

# You Will Not Erase Our Kids: The High Stakes Fight for Trans Liberation

*Panelists: Jamison Green, Heron Greenesmith, Imara Jones, Chase Strangio*

*Moderated by Dr. Koki Mendis*

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**Koki Mendis:** Thank you all for joining Political Research Associates today, for our roundtable discussion, “You Will Not Erase Our Kids: The High Stakes Fight for Trans Liberation”. For those of you who are new to PRA: Political Research Associates is a national nonprofit entering its 40th year (Also I apologize if you can hear background noise coming from me. We have landscapers with great timing.) So PRA researches, monitors, and publicizes the agenda and strategies of the U.S. and global Right, revealing the powerful intersections of Christian nationalism, White nationalism, and patriarchy. PRA produces investigative reports, articles and tools; publishes the peer reviewed quarterly magazine *The Public Eye*; advises social justice movement organizers and offers expert commentary for local and national media outlets. Our core issue areas span reproductive justice, LGBTQ rights, racial and immigrant justice, civil liberties and economic justice.

For today’s discussion, we are honored to be joined by an absolutely all star panel featuring [Jamison Green](#), past president of the [World Professional Association for Transgender Health: WPATH](#) and a current co-chair of WPATH’s [Ethics Committee](#). He is the author of [Becoming A Visible Man](#), and has been a respected leader in transgender rights and health for nearly 30 years.

[Heron Greenesmith](#), PRA’s own Senior Research Analyst who has worked in LGBTQ advocacy for almost a decade with organizations including the [National Coalition of Antiviolence Programs](#), the [Movement Advancement Project](#), [Family Equality Council](#) and the [National LGBTQ Task Force](#).

[Imara Jones](#), whose work has won an Emmy and Peabody Awards, is the creator of [TransLash Media](#), a cross platform, journalism, personal storytelling, and narrative project which produces content to shift the current culture of hostility towards transgender people in the U.S. In 2020, Imara was featured on the cover of [Time Magazine](#), and in 2019 she chaired the first ever [UN High-Level Meeting on Gender Diversity](#) with over 600 participants.

We have [Chase Strangio](#), Deputy Director for Transgender Justice at the [ACLU](#), who has served as lead counsel or on the legal team for whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who came out as trans while in military custody; for the challenge to North Carolina's notorious bathroom bill; for the challenge to the Trump administration's trans military ban; and for the case of Aimee Stevens, which led to the US Supreme Court's historic 2020 decision that the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects gay, lesbian and transgender employees from discrimination based on sex. *Time Magazine* named Chase one of the [100 most influential people of 2020](#).

So thank you very much to our esteemed panelists and to you, our wonderful audience, for joining us today. Please note this webinar will be recorded and the recording will be distributed by email and on PRA's website next week. Our audience today also has access to live close captioning, which you can toggle onto the bottom of your screen. Audience members feel free to introduce yourself in the chat, as I see some folks doing already, so we can see who all is with us today. We will also be taking time today for audience questions, which can be dropped into the chat at any point in the discussion.

We are so excited to have this incredible panel of people with us today, people who live and fight tooth and nail for Trans joy. But because we at PRA (an organization dedicated to understanding the strategies of the Right, so we can partner on the Left to make real change,) are hosting this roundtable, our conversation will begin with understanding the strategies of the known actors on the Right who are doing everything in their power to erase trans people. We will continue our conversation with the strategies and recent victories of the trans liberation movement to secure fundamental rights and change national narratives and conclude with a grounding conversation that centers the flourishing and joy of transgender people. So let's get started.

I'd like to begin with the long history of the Right targeting children: of right-wing policies and programs that harm children in order to locate power in patriarchal White supremacy. In a well-established pattern that runs from the so-called civilizing mission of the Indian boarding school starting in the 19th century, through today's criminalization of Black children in schools, the incarceration of Black parents, and the family separations at the border that subject children to a slow and inhumane immigration process, why is targeting trans children politically expeditious for the Right? Heron, I'd like to start with you and your work on this topic and then open the question to our full panel.

**Heron Greenesmith:** Thank you. As you were talking, I was thinking that there's actually seems to be two separate things going on right now. There are... you know, there's the kind of history of attacking children in the U.S, Black

and Brown children, through incarceration, through genocide, that you know, effectuates the destruction of a community. So, you know, effectuates the destruction of enslaving kidnaped families (in early post-colonial American history or early colonial American history), and effectuates the destruction of Indigenous folks in the United States. And is right now being weaponized to destroy low income Black and Brown families in...across the United States through foster care, and then to destroy families as they enter the United States from our southern border.

And then simultaneously, there's the weaponization of anti-trans rhetoric, to heighten threats against mostly, White children, mostly White cis children, mostly White cis female children, or people who are perceived to be female, are assigned female at birth. So we have two things going on. We have the separation and murder of children in order to destroy families. And then we have kind of the threats against those...the threats of those same things against White, more affluent children that is used to activate anti-trans bases and anti-trans networks. And obviously the weaponization of mis- and dis- medical information in those spheres in order to activate parents fears for their own children's safety.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Heron. I really appreciate that two-part framework for understanding what's happening. Would any of our other panelists like to chime in?

**Jamison Green:** If I could just add that, you know, I think targeting kids is sort of a double-edged sword in the sense that the frame is often about protecting kids, but it's really not about protecting kids. It's really about inhibiting kids, it's really about limiting them, attacking them, actually hurting them. And the rhetoric...the way that they are so deceptive about, you know, their intentions is just appalling. And I—you know, we've got to get underneath that, and get at that...the visceral heart of that, and challenge that in a strong and effective way. And that's hard. It's hard because they've got a lot of power.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Jamison, and we'll definitely get to that power holding later on in our conversation. Any other comments from our panelists before we move to our next question?

**Imara Jones:** I think the only thing that I would add is that, you know, we have to remember that this fight, of course, is in the context of a much larger vision that the Right has had for the past now 40 years. And targeting children and using the language of children and family has been there from the very beginning. And they've understood that that's their most effective way to get

people's attention. And so every...going back to Anita Bryant and trying to keep people before my time, but I read about it, before even keeping kids out of school. I mean, keeping gay teachers out of school, targeting children. Focus on the Family was, I think, probably more effective, early on, in reaching people with messages because they focus on family and children. And their polling has dictated that this is the best way to...groups on the Right have polled this issue and have focused grouped it. And their best shot at stopping trans rights is by focusing on children. And they understand that. And so I think that's why they do it, because it's the best shot that they have.

**Chase Strangio:** And it's, yeah, I mean, it just and this has all been covered...(and I lost my internet for a second, so apologies if I missed anything). But I think that this type of control over the nuclear family and the, like sort of, reinforcing the entrenchment of binary norms of sexual difference, as sort of inherent to a state building project, particularly like a far-right state building project. And that's what we're also seeing, sort of, the rise of the discourse around gender ideology, coinciding with the rise of far-right governments in Latin America and Eastern Europe, in the UK, in the U.S. You can see this trajectory. It's like the election of Donald Trump, the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil, everything that is happening in Hungary, it's all connected because this discourse actually builds a sort of far-right form of state power.

**Koki Mendis:** Fabulous, thank you for bringing the international perspective in, too, is really important in this conversation, and in the work certainly. Continuing in this vein, I'd like for us to discuss how encountering this tragedy on the Right, we on the Left can center trans adults. To ground the narrative in the struggles and needs of trans adults to thrive and flourish, while also recognizing the profound struggle of trans children, whose identities are politicized and contested at a time in their lives that should be characterized by low stakes struggles that play out against a background of safety, security, and unconditional love. How do we represent balance and advocate for the whole autonomous lives of trans people? This is an open question to our panel. Whoever would like to go.

**Jamison Green:** I would really like to say that trans adults were once trans children. And paying attention to trans children can create healthier, more successful, less traumatized adults. And this is...you know, basically it's attacking a population at its root. Where it's most vulnerable and that is the bottom line here. And yet using it through that—through that rhetoric of, you know, the creating the knee-jerk, “we have to protect the children” idea that is so insidious,

that we have to get underneath that.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Jamison. Would anyone else like to chime in?

**Heron Greenesmith:** Although, you know, as a as a non-binary person, it was really, really hard for me as a child in isolation, you know, hearing only negative messages—and some of that messaging is changing, and some of the you know, the possibility models are growing and thriving in the world. But I encouraged us to ask this question because there...you know, the emphasis on trans children is two-fold for me. It is so perverse in its microscopic, you know, looking at who has had what medical intervention done, if they want any at all, to the point of talking about the mastectomies of 13-year-olds, it is disgustingly perverse. And I think that we as a Left really need to talk about the whole and thriving lives of trans adults.

And then secondarily focusing on children forces them to respond to the attacks themselves instead of looking to, and putting the spotlight on trans adults who have been through struggles, who are now thriving, who are still struggling to represent the multitude of our community. I'm thinking back to...was it Stella Keating who testified in the Equality Act hearing in the Senate, who had to hear—she was the only trans representation on the panel and she had to hear the horrible attacks that Rand Paul leveraged. And it was just—it made me deeply wish that instead of her, we had this like hundred strong panel of trans adults who could say, “oh, fuck you, like, say those things to my face. Say those things to my face instead.”

**Koki Mendis:** That's a great point Heron, and I think also it raises for me the point of putting the onus on parents of trans children as well and really identifying who needs to be...who needs to speak up in this moment, who needs to show up in this moment. Go ahead.

**Imara Jones:** Yeah, I would just say this. And honestly, I think Chase models what I'm about to say really well. But I think that one of the things that can frustrate me is when we sometimes over...we overemphasize and over-project the power of children to change the world. When actually, as children they get to be children. It is actually the role of adults to protect children. It is not—it is not the role of these children to be protecting themselves. It is our role. And for people to constantly say, “oh, it's the younger generation will lead” or, you know, “16-, 17-, 12-, 13-year-olds are testifying and are so powerful” and everyone celebrates that. It's the responsibility of adults to do that. And I just want us to keep all that in mind. This is not a children's fight. This is not a teenagers fight. This is an adult fight. This is our fight. This is our responsibility. It is not the

responsibility of these children.

**Chase Strangio:** I mean, I mean, I totally agree with that is like no one should have to go beg their government not to kill. No child..no one period, but especially no child. I think the challenge, too, in all of this is that there is also this really disempowering and patronizing discourse that comes in that claims children don't know who they are, that young people don't have agency over their bodies. And so we want to, sort of, protect kids from having to be exposed to the relentless attacks. We also know that kids, children, adolescents have incredible understanding of who they are. I hate the sort of flip ways that people refer to young people, and especially in relation to accessing medical care, but just in general, like, "oh, well, you know, these kids have no idea, they're being manipulated by social media, they're being manipulated by society, they're being manipulated by their parents." And it's like, no. And so trying to create that counternarrative too. Which is that, first of all, like as a parent, I'm like, yes, my child...I could no more convince my child to be someone that she's not than I could convince myself. And I think that finding ways to both protect kids and also make clear that young people know who they are in some very fundamental ways is really, really important.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you. I think that you all really got to the root of sort of the—both the importance in centering trans children because children become trans adults, but then also making sure that the responsibility to advocate is on adults.

So continuing with our conversation, another devastating strategy largely enacted by the state on the trans community is the violent policing and incarceration of trans people. And as part and parcel of our White supremacist carceral state, it is, of course, disproportionately Black trans people who find themselves criminalized and behind bars. Imara, in your [interview on the TransLash podcast](#) with visionary art director Tourmaline she said the following about the context of NYPD policing, that was the backdrop to Marcia P. Johnson's legendary activism, a quote that I love: "These were laws about regulation of people showing up in public. And I had to really sit and think about, wow, they're really trying to enforce a sense of morality on public space. And it's in response to the power of trans aesthetic. There's something so powerful about our art form, about our expression, about our way of moving around in public life, that is at odds with the morality of the state." I love this framing of the power of trans aesthetic in the way in which your work with TransLash celebrates trans artists, particularly Black trans artists, whose artwork is both a celebration of self and a repudiation of status quo, power, and norms. Imara can you tell us about the unique lived experiences of Black trans

folks and how vital it is to expand the public narrative of what it is to be Black and trans? Which is the big question. I fully accept.

**Imara Jones:** Yeah, two responses. One, I thought that possibly you would have gone to Chase on the front part of that question, because I don't know much about the intricacies of the carceral state and all the rest of it. So there's part of your question that I can't speak to and that I honestly don't think that I should have to speak to, to be blunt about it. The other piece is that I resist encapsulating the experience of all Black trans women, and of all Black people. I believe that we get to be individuals and our experiences get to be individual. And so I don't speak to that. I can't answer that. I can talk as a journalist about trends that I see, or of data that I've come across, but I can't speak to people's experience. Black trans women are numerous and powerful and get to do that for themselves.

I think that what I would say is that...what would I say about the intersection of the carceral state and the Black trans experience? I mean, I think that it's like the last failure. If I have to look at it systemically, I think it's like the last failure for Black trans people. What do I mean by that? I think that beyond families, I think the institutions that we have in our society that are supposed to mitigate and provide opportunities for people, regardless of where they were born or how they were born, particularly, and uniquely, and specifically, fail Black trans people, Black trans women in very specific ways. We know that from—we know that happens in education, which is the first mediating institution that is supposed to intervene. We know that schools fail Black trans people because—not only of where schools are and the racial element (which is well documented), but also because those schools are hostile. That then means that less people—that people do either less well in school, and if you do less well in school or drop out, makes it much harder to find certain types of employment. And then if you move into lower levels of employment, we know that Black trans people have to change jobs on a regular basis because of harassment at work (that's a well-documented one), or be forced into the informal economy.

And if you're forced into the informal economy, (two out of five Black trans women, if my memory serves me correct, have engaged in sex work), then the carceral state is set up to capture you essentially from that. And so that's why I say it's the last...it's the last failure. It's the institution that caps the failure of all the others for Black trans women and for Black trans people. I think that we need we need to understand that. And that's why it's so important, and why there's been so much pressure to change the way in which we view sex work in this country and particularly the burden, the criminal burden, that we have on sex workers. That's why we want to make sure that we drop Walking While Trans laws which give explicit power of the state to assume what you're doing

as a Black trans person, and to temporarily detain you to search for something that may or may not be wrong. And then, of course, the way that we criminalize sex work overall and have made sex work more dangerous through recent laws that were passed under the guise of protecting women. That is to say, making it harder for sex work to be transacted and negotiated online, which is just a much safer space and way. And then you compound on that Covid's impact on sex work. So I think all of that is to say that what I would say about what we see, about the way that the carceral state engages with Black trans people is that, as I said, it's the last failure.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Imara. I think you did a fabulous job answering a very big question. And I really appreciate how you brought sex work into the conversation. I'm wondering, Heron, if you wanted to talk a little bit about your work on sex work at PRA that you're doing.

**Heron Greenesmith:** I'll just talk a little bit about the work that me and Ashley-Devon Williamston, an incredible social anthropologist—from Cincinnati? [Laughs] I don't know where they are—are working on right now, looking at specifically at how feminist and women's organizations can be seduced by (the same things that Imara's talking about), seduced by the idea that all sex work is coercive, seduced by the idea that sex workers need to be rescued somehow. And honestly, it comes down to many of the same structures that are placed—that result in anti-trans advocacy. But with some specific twists. So for kind of broader feminist and women's organizations, anti-sex work advocacy, we see a lot of White savior complexes that also are combined with a willful ignorance that the majority of the things that we interact with in life, are reliant upon trafficked labor, underpaid labor, and forced labor in some cases, and even kidnaping and slavery. So, you know, the shirt I'm wearing was probably made—used by forced or underpaid labor. Not in the United States, where people can, you know, duck labor practices. And the grapes I'm eating were probably picked by people who were either trafficked or forced through circumstance to pick grapes. And the White feminist idea that only sex workers needs saving from the system of capitalism combines patriarchal paternalism with a willful ignorance of how capitalism infects everything that we do. And the only thing it does, as Imara said, is make sex workers less safe. So you're not actually achieving anything.

One of the most shocking things I found (and I am kicking myself that I didn't know this), is that some anti-trafficking organizations partner specifically with clothing companies who have garment factories in the areas that are targeted by these anti- trafficking organizations. So there will be a raid on a "brothel,

identified brothel,” and then those sex workers will be “rescued” and “given jobs” in the garment factory. Also underpaid, also poor conditions, also forced labor to the extent that there aren’t many options in that area. So you have White women who are specifically benefiting through cheap clothing from the transfer of sex workers from the sex industry to the garment industry. So I think we need to be able to look at these systems with open eyes and an understanding that we are complicit in all of these systems. Everything that we do as people who interact in society is complicit in the systems that that we are also fighting against. And White feminists, White anti-trafficking feminists seem to...well, not seem to, are deliberately pretending like they’re not participating in the systems that they themselves are criticizing.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you Heron. And we did have a question from Aaron: why not criminalize buyers, not criminalize sellers. If somebody on our panel would like to talk about the flaws of the “Nordic model”.

**Heron Greenesmith:** And I happy to talk a little bit about the Nordic model, but, you know, it just. All it does is continue to make sex work less safe. Sex work organizers, and sex work advocacy networks across the world are universally critical of the Nordic model and the fact that if you introduce criminal penalties into any part of the sex work process, it makes the whole—it makes the transactions unsafe.

**Imara Jones:** Well, I also want to be clear, like what we’re talking about is sex work, not sex trafficking. Sex trafficking laws should remain on the books. They need to be enforced. But sex trafficking and sex work are not the same thing. And we do want to make sure that sex work does not become organized and coercive, which is one of the reasons why it’s decriminalized and not legalized, as it were, because you don’t want it to be kind of a mass corporate business where people end up actually in a corporate model of sex work, which we see happening with cannabis and other things. So I think that we want to make sure that we are testing, making a distinction between decriminalization and legalization. And, of course, there’s a large conversation within the...in the community about those two things. But I think that, that fine line is one of the reasons why a lot of the emphasis is on decrim and not legalization, and also that we want to make sure that we are talking about making a distinction and continuing to criminalize in every way sex trafficking.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Imara, for adding nuance to drawing that important line. Anyone else on this question before we continue. Okay great. Oh, Chase, go ahead.

**Chase Strangio:** Well, I mean, I think it's just also like going back to the originating question about sort of the carceral state and then these sort of subsidiary questions. You know, in the United States, there is no state other than the carceral state. And so every intervention that we engage in with the legal system, especially when we think about enhancements of surveillance, including the ways in which we're looking at increasing surveillance of athletes, and sports, and schools, increasing surveillance of access to medicine for trans kids, that is an expansion of carceral power. And the way that carceral power works in the United States is through anti-Blackness. And so that when—if we look at the impact of these laws, we're expanding the authority of a state that is at its core anti-Black into all different areas of people's lives where it already is present. But we're expanding the authority. And I think that it's just really dangerous to think about, well, what's going to happen when the state is authorized to inspect people's bodies even further in the context of athletics? What's going to happen when the state is authorized to intrude upon the family even further in the context of health care? And that, I think, is really scary. And one of the reasons why this should be, you know, like a five-alarm fire every single day.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Chase, somebody in our comments said this is a dream panel and I could not agree more. Really loving the responses today.

A through line of our discussion has certainly been the politics of visibility, which is and has been the profound lived reality of trans advocates through decades of struggle for trans liberation. Jamison, in [a recent interview](#), you encapsulate this fact so succinctly, saying, "Visibility is crucial. It's how we articulate our needs, what we want to accomplish, how we want to succeed, what all this transness means for all of us." In fact, your activism is deeply rooted in the concept of visibility. Can you talk a little bit about the power of visibility, but also what it means to live so publicly, to have your personal self intertwined with public narrative and political activism? And I'd love for you to start and then to hear from our other panelists.

**Jamison Green:** I'd love to hear from other panelists too. It's...Visibility is absolutely crucial. Without it, we are...we are invisible. We don't exist. We are erased. If we do not stay visible, we cannot persist. We can only hide, we can only, you know, cover ourselves and how will our needs be met in our old age? How will our needs be met if there's no safe place in the world for our bodies to exist? We have to make it known that people with diverse bodies, diverse sexualities, diverse everything, exist. And we are human beings and we deserve the same level of respect,

and dignity, and care, and services that everyone else expects and receives. So bottom line, that's it.

And how is it to live that every day? It's actually quite rewarding. You know, I was afraid of it in the beginning. I was afraid back in the 80s and the 90s when I first realized that that was going to be necessary. That to pretend I wasn't trans would be a lie, at least for me. And I don't [clears throat] excuse me. I don't begrudge anyone who is trans, who does not want to be out. That is a personal choice. And I don't declare that everyone who is...wants to remain closeted is lying. That is not true. That is...it is their choice. It is their experience. It is their life. It is not my place to judge them. But for me, I knew that I had to be out because I didn't want to not to be called unreal. And I thought if I could be out and explicate these situations and help people understand that trans people are ordinary people, we just have some unique needs. We have some unique bodies. But that doesn't mean that we're completely off base. That doesn't mean we're completely unreliable. It doesn't mean we're completely inhuman. None of those things are true. And if we only can partake in society, as everyone is expected to partake in society, we just exist just like everybody else.

It's only when we're singled out—and I discovered that particularly in the struggle for the the removal of exclusions from healthcare policies—everybody gets the treatments that trans people get until they're trans. It's only when trans people are known to be trans that they can't have access to these same medical treatments that anyone else can get. And that is the argument that I started making in the early 1990s, and that is how we've gotten exclusions removed from insurance policies in this country. And that is crucial. It's a foundation. It's not the only place we have to go. But it's a foundation.

And also the ability to have a job, the ability to to find work and to keep work. Whether we transition on the job or whether we transitioned 10 years ago, we should be able to contribute to society just like anyone else can. And that's...so without being visible, we have no place, no ground to stand on. Somebody's got to do it. I'm not saying everybody has to do it. I'm not saying that it's wrong if you don't be out. But if some of us aren't out. And of course, the more of us who can be out, the better. But literally, if you can't, if it's not safe for you to be out, please protect yourself. You know, some of us can do this. Not everyone can. It's OK. That doesn't mean you're bad. It doesn't mean you're not holding up your end. It means you need to take care of yourself. And that's our responsibility as a society to make sure that you are safe and can take care of yourself. That's where I'm coming from, about visibility.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Jamison. That's beautiful, and I'm so glad to hear that it's been a rewarding politics of visibility for you really, truly. Any panelists like to

chime in on this question?

**Chase Strangio:** I mean, I think yeah, and I really appreciate your perspective, Jamison, and all the work that you've done to make it possible for other people to be visible, myself included. You know, I feel so complicated about visibility for all of the reasons. You know, I think they're particularly in the last like six years. And the notion of a trans tipping point, and the ways in which trans people in trans stories have been leveraged in the media and in pop culture. It's been in many ways essential. Like as a kid, I had no concept of trans stuff. I had nothing. And that...there was barely anything queer. I mean, I had...I remember...I talk about, you know, just trying to find my dial up internet to find examples of anything queer, because just there was...there was just no...you know....We, of course, know who we are in any sort of fundamental ways. But it's really helpful to see people in the world existing that help us sort of map on to what we can believe as young people as possible. And that the more people we are seeing, I think the better.

And it is I just think because of the capitalism that we live under, because of the celebrity culture that we live under, there's a false sense of success. There's a false sense of sort of...and our community is thriving for sure. But there's a false sense of what it looks like. And then I think that for those who are enacting violence against trans people as a reaction to what they're seeing, the violence is being enacted on people who aren't supported, who aren't having the material conditions to support their survival.

And it's just...there's...it's so complex. And then I also just think, you know, the toll of like...I.... My life is not ruined, but like sort of ruins my visibility. You know, it's like the relentlessness of the attacks. And just like everything I do, because this like something to torment me over. And I'm fine. You know, I have a job. I get to be trans at my job. I get to, you know, do what I love. I think that... but we're asking people, a lot of people to sort of shoulder an incredibly hostile public environment. And that includes just so much meanness. And since most of us probably didn't have the best experiences as kids, that it taps into like our inner children, who are also still healing from that experience. And so when you put yourself out there and then you're being met...I can't do anything without people calling for me to be fired, making fun of my appearance, you know, saying I shouldn't have kids, you know, all the things. Of course, like I feel secure in all of it, and also I'm a human being and I am vulnerable. And those...that, you know, they tap into the things, especially as trans folks were like, "yes, thank you, please exacerbate my dysphoria." And so I just think all of those things going on at once that we need a lot of space to hold our people, the people who are getting attacked because there is big visibility, the people are

being visible and getting attacked. So it's just a lot to hold.

**Jamison Green:** In each individual life, you have to find balance. I mean, I don't...I'm not...I don't spend a lot of time on social media. I could care less. You know, seriously, that is not where I'm going to have an impact. I mean, that's just more gunk in the air as far as I'm concerned. I mean, I know I have good things to say, but, hey, so do a lot of other people and how does anybody tell the difference? So I just do what I know I can do and make a difference in the way that I can make a difference. And I...I insist that people recognize that balance is crucial in all our lives, just as it's crucial in our society. We can't have...I mean, we talk about binary systems and we talk about combating the binary because it's a vicious thing. Every aspect of of a person's life can be binarized, whether you're trans or non-binary or not. Every aspect of our economy is binarized. Our racial structures are binarized. And in fact, in real life, people are not literally all black or all white. The economy is not all capitalist or all socialist, the economy is is diverse. Even though we label it socialist, we've got some people who are very, very wealthy—I mean, excuse me, we label it capitalist. Some people are very, very wealthy and other people do just fine, just going with a flow, and other people are suffering horrifically. We need to recognize that our system that we live in, the environment, the whole system, the ecology of human life in our society, struggling against these various—these impulses and these various poles of opposition is not the be all and end all just like being visible.

I'm...I got on an airplane once and was...that same day the San Francisco Chronicle had come out with a huge story about me. My picture, huge picture, three quarters of a page, on the front page of the Sunday Chronicle paper. All these...I got up to go to the bathroom and I turned to go down the aisle and almost every seat in the aisle had my picture in it with people reading the paper. Nobody recognized me. Nobody said a word to me. What is visibility? You know, we have to recognize that there is a balance. I'm not going to be threatened by my picture in the paper. People don't recognize a real live person in the face of a picture right next to them.

You know, it's a complex world that we live in. And when we take these things and put them into little packages to try to understand them—which we must do because we must understand them—we have to maintain the perspective that shows that we are fitting into a complex web of humanity. And how do we influence humanity to be kind, to be considerate, to be helpful to others? What are the values that we want to project? This is what our opposition has been very, very good at. They've been very, very good at articulating their values, and projecting them as absolute, and absolutely necessary. And we have not been good at that on the Left. We have not been

good at it because we fight with each other too much about labels and things. It's been very, very difficult sometimes, but I think we can do it. I still have faith. I still have energy for it. I still have compassion for our diverse communities and want us to succeed. And I think we can. But we have to stop struggling, to a certain extent. I don't know if you understand what I'm getting at.

**Imara Jones:** I'm sorry I...

**Koki Mendis:** I want to just hear what Imara has to say.

**Imara Jones:** I think that, Jamison, if you have had that level of visibility and haven't been targeted, that is...that's amazing!

**Jamison Green:** And I'm a consulate outsider, I'm constantly ignored.

**Imara Jones:** But Let me...let me just...

**Jamison Green:** I won't say any more.

**Imara Jones:** OK, stretch my legs a little bit. No, I think...I think...I think if that's the case—I mean, for example, you know, Chase is regularly rounded by TERFs, right? For me, I've spent the last six months in security briefings getting ready for the possibility that at some point, you know, the gaze of Sauron might find me. And so I think that if that's been your experience, I think that that's important. And I think that you need to continue to be out there because what you have done, and are doing is really powerful. But not everyone in our community has that experience.

**Jamison Green:** Well, I've been targeted, too. I have been targeted.

**Imara Jones:** OK, so one of the things that I wanted to just continue to say is that for me, the way that I think about visibility is a little bit differently. And I'm trying to figure out in my...I'm trying to come up with labels right now. I've been playing with it a little bit. But for me, there's something about like being out, being scapegoated, and being visible. To me, those are three different things. And we call them visibility. Those are not all the same things. And there are people who cannot be out in their communities in this country, because it's a matter of life and death. And it has nothing to do with like, being closeted. It has nothing to do with a lot of the stuff that we've been talking about, quite frankly. For them, it's a matter of life and death. And especially for Black

trans women to be made known, it costs people their lives. Now when people then say we shouldn't be visible, my response to that is that, well, sadly, that's always happened. I mean, Marsha P. Johnson was killed in the 1990s. We still don't know who killed her. So people have been killing us before we were "visible," before we were mainstream. That's not...that's not the delta. That's not the change. But that's happened here. There's not causality. But we have to remember that for some people, being out is a matter of life and death and they shouldn't be out. And they need to stay in the closet because we need them to stay alive, and we need them to do everything they need to do to stay alive.

Then there's another type of visibility when we are scapegoated and we don't have any role in that. What I mean by that is the use of us by Donald Trump, and now by politicians in dozens of states across the country, and by governors. We didn't have any say in that. That is people deciding to use one and a half percent of the population as a scapegoat, and to further their political means. That doesn't have anything to do with us.

And then there's visibility, right? And that is the way...the positive ways that we think about that. Which is to say—which touches upon what you're talking about, Jamison, which is creating space for ourselves by showing people that we exist. And showing that we can be lawyers, and scientists, and authors, and you name it, right? That understanding that trans people exist and we know that that personal—we understand that for the nine out of ten people in this country that don't know us, almost the only way that they'll get to know us, is because of us, right? And people that reveal ourselves, either in their families or through the media.

And so I think that when we say visibility, we're lumping all these things together. And sometimes we're talking across purposes, even within our community. Some people are like, "well, visibility won't save us." Well, no one ever said that visibility would save us. And I think that what you're talking about is the fear of being scapegoated or people dying in their communities from being out. That's different than visibility. But my point here is that I think we need to make clear what we're talking about when we talk about it, and to understand that I firmly, personally believe that visibility is a tool in our liberation. I believe that Marsha P. Johnson understood that, which is why she was allowed herself to be photographed by Andy Warhol, because she understood that placing herself within a certain type of cultural movement was about establishing that she exists and that she's real, right? And so I believe in that as a tool for our liberation. My entire media project is grounded in that. At the same time, I also hold complexities and understand that this is a hostile space and a hostile world for us still. And for so many of us, it's still life or death, and we have to understand and acknowledge that as well.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Imara. I really appreciate the distinctions that you've

made within the concept of visibility. Mallory, one of our chat participants, says that they use exposure as a way to talk about unchosen violent visibility, which is an interesting framing as well. Heron, Chase, would either of you like to jump into this question? No pressure. We can continue on our journey, if not.

**Jamison Green:** I would just add to that scapegoating is the issue right now that's facing our community by...through these bills. As Imara says, it's the scapegoating and we didn't have a choice in and in fact, we are not given a voice at all. And this is the most appalling thing, (well, there's a million appalling things about the situation we're in right now and that are that our youth are in), but we have no voice. They don't care to hear the truth about trans experience. They don't care to hear what trans adults have been through because of lack of treatment as trans youth, they don't care about any of it. They're using us for something else. That is hurting our children.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Jamison. That's actually a great transition into our next question. Looking at a place in which there is some degree of, sort of, representation at the national level conversation narrative and change. So in these politics of visibility, it's, of course, a key component of the high impact Supreme Court cases that codify lived trans experiences into law. And Chase, you've represented many of the people, as I mentioned at the top, whose lives and names have entered the historical record as defendants in high profile Supreme Court cases. So from Chelsea Manning to Gavin Grimm and the late Aimee Stephens, [about whom you wrote](#), "Aimee did not set out to be a hero and a trailblazer, but she is one and our country, owes her a debt of gratitude for her commitment to justice for all people and her dedication to our transgender community. When Aimee decided to fight back after she was fired for being transgender, she just wanted it to be acknowledged that what happened to her was wrong". Chase, can you talk to us about the significance of this kind of impact legislation so often centered on people who did not necessarily set out to change the course of history? And the Supreme Court, which we know is a fundamentally conservative political institution, has become a locus of contestation for trans liberation. Can you, in particular, give our readers a sense of what the recent Bostock decision means for future attempts to deny rights to trans people and set the stage for the upcoming *Fulton vs. City of Philadelphia* case.

**Chase Strangio:** Yeah, well, OK, that's a lot. I mean, yeah, so I, I guess...I...I think starting from the premise that, like, yes, the courts and the legal system are fundamentally flawed and conservative structures...like this is...our Constitution was drafted and ratified with goals of maintaining chattel

slavery as part of a project, a colonial project. And so everything we do, in law, is entrenching those things in one way or another. And so there is a way in which...we have to just start from the premise that this is not liberation, and that that we're doing harm reduction in the courts. And that I still believe in doing it because I believe in reducing harm and I believe in creating pathways for people to have more survival opportunities. And I think Aimee's case is a great example of that, where norms of equality and employment are important, and we need to protect people from discrimination.

And there are big structural problems, too, in the United States. The fact that we connect, for example, health insurance to employment is a big structural problem. The fact that we have largely at-will employment, and a sort of not-robust-compared-to-other-parts-of-the-world labor movement is a problem. It's also hurting trans people in the workforce, and in the world. And you know, and the fact that we have...you have to prove intentional discrimination in order to show harm is a nightmare. And the unique case of...Aimee's unique case and some trans cases, we actually had employers who were like, "yes, I fired you because you're trans." That is not going to be 99 of 100 cases. And so I think that just recognizing limitations of the legal system as a whole, is important to sort of placing in context what each Supreme Court win actually means.

And that isn't to say that Aimee herself isn't incredible, because she was just...she was just being Aimee. And she was living her life, and needing her health insurance, and needing to care for her family, and had no choice but to be Aimee. And then for that, she was punished. She was fired. And because she was fired, and because we have this horrible system, she lost her health insurance. And because she lost her health insurance, her health was impacted, and she died. She died before the Supreme Court ever ruled in her case. So it's like, yes. And Gavin too! Gavin's in his twenties now. He didn't get to go to the bathroom at school. And so, yes, we are doing the work to try to rectify and minimize some of these harms. And people are still experiencing significant harms in a multitude of ways. And so with with Aimee's case, I think it was incredible. It was incredible to get a 6-3 opinion from an incredibly conservative court, saying that federal laws already prohibit discrimination against LGBTQ people, and that should be imported to every single federal statute that prohibits sex discrimination as well as the Constitution. And that is a huge win. It's constrained by the limitations that are already inherent in these laws.

And, you know, the court has obviously shifted further to the Right, even since *Bostock*, because Justice Ginsburg was on the *Bostock* 6-3 panel at the court. And obviously Justice Ginsburg has since died, and now we have Justice Barrett, and the demand that we made to the court, as is so often the case, was an incredibly conservative one. We made a textualist ask, which was the

right thing to do to Gorsuch, essentially saying, “don’t look at what the...don’t look at anything else but the simple question before you.” And the demand was really about, well, can you just be fired for being who you are. In the same way that the marriage victories were a very conservative and straightforward demand, in the same way even that a lot of the trans bathroom cases have been reinforcing the gender binary, talking about your sort of...and legitimizing sex separation generally, and sort of placing binary trans people into the boxes that already exist. And in so doing, reinforcing those boxes rather than destabilizing and challenging that. Which is one of the risks of leading with law in a civil rights movement: you’re going to make conservative demands, you’re going to entrench power structures, and you’re going to do both harm and good.

And so I think that the win in Aimee’s case was incredibly important. It held the line for decades of work and case law. It also allowed for the Biden administration to come in and promulgate regulations in the context of health care, in the context of shelter, in places where we need—our community needs support. In the context of prisons...like the interpretation of the law that Bostock put out in the Title VII contests is enabling good regulations in a whole bunch of other contexts, that had we lost, a new executive would have been largely without authority and that would have been a true nightmare. So I do really believe in the work that all of us did to make that happen.

We also just have to be ready for the fact that they’re about—they already chipped it away last term in this...in terms of expanding religious exemptions under even Title VII in cases right after Bostock was decided. And now we know that the City of Philadelphia...Fulton vs. City of Philadelphia case (which is also going to—which could come down as soon as Monday), is very likely going to significantly abrogate civil rights protections, assuming that we lose, (which I think is something that we could assume, or fear let’s say), that would locate even the protections to be exempt from generally applicable laws of nondiscrimination, and rules of nondiscrimination to a constitutional right. Which means it can be overridden by Congress. It means that we are going to be constrained by a court that is invested in chipping away at legal protections.

Which is why there’s such a need to not locate all of our—or not put all of our eggs in the in the litigation basket. Not look only to law to create distributive change, because at the end of the day, Kavanaugh might be the swing justice on this court. This is a court that is a catastrophe for our communities that we will...we should be keeping cases away from this court. We should be really thinking about what does it mean to be contending with a judiciary that we have. We are not just the Supreme Court, but the lower appellate courts, and the district courts are drastically changed. And so the work moving forward is yes, building off of everything that Aimee did, that Gavin did, that all of our

plaintiffs have done, and also really investing in the organizers who are keeping people alive every single day in Arkansas and Alabama, in places where we're seeing all these bills. And ultimately, we may not be able to win in the courts, but we can always win when we care for each other. And I think that's one of the key demands.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Chase. What a great call to action too. Jamison, you wanted to chime in?

**Jamison Green:** I actually have a question that is related to the spate of bills that are out there now and related to the court. Do you think, Chase, that...and Heron too from your work as well, and Imara your thoughts are crucial. Do you think that what they're trying to do here is push us toward a Supreme Court decision about the rights of trans people through contesting this litigation? Ultimately.

**Chase Strangio:** I mean, I can start. I mean, I believe it's two—I think it's two-fold. I think they genuinely want to take away—take away rights for trans people, and kill trans people. And that they feel great about doing it largely. And there is a goal to bring things into the courts. Absolutely. They'll intervene as defendants when we're challenging these laws. But, you know, I think it would be very difficult for private actors to figure out ways into the healthcare ban litigation. It's a lot easier in the sports cases. So it'll be interesting to see, as we file these lawsuits, what does it look like? Who's jumping in? I think it's both things. I think it's like...it's abortion...like abortion in that sense, where, you know, they they want the bans, they want the trap laws for their own sake, and they want to bring them into court.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you. I think actually I want to continue our conversation. I want to talk about the “they” in your response just now, Chase. And in the next part of our discussion, I'd like to explicitly engage with the groups and movements behind this recent slate of repressive anti-trans legislation aimed in particular, as we've mentioned, at trans student athletes, and children seeking gender affirming healthcare. Heron, you've been doing a lot of excellent work mapping these groups, both literally and figuratively, identifying the intersections of disparate right-wing movements, aligning along explicitly anti-trans agendas. I'd love for you to give our audience a sense of exactly who the key constituents are on the Right that represent the greatest threat and action against trans liberation, and some idea of how we mobilize the Left against such a formidable and most importantly, well-resourced adversaries. So if you could get us started on this conversation.

**Heron Greenesmith:** Yeah, absolutely. We've named a bunch of the

organizations and networks so far, but I'll just explicitly name them. As you said, there's a core coalition of mostly evangelical Right funded and evangelical Right kind of theologically guided organizations at the heart of the litigation, legislation, and general advocacy here. And that includes the Alliance Defending Freedom, the Family Policy Alliance, and the Heritage Foundation together, who authored The Promise to America's Children, which lays out 10 principles that these organizations hold in common. And then with organizations like the Family Research Council, who is not a signatory of the Promise to America's Children, but who, you know, hosts these conversations and informs federal and state policy around these issues.

And the Promise to America's Children, as I said, it has 10 principles or promises to children that would enshrine gender essentialism in a narrow evangelical, theological understanding of what it means to be a man and a woman, and indeed a child. And the Promise explicitly endorses conversion therapy. It opposes comprehensive sexual education. It opposes reproductive health care at any age. It explicitly endorses outing queer children to their parents, if a school is a place where they have found safety. And then it endorses many of the bills that we've been talking about today. So it endorses bans on trans athletes, and bans on medical care for trans youth. And that includes medical care across the entire spectrum of care that trans folks need, including care as basic and as lifesaving as literal therapy, and social transition for kiddos who sincerely need someone to just use the name that they use for themselves, and to wear the clothes that make them feel comfortable.

And this promise is one of the first times I have seen such an overt agenda listed. You know, many of these organizations are not quiet about what they believe in, but for a team of organizations who work so closely together to just to say, "yep, this is what we believe in, please sign on." It has a sign on spot for parents to promise that they will support these promises for their children. You can sign on as a teacher, you can sign on as a concerned citizen, and you can sign on as a legislator. And I'll talk a little tiny bit about the legislation, because I've seen a lot of news outlets, and advocates on our side claiming that these are pieces of copycat legislation, that they're just sprouting up because a central, you know, advocacy network, (maybe The Promise to America's Children) is handing legislators sample bills. And I actually don't see that happening. I've done some text analysis of the healthcare bills, and what I've seen is far more concerning. What I've seen is actually that there's a lot of different language and the legislators are drafting their own legislation. There's some that are similar, and maybe those people are talking with one another. But I am far more frightened of legislators, anti-trans legislators who are being emboldened and supported by these networks to draft their own legislation, than I am of

people who are being puppet-mastered from afar. I think what we're seeing is the development of a cross country cadre of deeply conservative anti-trans, evangelical-right legislators, who are being given the tools that they need to draft legislation in the way that they see it should be drafted.

And then just to touch briefly around the kind of satellite organizations around the main four: Alliance Defending Freedom, Family Policy Alliance, Heritage Foundation, the Family Research Council, we have the other kind of Evangelical Right and Catholic Right, legal organizations like the Becket Fund, and the John Birch Society. Then we have the anti-trans medical associations that are credentialing the anti-trans medical bills by using their medical licenses in order to give kind of the veneer of, I guess, respectability, or credential to these organizations. And you have the American College of Pediatricians, and Quentin Van Meter and Michelle Cretella there. And then you have kind of the anti-trans "gender critical" medical associations, like Partners for Ethical Care and GCCAN, who are orbiting around that. The legislation, some of them are test— some people affiliated with these organizations are testifying in support of the legislation.

And then over here you have the anti-trans feminist organizations like Women's Liberation Front, Women's Human Rights Campaign, and Save Women's Sports, who are likewise giving the anti-trans legislation kind of this veneer of a broader base of support. And, you know, the satellite organizations have their own kind of rhetoric that boosts the rhetoric of the major organizations. But it's all designed to make these—make this legislation appear as if it has a far broader community, and kind of general societal support, than it actually does.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Heron. That was really thorough. Chase, if you'd like to jump in?

**Chase Strangio:** I just..I wanted to flag something that's also happening that well....So first of all, again, we have money coming from the U.S. to the U.K. and we have things happening in the U.K. that are being copied here in the U.S. And one of the...one of the things that's troubling that is happening right now is—are these public records request that Women's Liberation Front, and other groups are sending to prison corrections agencies, trying to get data on who... which trans people are incarcerated, who's placed in women's facilities, and any data about any trans person with any violence—like quote unquote, violent conviction. And then they're going to get that information— well, first of all, I think the ACLU has tried to block them from getting it. And that's another source of these fights between the ACLU and these groups. Legal battles. But I think that

the ways in which they're not only drafting legislation and engaging in litigation, but sort of using the right-wing media context to, you know, to sort of hype up this false sense of some sort of safety crisis, and position the trans person, particularly the trans woman, as a threat is just...yeah, I mean, just nonstop churning out a false narrative.

And it's really scary because it's really hard to combat. And when you have something that's not nuanced at all and untrue, it's really hard to combat it. And that, I think, is what we're seeing. Like there's the court cases in the U.K., there's the court cases here. But yeah. And someone in the context talking about the way in which FOIA, a public records request have been used in the U.K. I mean, they're going after Stonewall U.K. and organizations to look at all of their funding to try to attack the ability to do any advocacy for trans people, let alone for trans people to have the means for survival. And it's so...it's like the ultimate gaslighting all the time. And then when you're in court, they're like, "oh no, we're not discriminating against trans people. These are just like very mutual" and so you start—it's like being in an abusive relationship. You're like, wait, I know this is happening and I'm being spun around and then it's coming over here and you're—and so I just—I think there's a way where we have to sort of really look at all of these things at once, and how they're playing out, and how they're happening globally, and then what's happening to the individuals. Like what's going to happen to trans people in prison who are already over-policed and criminalized, and now are the new target of a lot of this anti-trans discourse. So I just wanted to add that because I think every day I'm like newly terrified and that is a big aspect of the next level.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Chase and Heron, for painting a very bleak and thorough picture, and sort of really getting to the strategies that are at play. I want to push you all on the second part of this question, like, how do we mobilize our Left to do something in the face of this increased activity, and these varied strategies? You know, Chase, you talked about sort of the danger of litigating, especially right now. What are the other strategies for—towards—to achieve trans liberation? And so that both for our audience, both for the organizations represented on this panel today, what can we do, and how? And anybody who wants to take the big question again, certainly not an easy one to answer. But I am really interested in what the strategies you all identify as next steps.

**Imara Jones:** I...two things, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to step off the panel in five... in like, ten minutes. So I just wanted to let everyone know that if you're in the middle of your brilliance and you see me leave, it has nothing to do with you. [Laughs].

**Imara Jones:** The second...what did you say, Jamison? Does it matter? What did

you say?

**Jamison Green:** Don't leave!

**Imara Jones:** OK, thank you, thank you! That's always a better than get out of here.

So what I was going to say is I think that one of the things that I am learning is, and believe is, that we are underestimating the threat at this particular moment by a vast amount. Take whatever you think you know and then multiply it by a hundred and you're probably close. That if you think that this is about, you know, hate or an individual ignorance, or an individual person who's acting out, that's not what's really going on. And so I think a part of it is for us to do our jobs in communicating that, and in communicating the bigger picture of what's happening. Because we can get—we can get in the...we can get in the tactical fight, right? This bill is here and it's at this stage in committee, and it's...And all of that's really important, that's how you stop bad things from happening, is to know what's going on and to push back on them. But it's also equally important to contextualize the story, and to just let everyone know that it's not an accident, that we went from six anti-trans bills in 2019 to over a hundred in 2021, right? That's not....

And to just begin to make contact with that. And I think to educate ourselves, for us to educate each other. I think that there is a horrendous miscalculation by the Left and progressive institutions right now, in thinking that this particular trans fight is a marginal one. And that we don't need any resources and that, "oh, it's just the Right doing their thing again. And we got this and we got the people in the White House and the Republicans are on the back foot," all of that stuff. And you know, if you look at 2020 and 2016, those people have been wrong. We eeked it out in 2020. Like it was eeked out. There is no...you lost seats in the House, you barely won the Senate. Barely. Like you shouldn't have, but you did it. And I think that just that particular sleepiness, and dismissiveness, and underestimation of where we are, is one of the ways that we got here. And I think that, you know, it's really important to understand that this isn't going anywhere. And all those...and all of the alphabet institutions that you can think of right now, besides ACLU, but all of the other ones...but all of the other alphabet organizations that you can think of in your head are pretty—pretty wrong and behind on this issue right now. And are vastly underestimating the threat and are vastly underestimating the risk. And are continuing to treat trans people and trans voices as if we are marginal. And is...it's like "there are so many other things we've got to get to and eventually get to that," and they're wrong.

So I think that that's a part of the conversation that we have to change, is to raise the level of engagement amongst our own side, right? It doesn't have

anything to do with them. You know, and trans people are already activated on this. So you don't really need to activate trans people, right? Like, you need to activate people who have organizations, and have resources, and have foundations, and have corporations and all that stuff. Those people need to be engaged. And I think that it's also incumbent upon us through Trans Journalists Association, all the activists, that—to again raise the alarm and the level...raise the level of conversation about where we are.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you. I think that's a fabulous response, certainly, and I think the fervent nods that I'm seeing on our panel suggest that you've hit the nail on the head. Opposition researcher over here, nodding away. So I think, you know, I think that is work that certainly PRA is committed to doing. But it is an interesting question of the Left, and how do you...how do we mobilize the Left around an issue that seems, like what you said, like a marginal issue, right? That's a really big question. And it seems at scale alone isn't making the argument right? The number of bills this year versus last should be enough of an alarm sounded...but it's a really interesting question, certainly. And how do you...talking about visibility again, how do you make that need so much more visible than it already is? It is a big one. And again, a responsibility that shouldn't just be to the trans community. The Left as the whole, needs to be committed to taking up this fight and prioritizing it, certainly. Although that's easy for me to say as a fellow individual. But you know. Chase, you wanted to add?

**Chase Strangio:** Yeah, I mean, I just I think too, that we...I think there's a real stuckness that comes with institutionalism. And the fact is that we...Congress isn't doing anything on anything. We are stuck. We have a Congress that is useless. We have a federal executive that has been more and more empowered over the last 20 years because of Congress's failures. But what that means is that you have lots of action happening at the executive level and then it all gets challenged in court. So we're like, if we don't reform the judiciary, if we don't reform the legislative—the legislative body at the federal level, at least, then we're just going to be in a cycle. We can't just say, "well, we'll just keep working with the systems that we have" because these systems, they create the exact outcomes that we know they're going to create and that they always have created. And so if we just continue to say, well, we'll just push Congress to do this and then we'll hope that the Supreme Court doesn't do something bad, then we're going to be right back where we started.

In 2013 and in the Shelby County decision, the Supreme Court, despite the fact the Congress unanimously passed the Voting Rights Act, (reauthorized it), they struck down Section V of the Voting Rights Act: in 2013. That

led to immediately all of the voter suppression that we're seeing, to the gerrymandering that we're seeing. And it's just—it's all predictable. And so if we just say, "oh, let's just go back up to the same Supreme Court that did this very thing," and Congress can't even pass any voting rights, you know? So it's like, what are we doing? You know?

And trans people are a canary in the coal mine. But it's not about trans people. It's about consolidating power, you know, building structures that are just going to perpetuate themselves exactly as they always have. And I think that it is about trans justice and liberation, of course, but it's just about...it's about survival and liberation for so many people. And when we talk about, like, the way in which sort of LGBTQ work is connected to this. Like if you look at 2013, that was the year that the Supreme Court struck down Section V of the Voting Rights Act, the same week that they struck down DOMA. So you have power being expanded for some people in the LGBT community, while the country, and particularly Black people, are being annihilated by the Supreme Court. And then look ahead to 2021, and you have the two primary things that are happening in state legislatures being—three things: attacking protesters and the BLM movement, suppressing the vote, and targeting trans people. And we're not getting the corporate response that we got to the marriage work. We're not getting people to mobilize. And it's all connected and that if we don't see it is all connected, then we're just going to lose. We're going to lose all these fights. Or we could see it as a connected thing that we have to fundamentally change our institutions.

**Heron Greenesmith:** I just wanted to say—oh, go ahead, Imara.

**Imara Jones:** Superfast before I leave, (sorry, Heron, thank you so much) is I have had people who were involved in the marriage fight say that this isn't the same thing. And that there are lots of organizations that are already focused on this. They named Chase's. "And so we don't really need to mobilize around this because..." And I'm like [confused face] And I just want to say to them, I I don't know how to help you. I don't know what to say to you.

**Heron Greenesmith:** This is a systems fight. We're having a systems fight. And the people who are benefiting from the system don't see we're having a systems fight because they're benefiting from it. The people who gained marriage, the White people who gained marriage, the White people who can now adopt their children, are not...they are incentivized to not see that this is a systems fight. And we're in a crisis of systems right now.

**Jamison Green:** And we also have a culture that sort of discourages us from

talking about our challenging religious-based ideas. We can't even go there, in many contexts, as a culture. It's just not allowed. Only the people who oppose us are able to do that.

**Heron Greenesmith:** I put in—I put in the chat, sorry, just really quickly, I put in the chat this The New York Times look at the recent data from the Robert's court compared to the other Supreme Court chief justices, and just showing the absolute sea change. Where the Robert's court is now, you know, 89 percent of the time, or 90 percent of the time finding for majority religions...favorably for majority religions in religious exemption cases completely, you know, in opposition to earlier courts findings for minority religious practitioners, (which arguably is why the first amendment was created: to protect minority religious practitioners.) But Imara love you so much. Bye bye! Thank you!

**Koki Mendis:** I think this is fascinating and fabulous that we're raising this level of complexity in our conversation and really identifying what the threat is. I do, however, not want to end on this note. So I'm going to end up with our last question, which is related, right?

So one of the significant consequences of this ongoing struggle for trans liberation, (the conversation that we're having right now, the recent uptick in these high profile court cases and proposed legislations that we've been talking about) is that trans lives have become synonymous with struggle and persecution, which is a reductive, imbalanced, and incomplete understanding of a community of people living vibrant and full lives despite the threats that we've identified today, right? And Imara's work through TransLash is a really great example of an organization reframing trans liberation through an ongoing celebration of trans joy. In that vein, in the spirit of sort of TransLash and Imara's project, I really love for us to conclude today's discussion with a focus on how trans people are flourishing and thriving, occupying public and political space that has grown out of decades of successful trans liberation activism. And for our audience today, who are some of the people, organizations, or projects that we should be following. Whose art, and work defines for you, pure trans joy?

We will be collecting recommendations and publishing them and in a document after the webinar, so people could drop their suggestions into the Zoom chat. We will be sure to collect and distribute. And I'd love for our panelists to talk a little bit about what trans joy means to you. Where do you go for it? And what would you recommend to our audience today? And of course, Heron is trans joy themselves, so Heron, would you like to take us away?

**Heron Greenesmith:** Yeah, I want to say, you know, as a non-binary agent,

a person who kind of like struggles with taking on the label trans and not knowing whether I, like, suffer enough to be trans. Which is so fucked up in itself, right? And places transness...the gatekeeping of transness as struggle, right? You have to hurt to be trans. I want to just embrace—embrace that so many people in my life who have encouraged me to understand transness’s multi-dimensionality—multi-dimensionally.

And I want to—I guess I’m going to—I’m going to point people to somewhere they should give money. You should always give money. If you have money, give it and give it to people who are out and who are living their lives. And you should give money right now to a group called [The Rêve](#). They have a Patreon. And they are a group of queer, and trans people who are building an intentional community in northern—well, is not northern New York, it’s central New York. It’s the Hudson Valley, north of the city. And, you know, if you support their Patreon, you get content like just the crocuses on their land, and like a tiny mushroom that they found. And being in The Rêve’s ambit has really helped me to understand that transness itself is joy, and intentionality, and co-creation, and liberation in such important ways that crocuses and mushrooms are part of the importance of our lives. So that’s what I’m going to say today.

And then, as a as a really shameless plug, [follow me on fucking Twitter](#) because I’m amazing. And maybe I’ll get to 10,000 this month, which would be like, really cool. Chase is like laughing at me: ha! 10,000!

**Chase Strangio:** I mean, I’m just like, careful what you wish for, but yeah, no. Follow Heron. I agree with that. And I refer so many people to you, Heron, and I apologize for that. But I hope it’s nice at times. Like, “I don’t have any answer for you, but Heron does.”

So, yeah, I will also—I mean, I also believe in just like centering joy and the magic of transness. And one of the beautiful things about this moment is seeing so many kids just out, even though they shouldn’t have to. Just being like, “I know who I am. And if you don’t know who you are, I’m sorry about that for you, but I know who I am. So project all you want.” And that’s like, I think one of the beautiful things about transness is that we, for better or for worse, have had to contend with, who we are when other people are telling us that’s not who we are. And that gives you an incredible amount of insight.

And I love engaging with art and cultural production by trans people. I love Tourmaline’s work and film, on the sports front. She did a film with my other heroes, Terry Miller and Andraya Yearwood, called [Joy Run](#) with Chromat. And I highly recommend that. Because it’s also sort of not ceding the frame of the sports conversation and imagining the joy that come out of sports when we embrace all bodies: like fat bodies, disabled bodies, trans bodies. Like let’s—let’s love that.

And I also (like, full disclosure, that is my partner) but this [conversation in GQ](#) between Kimberly Drew and Janaya Khan today is, I think, just another example of like giving space to people, to non-binary people, to particularly Black, non-binary trans people, to be generative, and not reactive, and not grounded in suffering only. I think that whenever I'm exposed to that, I grow so much. And that gives me a lot of joy.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Chase. Jamison? You have some recs? You are muted.

**Jamison Green:** I didn't click it, I didn't click it hard enough. Trans people know who they are, just like anybody else knows who they are. We have to struggle sometimes, harder, because we get these messages, as Chase was saying, we get these messages that, "no, you're not. You don't know who you are." But we do we do know who we are. And when we get to that place, it is spectacular. We find balance in our lives. We find joy in our lives. We find completion, whatever that looks like. There is no one way to be trans. It is a spectrum, it is a huge array of humanity. It is a way of being that takes in the whole. It doesn't compartmentalize. It takes in the whole. And I think humanity needs to do that for our environment, for our economy, for our culture, for our world. We need to take in the whole. And we need to stop cutting people out.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Jamison. And I—you know, I can't thank you all enough. This has been a fabulous conversation today. At times incisive, at times infuriating, energizing, joyful. I think we really ran the full spectrum of emotion in this conversation. And I really appreciate all of you taking your time to come and talk with us today. And all of you in our audience for watching, for engaging. This has been an incredibly dynamic chat, and I'm so excited to catch up on it post webinar.

This was our third webinar in our It's Not Over Yet series. Pointing back to our conversation that it's certainly not over yet. We will be distributing the recording, as I mentioned, and transcript of today's webinar by email, and on our website next week. We hope that you will join us next month for our roundtable discussion: "Mobilizing for Reproductive Freedom in the Battle Over Bodily Sovereignty." We hope to see you there. And in the meantime, definitely check out [politicalresearch.org](http://politicalresearch.org) for tons of incisive analysis on the anti-trans and Christian Right movement, for those of you in our audience who want to continue in this conversation.

I want to thank you again, Heron, Jamison, Chase, and Imara. This has been fabulous. Really, really great conversation. And we could not have done it without you.