and then I met Mike through Ronnie, and then a couple of weeks after, I met Mike, he caught this gun case; a really serious charge, and he had this warrant out for his arrest. I mean, I didn’t even know what a warrant really was.

Then he turned himself in, then he got thrown in the hole, and that was the first time I’d ever visited anybody in jail before. Then his family put the money together, to pay for his bail, and then he came home, so we started going to his court dates together. The first court date he had was in this small court house, next to the police station, in the neighbourhood that he’s from. Walking up the court house, like, outside of it, he saw somebody he knew and I thought that’s so funny; what are the chances? Then he walked into the court house, and I realised he knew, like, two thirds of the guys sitting on the defendant side, like, the kids from his neighbourhood. I mean, lots were in school, but mainly, in the court room, they weren’t at school, they weren’t at their job, so that was sort of it for me, like, as a sophomore in college that became the story. I didn’t want to leave that neighbourhood, and I didn’t want to… I applied to Princeton because I could commute there, from Philadelphia, so that’s what I did; I drove back and forth, like, three days a week, so that’s why I had all of this time, because I started sort of early, I think.

Eileen Green: There’s a question behind \_\_\_[0:43:26].

Female: Do you have a mic?

Eileen Green: Sorry, I don’t think they’ve arrived.

Female: Well, okay; I’ll just shout.

Eileen Green: Can you stand up, so we can hear you, and tell us where you’re from?

Female: Yes. After that \_\_\_[0:43:40] story, of Chuck and Tim, which was so moving, but also very depressing. It was good when you came out with the positive comments, at the end, and that was nice, but I’m just wondering about police racism, because that seems to be at the core of a lot of this. Recent events, like the shooting of that guy the other day, seemed to show that police racism hasn’t shifted at all. If anything, it seems to be getting worse, so I wondered what your thoughts were on anything that can be done to tackle that real problem.

Alice Goffman: Yes. So the question is about police racism; what can be done to tackle that problem; it seems to be getting worse. In Philadelphia, there was a report- the justice department… There was a report on Philadelphia that came out about a week ago, on police shooting in Philly. The report showed that the police are shooting once a week, at civilians; 80% are black men and this is a city that’s about 40% black. The thing about police shootings is that they’ve been on for a really long time, and only this year or last year has there been a protest movement around them. Like, when I go to these protests, it’s a warning; I’m warning the people I know that have been killed, by police, for whom there was no protest.

I think what’s really exciting is that, when unarmed teenagers and black men are killed, in the streets now, we’re coming out and screaming our heads off. That just wasn’t politically the political reality a few years ago, and also the kind of political traction of the plight of prisoners, and the kind of… Politically, you couldn’t get any action on this issue; it was, like, prison reform, this was like this fringe radical thing; everybody was tough on crime. The idea that it’s coming from the right and the left; it’s coming from the president and it’s coming from people, in communities, that are affected by this, coming out and protesting; that’s really encouraging.

It’s not like there’s more police violence; just now you’re hearing about it.

Eileen Green: Question at the front.

Female: Yes. I would like to ask you about \_\_\_[0:46:07]. I mean, it’s really inspiring, your story.

Eileen Green: Can you speak up a little bit, sorry?

Female: Yes. I wonder whether you- you made a vital contribution academically, and I wonder whether \_\_\_[0:46:21], whether using this book, at a platform, that you’re involved in sort of activity, in order to tackle the issues \_\_\_[0:46:29] raised, in terms of racism of the police, but also on a much more political level, whether you’re part of some kind of movement or activity, to bring justice to these people?

Alice Goffman: So the question is, “Now you’ve done this academic book, are you part of any political organising or activism? What are you doing now to try to solve this; more practical”?

Female: Yes.

Alice Goffman: I’ve been on the road for fourteen months, five days a week, talking about the need to end mass incarceration, in the United States. I’ve talked at community colleges and at Harvard Law School, and everywhere in between, and to a lot of practitioner conferences too, so probation and parole, police chiefs, juvenile justice conferences, so I’ve got to meet… I’ve been going to protests, so in Madison, the big organisers… Madison is where I live, the big organisers of Black Lives Matter protests is a group called Young, Gifted and Black, so they’ve been incredibly effective politically, in organising Madison. Part of it is just talking, to as many people as I can talk to, but, also, I’ve been trying to get to know reformers around the country.

It’s this kind of dispersed thing where there’ll be, like, a DA somewhere, who is dramatically dropping the number of people in prison, or a police chief in another state, who is changing the culture of the police department, to be not about making arrest counts. Like, a lot of police departments, in the US, have this informal or formal quota system where, in order to be promoted, they have to make a really high number of arrest counts. There are police chiefs that are trying to change that, and trying to make policing about promoting public safety, and community wellbeing, and not see black communities as like a neighbourhood they’re occupying.

I’ve been trying to meet people, and I think what I’m going to do next year is just focus on Wisconsin, so I’ve been trying to meet with probation and with the mayor, and with other folks, in Madison, around these issues. I think now that I kind of understand more, about how reform is happening around the country, I think I’m going to try to focus my energy there, because that’s the state I live in and Wisconsin actually has the highest racial disparity and incarceration, in the nation. Madison is actually worse than the state level numbers, so there’s a level of suppression, of black residents of Madison, that is extreme, so that’s going to be what I hope I’m going to do after this.

Eileen Green: Okay. Another question here.

Male: Hi.

Alice Goffman: Hi.

Male: Thank you so much; I really, really enjoyed that. I want to make a point of saying that, because I’m worried my question will seem dour.

Alice Goffman: Oh please.

Male: I really thought it was great and it makes me want to read the book, which I haven’t done, so that’s kind of behind my question; I surely will. The question is about theory; let me qualify, before everyone starts shaking their head. I can see what you’ve done politically, and I’m excited by, and in support, of what you’ve done today, in this room, politically, with the ethnography you’ve got. I think of all the great ethnographies that have similarly found themselves… The American Tradition, I’m thinking of now, found themselves similarly at that crux, of a local investigation and national politics. To the best of my money, going back into the tradition, would be \_\_\_[0:50:09], but you could pick loads, couldn’t you?

What’s going in [Hannards 0:50:12] book is a wealth of description and detail, moving stories, entertaining accounts, local detail, human recording of events. At the same time, some kind of wrestling of theory; in this case \_\_\_[0:50:27] or whatever. Now, I’ve heard it said that a good ethnography is something like a mouse and an elephant stew, in that it should have an elephant full of data, and a mouse of theory, but the trick is to bring out the flavour of the mouse. My question is…

Alice Goffman: What’s my mouse (laughter)? Okay, great. Did everybody hear that?

Audience: Yes.

Alice Goffman: Since I’m not in my own country, I’m just going to say what I really think here.

Audience: (Laughter).

Alice Goffman: I think that theory should help us understand the world; the world shouldn’t be contributing to theory, theory should be contributing to us, so the arrow is moving in the other direction for me. I think I was trying to write about a social reality that has been hidden, and that has been denied, and that hasn’t been brought into public discussion. Anything that theory could give me, to help me do that, I’m happy to take it. What my contribution is to theory, I don’t really care; I mean, because theory isn’t my master. I think, sociology, when it’s been good, it’s been making sense of the pressing social issues, of the day, at least, and sometimes the timeless ones too, but it gets people to see things that they can’t see otherwise, to reveal something hidden. That’s kind of how I think about that. In terms of, like, what theories I was pushing back on or using, so when I started writing this we had two… I was sort of in between two traditions, the urban ethnography tradition, which has written about racial exclusion, which is a tradition about neighbourhoods and social interaction, and race, and then the mass incarceration literature, which was just starting to come out. This was a largely quantitative literature, and the way that they were seeing… The urban ethnography literature, because ethnography takes so long, the accounts from urban ethnography, about neighbourhoods like Sixth Street, like the one I was writing about, was a very, very different policing regime.

It was a policing regime that was lesser fair; that was absentee that was corrupt, but very non-present. In accounts of Venkatesh or Terry Williams, in New York, you get like a few corrupt cops, who are working with, like, the local drug dealer or a project leader. They’re, basically, letting people settle their own disputes; people are mediating their own problems. When you call the police, they don’t come; they don’t care, you can’t get them on the phone, so it was this sort of absentee, lesser fair, corrupt, racist, but pretty non-present policing that characterising a lot of the urban ethnography literature thought the ‘90s.

Like, Terry Williams, in New York, he’s got this book called Crack house; it’s about a crack house in New York City, in Harlem. He says, “One night I watched the police drive by this street, with hundreds of dealers and touts and customers making exchanges, and the police car drove by and said, “Move on off the block, everybody.” The buyers and sellers paid no attention, so that was like the policing kind of… I mean, fast forward to now- we’re talking about a mini police state that, where so many people have legal entanglements, and the police are so present, that it’s come to fundamentally reorganise everyday living for people. The mass incarceration literature, their understanding of the problem was that people are free, then they go to prison; that’s bad for you, it messes up your family life. It effects the next generation; it’s bad for your health, it takes you out of school and employment, and then you come home and you have a criminal record, which then has all these other consequences. It’s very difficult, in the labour market, particularly, for African Americans with criminal records, who are already facing massive discrimination, in the American labour market, so that was their kind of version of it.

It was, like, you’re free, you go to prison, you come home a felon. That’s not what I was seeing either; I mean, it was this fugitive living, people living with these legal entanglements, and warrants and court cases and, whether or not you’ve been to prison, you were looking over your shoulder, worried about the police. I was sort of trying to bring the urban ethnography literature into connection, with mass imprisonment and understanding what was happening in neighbourhoods; how did I do?

Audience: (Laughter).

Alice Goffman: I could also talk about, like, the state and Louis \_\_\_[0:55:11] version of…

Male: Yes.

Alice Goffman: I mean, I have some things to say about that.

Eileen Green: You can perhaps do that afterwards. There’s a question half way back; because you’ve been waiting patiently.

Male: It seems to me that you’ve now got a fascinating mystery on your hands, because you’ve got a situation where somebody spends a year in prison, for something it turns out they didn’t really do, then they’re too old to enrol in school again and, as you say, \_\_\_[0:55:33] criminal record. The interesting question, for me, is why is not \_\_\_[0:55:37]. It doesn’t seem to be in anybody’s interests; it’s not even in the interests of the prison and the school, particularly, it seems to me, and yet somehow something like that isn’t being fixed, like some grand scheme like the war on crime. I guess my question for you is it sounds like you have to engage with this now, who’s got to be \_\_\_[0:55:56], to sort those things out? Why is something so obvious still such a problem?

Alice Goffman: The question is why is something so obvious such a problem; I mean, I think you have to talk about the racial cast system, of the United States. I mean, so black American’s have been living as second class citizens, in the United States, for hundreds of years and it didn’t end with slavery, because [Jim Crow 0:56:22] came right after slavery, to suppress black voting and political rights and economic opportunity, and you had legal segregation. It wasn’t until the ‘60s that black Americans gained- that the civil rights movement \_\_\_[0:56:41] full citizenship, so this is really recent. Two things happened, at the moment of the triumphs of civil rights. One is that we get the beginning of the most powerful and large black middle class, in world history; black people in every company, in every political realm, in higher education, so those barriers finally are broken down. Then we get a policing and incarceration regime, targeted at poor African Americans, unlike anything the world has either seen either, so you have a sort of bifurcated history. The growth of the black middle class, which is incredible and something we should celebrate, and the work of \_\_\_[0:57:30], of years and years of struggle, and then you get the lacking up of black young people who are poor at this massive scale. The way that the historians write about this it’s like you can see mass incarceration, as we’re rolling back over the civil rights; of the gains of civil rights.

If you look at, for example, black wages, just male wages, it looks like they really, really took after post-civil rights, but if you count the number of people in prison they’re flat. You can think politically too; so voting rights. You’re in prison, you can’t vote, or you have a felony conviction, you can’t vote in many states, so we’re still denying voting rights to black Americans, on a pretty large scale. So when you ask, “Well, this is so obvious; why isn’t it fixed,” you have to go to the kind of racial class system in American life, I think.

Male: So it’s the racists who’ve got to read this book? They won’t.

Alice Goffman: I mean, I’m a tiny little drop, in a much longer kind of conversation, and it’s partly… I think Michelle Alexander did more than 1,000 academics, to get this. I mean, people were reading her book, like, in little book clubs in the suburbs, in Wyoming; it was amazing what she’s done for this movement. She’s created this movement that didn’t exist before her book.

Eileen Green: There are two questions down here. One over there and one at the back, and up there, sorry; would you like to go first?

Female: How do you find the- I imagine that you speak to a lot of reformers and practitioners; how do you find them? Or do they find you?

Alice Goffman: The scariest one was I did this panel, in Philadelphia, like, about six months, and I hadn’t heard anything from the Philly police department. I’d heard nothing from them, about the book, and I was worried they were going to say, “This is all falsified; this isn’t happening, this isn’t true.” Or I was worried they were going to come after the people, in the book, or me and I’d done all these things, to try to de-identify people and change the neighbourhood, and I ran the manuscript through lots of lawyers, to try to make sure that even if the police could identify people or if people identified themselves, like, on Twitter, that they wouldn’t be able to bring new charges.

This is the kind of paranoia about writing a book like this, so I gave this talk outside of Philly, at St Jo’s University, where a lot of people are in criminal justice majors, and then become police officers. It was this panel where I gave a talk, and then the deputy mayor, of Philadelphia, and then the mayor’s, like, second… Like, another person, like second in command to the mayor; the person who, like, swears in every new police officer was there. I was, like, petrified; I had no idea what they were going to say. The first guy got up and said, “I don’t dispute any of the facts in this book, but let me tell you what we’re doing to try and turn things around.” Then he gave a whole, like, list of little programmes. What they’re trying to do to turn things around, in Philly, not much, to be honest, but, at least, they’re not denying the data. I think this report about a shooting every week, in Philadelphia, I mean, we have a level of police violence, in Philly, that is higher than other cities, but other things are much more national. Like, so there is 2.3 million warrants out, in the United States, right now; 60% are for things like probation violations, failure to pay court fees, traffic stops, not for new crimes, so all these people are worried when the cops come. I’m not answering the question.

There are some really exciting reformers, in practitioner circles, and talking to them has been awesome, but sometimes you come up against people sort of saying, like… Well, you come up against people who are, like, “Well, they’re committing crimes; what do you want us to do?” That kind of thought, but then, also, like, there is a lot of, like, shaking heads about, “Yes, this is a problem; yes, we need to change,” but then not much.

Female: I think my question was more do you contact people and say, “I’ve done this research and I’d like to talk to you about it”? Or do people contact you inviting you, to talk about your research?

Alice Goffman: Both, yes.

Female: Can I just \_\_\_[1:01:50]. We just wanted to know if you’d- I’m sure you have thought about your position, as a white woman, in all of this and I think it’s really interesting that you’re being heard or, like, someone is listening. Like, the black community have been shouting about this, for quite a long time, and I just think it’s really interesting. I know you’ve thought about it, because you talked about your position of privilege, in a way, but I just wondered if you could say a bit more about that?

Alice Goffman: Yes. The question is what do I have to say about my position, as a white woman, and the privilege that comes with that? I mean, I think that there are so many things to say here. When articles starting coming out about the book, like, in the New York Times, I was shocked. The articles that were coming out were like, “Daring white woman goes to the hood, reports back.”

Audience: (Laughter).

Alice Goffman: The first one I read I ran to the bathroom and threw up, and then I had this battle with reporters, where I was trying to tell a story, and they were telling a totally different story. I mean, it’s this really thin needle that you’re threading too, as a writer, because you’re thinking all the time about reproducing stereotypes. Is this making the problem worse? You write about people who are respectable, then you’re accused of white washing or romanticising. You put yourself in the text, and then you can be thought of as a kind of cowboy ethonographer, who’s like going to like a kind of avatar sort of story.

If you don’t put yourself in the text, then you’re failing to acknowledge your position, you’re failing to be reflexive. It’s a very, very- for scholars, of colour, who are writing about communities, like the one I was writing about, it’s almost even worse. It’s not just that you’re an outsider, who’s doing this violence, but it’s like you’re selling out your own people, you’re airing dirty laundry, you’re exploiting people to make a name for yourself. I mean, so the scholar- the ethnographers of colour who are doing work like this… Then they’re also facing way more risks, in just doing the fieldwork, from police, so we’re sort of in this crisis of positionality right now, I think, in ethnography, where it’s not clear who is allowed to write or how they’re allowed to write, or what about. Then you have the fact- but I think still it’s like we need to be writing about depressing issues of the day.

We need to be writing about grave injustice that is happening all over the place. I think that all those issues are worth figuring out a path through somehow, in order to do that work, but I can tell you that when those reports started writing those stories, that was like a level of my own privilege that I hadn’t even really thought about. Like, I thought about the fieldwork, I thought about the writing, but the reception I wasn’t prepared for at all, because I didn’t think anybody was going to… I mean, the appendix of a book, of a Chicago University Press book, was like the focus of these New York Times articles. The appendix, it’s like in tiny little print.

In the book, I’m not reflexive about the reception of the book, because it hadn’t happened yet and, like, if I’d had known that would have happened, I mean, I would have written things differently. The other thing is the articles that I hate the most that are most in this kind of trope, of like young white girl, famous last name, goes to the hood, they sell the most books. Then I get these emails, from people, like, across the US, saying, “I had no idea this was happening; now, I know,” or saying, “You’re writing about my life; thank you,” so then should I hate the articles that are doing this work? It’s complicated, but artless that I like are the really, really harsh critiques; that I’m like, “Yes, I can get behind that.”

Eileen Green: There are lots of people trying to get in; shall we take a couple at a time? The lady in yellow at the top?

Female: You mentioned about it being \_\_\_[1:06:12], in terms of, like, the policy on mass incarceration; that’s what’s happening right now. What do you think about \_\_\_[1:06:19], in the initial aftermath, because it appears to be quite silent on it, and kind of condemned the black protestors; there’s no excuse for violence and so on. I think that protesters are a big part of reform because, as you said, people are shot at daily. We only heard about \_\_\_[1:06:37] because of the protest so, I guess, how much do you think the kind of protesters are part of the reform? Then what do the communities, who are kind of dealing with them, \_\_\_[1:06:48] think about Obama’s relative silence, to the initial shooting?

Alice Goffman: The question is- that was like a multi- did people hear that?

Audience: No.

Alice Goffman: The question is what do I think about Obama’s role in reform; what about his silence and his condemnation of protestors and violence that’s happening in protests. Then what role do the protests have in the larger reform movement, and then you had, like, three other things?

Female: No, that’s it.

Alice Goffman: I didn’t really do a good job of that.

Female: You said that Obama being quite aggressive at the moment, \_\_\_[1:07:28].

Alice Goffman: Yes. There are two ways to see our president; one is that he’s not doing enough, and one is that he’s doing more than 40 years of presidents has ever done. I think both could be true, I think it’s only in Obama’s second term and, at the end of his first term, that you see, for the first time, in the United States history, since the war on crime began, a small reduction in incarceration rates. It’s only in his presidency that the numbers are starting to stabilise, and then to come down a little bit, and that’s not insignificant. It seems insignificant because the amount that it’s coming down isn’t that much, but all we’ve been doing is building it up.

I think that Eric Holder is a kind of more radical kind of arm of the Obama White House, and he’s just been tireless in being very, very public about racial disparity and about the need to end the drug war. He’s also done all of these- like, started doing all these investigations so, like, a ton of police departments and probation and parole departments, and prisons, are under investigation now in the United States. That’s coming from the president, and I think he’s in a very tough position, and I think he’s navigating it as best as he can, but I think that the protests, the \_\_\_[1:09:05], the ballet initiatives, they’re happening with his support, and I’m grateful for that. The role of the protestors, in this reform movement, is massive; I mean, politically, the protestors are getting a ton of work done. The people who step down, in Ferguson, and now the whole thing is going to be under… I mean, around the country, so because of Ferguson, like, a lot of police departments around the country are doing their own internal investigations, are having meetings about these issues. So that even in places where the protestors aren’t protesting, like, their voices are being heard and, politically, it’s been incredibly powerful.

The thing about the Ferguson protests, and the protest movement that has built, in its wake, is, like, sentencing reform, the war on drugs, prison reform. All of this was part of the reform conversation, but police really weren’t… Police were, like, this missing piece that weren’t in this larger reform movement that was happening, before Ferguson, and now they’re, like, smack right in the middle of it. If we’re going to get reform, in policing, it’s to the credit of the protestors.

Eileen Green: There several people up here, at the top, on the right.

Female: \_\_\_[1:10:30].

Eileen Green: Yes, you’ve been waiting.

Female: I guess my question was really about what it means to \_\_\_[1:10:39]. This isn’t a question about reflexivity; it’s a question about politics, and the ethics of doing that, and what it means to narrate the lives \_\_\_[1:10:53]. I’d like to hear a bit more, from you, about that.

Alice Goffman: The question is can you talk about the ethics and politics, of narrating black lives and narrating the lives of marginalised groups? We sort of began talking about it here. Part of me feels like- a lot of the time I was doing this project, I felt like I had no right to be doing it, and people were suspicious of me. I mean, lots of people were suspicious of me, and rightly so. Chuck’s mum didn’t really trust me, the whole time I was doing this- off and on. It wasn’t until, like, she got the royalty cheque that she called me and said, like, “Now I trust you a little more, not all the way though.” I think that white researchers, the history of white researchers, writing about black American’s is just a very ugly history.

Also, in academia, I mean, the intellectual sort of push of sociology and of criminal justice… There was a big intellectual push; there was a big push, from academics, to get the war on crime started, so I think to own up to that history is important. Even now, I mean, I think I’m really ambivalent about what I’m doing, to be honest. Some days I feel good about it; like when I get letters from people in prison. The two that I remember most are- I get a lot of letters from people in prison and one guy, who wrote to me last year, said, “I’ve been here for ten years, I read a book a week in here; this is the first book I’ve read that I was in.”

Another guy said, “I’ve been here for five years, and my sister is the one who informed on me, and I haven’t spoken to her since; she’s a snitch. I deny her visits; I don’t answer her letters. Then I read your book and I realised that this is what they’re doing to us; they’re turning us against each other, to round us up, and then I forgave her and she came to visit me last week.” So there’s that, and then sometimes I get emails that are really challenging the legitimacy of a white woman writing a book like this. I think that’s a fair critique; I mean, I don’t have a good answer around that. I think doing this fieldwork, I tried to be aware of my own prejudices and listen to people, and try to understand where people are coming from, in an open way, but I don’t think that absolves. I mean, I don’t think the legacy of white researchers or my own role… I don’t think there’s a way to make that okay really, but, I guess, I think that the people who are at the centre, of this insane level of incarceration and police violence… They’re poor, they’re denied voting, they’re running from the police, and lots of people should be writing about it.

Audience: (Applause).

Eileen Green: Question over here.

Female: I’d just like to ask what you think the relationship is between your kind of work and the work of \_\_\_[1:15:18] society always do better. They showed, across the states, but also across developed countries, every white correlation between the higher the level of social equality, the lower the level of social ills. So if a particular society is very socially unequal, it was more likely to push higher incarceration rates, to have early age school leavers, lots of teenage pregnancies, high levels of obesity, low levels of social trust; all the things we think of as social ills. The reason why- I’m sure everyone here is familiar with \_\_\_[1:15:56}, but the reason why I think it’s so valuable is because it gives an explanation, and a solution; it’s just redistribute wealth and it won’t go. I think I’m worried about solutions, to sort of target disadvantaged groups, because even if the best outcome, of a book like yours, is that a well-meaning people say, “Right, we need after school programmes, we need home liaison; we need all this.” Putting money into nearly, like, a reinvigoration of the problem, when the simple solution is redistribute wealth socially. It takes the top of the well to the bottom.

Alice Goffman: I have a great answer to this question; I can’t wait for you to finish it.

Audience: (Laughter).

Female: \_\_\_\_[1:16:42-1:16:45] because, if you want social change, I think you have to \_\_\_[1:16:48] to that high structural level.

Alice Goffman: Did everybody hear that? The question is if we want social change, we need to redistribute wealth; the most unequal societies are the most punitive. There seems to be a clear solution, and after school programming isn’t it; we need to redistribute wealth. Here’s my answer to that. The problems of racial exclusion and marginality, and oppression, in the United States, have been ongoing for hundreds of years, and those problems they ebb and flow; they ebb and flow. The problems associated with poverty and racial marginality; mental health, addiction, people relying on the drug trade, because they can’t get jobs in the legal labour marketing, teen motherhood. All these kinds of problems, they’ve been going on for a really long time.

The new problem is mass incarceration, the new problem, on top of all those other problems, making all of those problems worse is mass incarceration, and a policing regime that sees black young people as the enemy, and we need to get rid of that. We’re not going to get rid of it by redistributing wealth; we’re nowhere near that conversation, in the US, but we are in a conversation about ending mass incarceration, so let’s do that.

Audience: (Applause).

Eileen Green: There’s a question here at the front, and I think you’re getting to the end of your energy, Alice.

Alice Goffman: Am I starting to sound a little…

Eileen Green: You were, yes.

Male: Hi, Alice, if I may? Thanks for your talk. My question has actually been reduced to more of a comment now. \_\_\_[14:18:20].

Alice Goffman: I’m glad we’re having a conversation. I try to leave a lot of room for questions, so we can just talk to each other, so thanks.

Male: I was going to introduce that issue with this nice phrase, which \_\_\_[1:18:34] uses, in an interview with Les Back, about white researchers researching the black communities. He says, “You can get as close as you can or as close as you think you can, but there’ll always be this… You’ll be behind a chainmail fence.”

Alice Goffman: Yes. He’s quoting Eliot LeBow, from Tally’s Corner, page 63 (laughter).

Male: You’ve kind of answered it actually, but I don’t know if you want to reflect on that metaphor? Also, I think it’s interesting, in looking at the responses to your positionality; one of the things that certainly I haven’t seen really talked about is actually your position, as a female, as a positive thing. Reading the book, some of the chapters that had that kind of deafness of touch there, the mark of a great ethnography, \_\_\_[1:19:18] you were with the women, and then really that’s something that the book, to me, that was particularly strong. It was showing the knock on effect, if you want, for females in the situations.

Alice Goffman: Thank you. I think this inside or outside debate; whether outsiders have some kind of ability to see things that insiders don’t or whether insiders do. Then also, ethnographers, they tell these accounts where they sort of use whatever position they have, to say, like, “And because I was neither black nor white, but in India I could do this kind of…” Or, “Because I was French,” or, “Because I had a kid,” or, “Because I was from that city,” or, “Because I wasn’t from that city.” I mean, we’re just doing all this and I think you use what you’ve got, and you make up for what you don’t. The making up for, as a white woman, is endless because my experience is so different, and I’m coming in with a lot of racism. I’m coming in with my own racism, I’m coming in with the racism that pervades American life, and I think that makes it really hard to understand people, and tell a story. I sort of see my position mostly as a detriment, except the fact that people read it, because a white woman wrote it.

Female: \_\_\_[1:20:44].

Alice Goffman: Right, yes. That’s kind of what I would say about that. As a woman, I mean, almost no women do urban ethnography; it’s really a man’s game. When I go to the urban ethnography courses, I’m almost always the only woman on the panel. It’s also been- but I think women are coming into it, and I think more and more scholars of colour are coming into it. Most of my students are women, and are students of colour and are first generation, so I hope the field looks really different in the next generation. The role models- here’s the other thing I want to say; my own role models are people who were members, at least on some level, much more than me, and I think that… So Drake and Cayton is the bible for me; Black Metropolis.

It’s written by two black graduate students, at the University of Chicago, who are living on the south side, who take over a church basement and run this giant staff of people, who are from the community studying themselves and each other. It’s an amazing book; Black Metropolis, if you haven’t read it. I mean, when I teach urban ethnography, it’s like \_\_\_[1:21:52] Drake and Cayton, Eli Anderson.

Eileen Green: I think we need to stop. Alice has given us some fantastic \_\_\_[1:22:03].

Audience: (Applause).

Eileen Green: Can I remind you that the BSA president, Professor Lynn Jamieson, is now going to present the Distinguished Service to Sociology Award so, please, remain in your seats while we do this.

Lynn Jamieson: So if I can just say, “Hello,” and remind you what the Distinguished Service to Sociology Award is. In September, a call goes out asking for nominations, for somebody, asking you, as members, all members, to put forward names of people in the profession that they think have, over their career, given exemplary distinguished service, to British sociology in particular. You’ll be invited to do this again this September. I’m incredibly pleased to be about to award this award, to Professor John Eldridge. Now, we’re in Glasgow; I don’t need to remind you of that. Professor Eldridge is nominated by the Glasgow department, and has worked in Glasgow for many years.

That’s now why he’s getting the award; that just happens to be a coincidence, (laughter) but it’s a very happy coincidence. He’s getting the award because of his distinguished service, which is exceptional and incredibly deserving. He’s worked across a number of domains in sociology. We tend to think of him, because we’ve known him for many years, as if he’s a Scot, but, of course, he had a life before he came here; he’s not a Scot. He worked in York, he worked in Bradford, before he came to work in Glasgow. He’s worked in social theory, industrial sociology. He is possible here best known for the world famous Glasgow Media Group, which he was one of the founder members of. He also describes himself as interested in risk. He’s written also about the history of our discipline. He’s known for his generosity with students, with colleagues and also in the spirit of, what’s now called, impact, he’s done lots of work with non-academic sectors throughout his whole career, long before that was being talked about in the way that it is now. Just to remind you of some of his work; in 1968 he published a book, Industrial Disputes; essays in industrial relations.

When he was in York, he was also already working on theory. In that period, he was working on Max Weber and published Max Weber; The Interpretation of Social Reality, with his own introductory essay, in 1970; just about the time he was moving to Bradford. He published on the sociology of organisation. He’s had a line of work throughout his career, about industrial sociology, writing with John MacInnes and Peter Cressey. He’s also returned to social theory throughout his career, writing about C Wright Mills, writing about Raymond Williams. Then there is Glasgow Media Group; getting the message, news, truth and power, the Glasgow Media readers’ bad news, more bad news; writing about war and peace news.

He was at the forefront of media analysis, and getting us to see who gets to speak and why, who doesn’t get to speak; how is that discourse framed; how is power being exercised, in a way that hadn’t actually previously been done. So I’m absolutely delighted to have this award, and I believe that John himself wants to say a few words, so I’m going to now invite him to come and take this, from me, and to say a few words to us. I would like you all to give him an incredible round of applause.

Audience: (Applause).

Lynn Jamieson: Also, just before he speaks, can I just tell you there was a \_\_\_[1:27:48], for John, in September at his own university, where lots of people spoke about his work, and how it has a continued influence. This award isn’t given to people who’ve given up; this is for active people, as he is, and you’ll find his own paper contributing to that work on the university website, along with an interview with his colleague, Bridget Fowler, so I recommend all that to you.

Pro John Eldridge: Well, thank you very much. I’m really appreciative of this honour, and I want to say that I count myself fortunate, to have lived and worked as a sociologist, for so many years. Looking at your all here this afternoon, makes me realise what a distant time it was when the BSA met, in a couple of rooms, in Endsleigh Street in London, presided over by the legendary Ann Dicks, who was an administrator extraordinaire, a long time ago. A little thanks to Ann and thanks to LSE for the help they gave us, at that time.

I feel to use a biblical phrase; that I’m surrounded today by a great cloud of witnesses… I just want to mention people who have impinged on my life, and have helped me to become a sociologist, and have influenced me by their work and example. I’ll be, of course, very selective, but there are one or two things I just want to say, in recognition. First of all, my teachers, Ilya Neustadt and Norbert Elias. Now, Neustadt, was the first professor of sociology, at Leicester, and, with Elias, he established the teaching of sociology there, so that Leicester became a seabed, for the teaching and development, of sociology in Britain; a very important time and long may Leicester continue to flourish. It was Neustadt who conveyed an unrivalled enthusiasm, for his subject, and which certainly kindled a flame in me. The first essay I wrote for him was on the idea of progress, and I seem to remember I was in favour.

Audience: (Laughter).

Prof John Eldridge: Elias wasn’t famous, when he taught me, except to a very few, but he overcame many personal difficulties, in his life, to become a world renowned sociologist, but I still remember him as the tutor who returned a chapter, of my thesis, with apologies. He had dropped it in the bath, and it was served with many soap marks.

Audience: (Laughter).

Prof John Eldridge: I recall others of course. I remember Joe and Olive Banks, both of whom were fine sociologists and great contributors, to the BSA. In some ways, I used to think they were like latter day Sidney and Beatrice Webb, except that they were much more fun. I remember Joe for his brilliant smile and his commitment, to the work of the association, and I remember Olive once saying, “I used to think history was on my side, but I don’t anymore.” Well, maybe we’ve all been there at times. I think of two fine industrial sociologists; Joan Woodward and Dorothy [Weatherbone 1:32:03].

Joan’s work on the impact of technology, on work relations, was ground breaking and she became the first woman professor of sociology, in Imperial College London. She was followed by Dorothy Weatherbone, who transformed herself from an applied economist, to an industrial sociologist, and led the industrial sociology group there with great flair and panache, and then I think… Bear with me, I think of John Ricks, John Ricks, provocative, controversial, exciting, and work that he did… He’d been brought up in the politics of Southern Africa, and he brought all that passion and fire to Britain. The work that he did, especially with Robert Moore, who’s here today, on \_\_\_[1:33:06], was ground breaking, and really quite inspiring.

The contributions he made to the study of race remain very significant, and relevant, to our days today. Then I think of Stewart Hall, who has so recently left us. He was the most mellifluous lecturer I think that I’ve ever heard; always was there a twinkle in his eye and a chuckle in his voice, as he sought to make difficult things plain to us. His work with the Open University was and remains memorable. A great analyst of post-colonialism, and I take this opportunity to commend to you the film The Stewart Hall Project, which charts his life and interests, and the music of Miles Davis is always present, in the background.

I think too - I’ve nearly finished. I think too of Edward Thomason who, of course, wasn’t a sociologist and very critical of them very often, but whose historical work was deeply sociological. It was he who sharpened my thinking, about the issues of war and peace, and was a public intellectual of great power, as of course also was Raymond Williams, his great colleague; when will we see their like again? One thing that comes through, to me, as I reflect on such influences, is the importance of doing work that is empirically grounded, and theoretically informed. Despite all the debates, about relativism, I believe such an approach does make possible a growth in knowledge, and enables us to contribute to debates, in the public square. It’s this which makes sociology a vocation, and not just a profession. I remember Richard Hoggart saying, as he looked back on a busy and full life, “Where did I get all that energy from?” I echo that sentiment and simply say to you use it while you’ve got it; use it creatively, use it passionately, make it count. Thank you again, and I hope you enjoy this conference, where big questions are being raised, and some answers, at least, will be provided.

If we hear more of the kind of sociology that we’ve heard this afternoon, then I feel we’ll certainly be moving in the right direction, so thank you very much.

Audience: (Applause).

Howard Wollman: Just before everybody goes; sorry, we’ve been handed a late change of venue; a bit of anti-climax after both John’s speech and Alice’s wonderful talk. Tomorrow mornings special event; troubling youth identities, nation religion and agenda in Lebanon, \_\_\_[1:36:43] and Pakistan and Senegal, has had a move of venue. It will now take place at eleven o ‘clock tomorrow, in library seminar room one; eleven o ‘clock tomorrow, library seminar room one. Thanks.

[Background noise 1:36:55-1:37:50].

END AUDIO

[www.uktranscription.com](http://www.uktranscription.com)

Transcription services provided by UK Transcription and may include occasional errors in name spelling. If you spot any errors, please do get in touch.