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Client: University of Hartford

Event: Keeping Dr. Martin Luther King's Dream Alive

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>> CART Captioner: Testing for captioning. Testing for captioning.

>> CART Captioner: I am not hearing any music.

>> We're so happy to have you here and I'm going to try to play a beautiful rendition of a song that our wonderful alumna Dr. Jolie Rocke recorded for us. I'm going to go the next slide and try to play it. If it does not work, we'll try to go right into the welcome. I thank you all for your patience and understanding.

¶ ¶

¶ Lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring ring with the harmonies of Liberty ¶

¶ Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies ¶

¶ Let it resound loud as the rolling sea ¶

¶ Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us ¶

¶ Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us ¶

¶ Facing the rising sun of our new day begun ¶

¶ Let us march on till victory is won ¶

¶ Stoney the road we trod ¶

¶ Bitter the chastening rod felt in the days when hope unborn had died ¶

¶

¶ Yet with the steady beat have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers sighed ¶

¶ We have come over a way with that the tears have been watered ¶

¶ We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered ¶

¶ Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last ¶

¶ Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast ¶

¶ What are the weary years, God of our silent tears, thou who has brought us thus far on the way ¶

¶ Thou who has by thy might led us into the light ¶

¶ Keep us forever in the path we pray ¶
¶ lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee ¶
¶ Lest, our hearts drunk in the wine of the world we forget thee ¶
¶ Shadowed beneath thy hand may we forever stand true to our God,
true to our native land ¶
¶

>> Llonia: Good Afternoon, I am Llonia Jackson, Director of the Office of Student Engagement and Inclusion at the University of Hartford. Thank you for joining us today.

Many thanks to alumna Jolie Rocke for the beautiful performance of the Black National Anthem to open today's program.

The University of Hartford annually holds this "Keeping the Dream Alive" observance to remind us all of Dr. Martin Luther King's dream of justice and equality for all and to renew our commitment to achieving that dream. The theme of the 2021 observance is "Resistance, Activism, and Good Trouble."

Dr. King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In the 57 years since the march, some laws have changed, some progress has been made, but the fight for justice continues.

In 2020, we all faced a great deal of adversity including a coronavirus that has resulted the death of joining us today. Just a quick note that we have captioning during this virtual event.

If you want to use captions, please click on the multimedia tab on the right side of the screen and click the continue button. The caption will appear in the multimedia viewer. If you need assistance, you can use the Q&A function to ask for help.

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In 2020, we all faced a great deal of adversity including a coronavirus that has resulted the death of hundreds of thousands of people and disproportionately impacted communities of color. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Abernathy, and others resulted in protests and calls for improved social justice. At the same time, we

have seen a rise in actives of hate groups. 2020 was also the year in which we mourned the death of civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis, the last surviving speaker from the March on Washington and the man who urged us to get into "good trouble."

Continuing the today's theme, it is first my pleasure to introduce Joyce Ashuntantang, Associate Professor of English in UHart's Hillyer College. Professor I would like would like to the opportunity to congratulations her on the promotion to professor.

Ashuntantang is an accomplished poet. She was recently awarded the African Literature Association's Book of the Year Award in Creative Writing for her book of poetry titled, Beautiful Fire. Today, she will present an original poem titled "Libation for Good Trouble"

Prof. Joyce Ashuntntang

(My ancestors, here I am!)

I pour libation on this threshold of a new dawn

I, woman getting into good trouble. Insisting

I am not just a woman, I am human too!

I invoke your presence; you, forced through the doors of no-return

From Bimbia, Gorée, and Elmina.

Return now in my being, return in my seeing.

Connect my words with the harmony within and without.

In this virtual space we celebrate a harvest of dreams.

A rainbow nation marching from Minneapolis to Portland

From New York City to Washington DC

Beaming revealing lights from history to our story:

Boots never broke the joints of justice!

Batons never petered out passion for peace!

Guns never bled us empty of our quest for freedom! So we converge again at this cross roads of memory, reminding us that what -- words matter, words can shatter but in truth we can reconstruct justice from the carnage of falsehoods. What we speak can maim the world.

What we speak can change the world. Choice is wisdom wrapped in humane values. Here Ahmaud drops for the nation waiting our resolve, the nation tested like still tempered weather the heat and belows of human hammers. 250,000 flags dance in the wind of a new day, no one can steal the sun for only their backyard. No one can milk the moon and deny others. The Sky is wide enough for all birds to plow. Here are more drops. For the season of healing, to heal we must remember, he said, but beyond the dead of the virus, strange fruits still litter our road sides and our homes. The maimed scared our tongues Ahmaud, Breonna, George and many more. Each name is a necklace too tight. We can't breathe. But Martin's continues to counter the nightmare. The capricious cabinet has room for this diverse nation. We first vow they can't be last. Our bloom is our

strength to keep striving, to never return in fear to our darkest divide. Inclusion is he can wet for diversity. [native language] here are the last drops, hope is a verb, the nation's doing word, the hun is empty, the drops soak the earth. We climb standing on MLK's mountain top united in action, getting into the Lewis' good trouble knowing if one finger brought oil, it soils the rest.

In our midst the voices to continue to echo. We are black and Americans, too much we are immigrants and Americans, too. We are Muslims and Americans, too. We have Latina, Latino and Americans, too. We shouldn't be in the margins. We are Americans, too much e pluribus unum, the bedroom. We thrive as one. Invincible. [native language] thank you.

>> Llonia: Thank you Professor Ashuntantang. We see why your work is so highly recognized. That was Simply beautiful. Thank you. Now it's my pleasure to introduce Christine Grant Executive Director for community engagement at the university and chair of the MLK observance planning committee. Christine?

>> Christine: Thank you. This is the 16th year of university's keeping the dream alive observance. We're so pleased that so many of you have joined us this afternoon. Each year to commemorate Dr. King's legacy, the MLK planning committee selects a speaker who continues to work the work of advocating and fighting for civil rights and social justice. Today's speaker is social justice activist Yusef Salaam. He will share his experience and how we can continue to actively pursue social justice and equity. We hope today's program will serve to inspire everyone to good trouble. Now let's get to right to today's conversation with Dr. Salaam moderated by Aaron Isaacs, U of H dean of students and UHart junior Russell Johnson a psychology major in the College of arts and sciences. Dean Isaacs will introduce Mr. Salaam. The floor is injures.

>> Thank you for the introduction and welcome everyone and thank you for observing us for the annual observance of Dr. Martin Luther King with this year's theme of resistance, activism and getting into good trouble. We're your moderates for the session. The Q&A feature has been activated in WebEx for those joining us. It Russell will be monitoring and gathering your questions for our guests to answer later on in the conversation. Please feel free to use this feature throughout the program. With that, I would like to introduce our special guest. Dr. Salaam was one of five boys, four black, one Latinx tried and convicted for the attack of a jogger to central. They became known as the central park five. He spent six years of jail first as a youth and then adult. The convictions were overturned in 2002 on the recommendation of the Manhattan district attorney after unidentified DNA not linked to any of the five was linked to a convicted murderer and serial rapist who confessed later. He is now known as

one of the exonerated five. He has become a family man, father, poet, activist and motivational speaker. He continues to advocate for people on issues of false confessions, police brutality and misconduct, press ethics, race and law and disparities in the American criminal justice system. In 2013 there was a documentary the central park five which told of this travesty from the perspective of Salaam and cohorts. He received a lifetime achievement award in 2016 from president Barack Obama. He was appointed to the board of innocence project in 2018.

In 2019 Netflix featured a four part series called when they see us based on the true story of the central park five. In 2020 he co-authored the novel punching the air with award winning author which tells a moving and deeply profound story about a 16-year-old boy name Amal who fights to maintain his humanity and find truth while being incarcerated. Thank you for join us today and how are you doing? Welcome.

>> Thank you for having me. I'm doing wonderful. The sun is shining outside. Down here in the Georgia area I'm so happy to be here with you all.

>> We appreciate and we're lucky to have you here today. We're looking for some of that warmth and sunshine here in the northeast. [LAUGHTER]

But it's been fantastic and it's great to have you here. We have a lot to get through today. A lot of questions. I want to make sure we have time at the end for students and some of the folks joining us to ask some questions to you. But I'll start off with the first one. Are you ready to go?

>> Let's go!

>> Let's do it. Today we're honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King with a focus on resistance, activism and getting into good trouble. I'll give a nod to John Lewis there rest his soul. A lot of us resistance, activism and getting into good trouble play out in 2020 as we dealt with the pandemic, widening racial division, civil unrest and the fight for racial justice and equality. What does Dr. King and John Lewis's message of resistance, activism and getting into good trouble mean to you?

>> Really it's the embodiment of the reality of our ancestors wildest dreams. See, we are the seeds that they buried and forgotten that were actually going to bloom and blossom. The beautiful thing about it is that the conversations and the languages that were being held around the country and really around the globe, used to be pinpointing things that were talking about reform more so. It was almost as if the idea was that the system was broken, that the system was alive and well. The truth is that the system is alive and sick and is not broken but it's operating exactly as it was designed. So in 2020, one of the

most beautiful things that happened in response to the over 400 years of oppression that we were experiencing, right, George Floyd's murder was the straw in many ways that broke the camel's back. And our ancestor's wildest dreams poured out into the streets and the streets erupted with the word black life matters. Because what we knew, those of us who have this skin, what we knew was that when the founding fathers said we the people, we weren't even considered full human beings. So in this time and in this day, what we are carrying, right, the DNA, the DNA that Dr. King would pass forward in the form of a baton to the current generations is to keep up the good fight, keep on agitating, is to make sure that we don't lose sight of the prize because we are just about to be there. Everything that we have done is pushing us forward and now we need to lean in. We need to lean in like never before.

>> I appreciate that. And as you talk about leaning in, right, not losing -- keeping our eyes on the prize, you know, one of the things -- you know, when I was doing some research on just your background and your story, you know, being incarcerated, being put in prison, how do you maintain that self? How do you maintain at that energy moving forward? We talk about we have to sustain this. At a race relations summit in Notre Dame you talked about an officer who asked who are you is and from that you had a profound answer. And I think that answer connects to what you just said in terms of how we need to push this forward. Can you elaborate a little bit more on the experience, [inaudible] how that would go to how do we keep this energy? How do you find the strength.

>> Hold on for one moment. Saying something about the bandwidth was looking like it was a problem. I think I'm good to go. None of my answers are scripted so I don't remember exactly what I said. But one of the most beautiful things I think when you think about perseverance is something my mother said. I always share this because I feel like it's important. When my mother came to the precinct to get me, everyone who has seen "What they see us" everyone saw it was as if she was my super hero and came and got me. She told me that they needed me to participate in whatsoever it is that they were trying to do. And so the ultimate story of survival comes from you refusing to participate in your own destruction. It comes from you refusing to accept the box that they are trying to put you in, the limitation of your jump, the limitation of your beauty. They are trying to mute our voices and we are saying turn it up. They are trying to dim our lights and we are saying turn it up. Because the beauty of being born in the great question that was asked of me, who are you, you find out so many things. So many profound things about yourself when you begin to interrogate yourself and do a deep dive. The beauty of being born is understanding that you are one of over

400 million different options and you were chosen. The miracle of that is that you were born on purpose with a purpose. That is the miracle of that. And understanding that catapults you into a different space in time. You begin to understand who you are, where you are, what you are and where -- who, what, where, why and when, right? You understand those things we learned so many years ago. In that question that was asked of me, I found out I was born for this. I found out that we do not get placed on our shoulders more than we can bear. And yes, it looks like a tragedy. Yes, it looks like one of the most horrific things to go through. But the truth of the matter is that I needed to grow through that. I didn't need to just go through it. Growing through it allows you to look at it in a different way. You begin to understand and begin to scientifically deconstruct or reconstruct it all over again and you begin to understand that the central park jogger case is actually not what most people think it is. It becomes a love story between God and his people. It becomes a story of a people buried alive and forgotten. It becomes a story of a criminal system of injustice placed on trial in order to produce a miracle in modern times. And the atrocity of it, the overwhelming atrocity of it causes people to vibrate differently when they see it. So when they see us -- when it was revealed to the world -- it caused so much people to have so much tremendous pain that have never been to prison themselves. Seeing the stories of the five of us who have been run over by the spike wheels of justice and then seeing the victory at the end. The beautiful thing about it is that no longer are we just saying we were victorious and therefore we can just fade off into the sunset. No, we have begun to use our positions, our platforms, to continue to agitate, to continue to talk truth to power, to continue to let other people know how to turn up their light. You see, when I came home from prison, I was walking around with my head down inside even though I looked like I had my head up. There had to be a shift I had to make. Part of that shift was remembering in a kind of way that I was born on purpose and with a purpose. Moving in that vibration allows you to move mountains and that's where it's at. >> That is absolutely profound and powerful. And the fact that you are able to capture that with intentionality on your own experience helps other people, particularly black and Brown folks, feel that confidence that has been stripped from them. Being able to feel that you were born with a purpose.

It's often not the message we get as people of color and some people in general, too, are not getting that. The level of intentionality and speaking about your experience to that really conveys that we have a purpose here. We do belong here. It's absolutely powerful. So you mentioned, as you were talking, you you know taking what you've learned and experience and using your platform, right? How do you

continue this work? We all know criminal justice reform continues to be a battle in this country. I want to read you a statement from equal justice initiative, an organization committed to ending mass incarceration as it exists in the U.S. I want to have a follow up question to that but I want to get your take on what is here. They have beautiful facts about what is happening in our system and how it's continuous of what happened 400 years ago as we move through slavery, Jim-Crow and how we get here. The tough on crime policies that led to mass incarcerations are rooted in the belief that black and brown people are inherently guilty and dangerous and that still drives excessive sentencing policies today. More incarceration doesn't reduce violent crime. Using prisons to deal with poverty and mental illness makes these problems worse. People leave jails more TRAUMATIZED, mentally ill and physically battered. How is your work with the innocence project and one of the exonerated five shaped your views of America and the current state of the criminal justice system?

>> Wow. I want to perhaps begin in answering that question with a quote and a statement from Dr. James Baldwin. Dr. James Baldwin said, "to be African-American is to be American without privilege and African without memory." the worst part about the way we have been described in America, often times if you turn on the news today, you hear people talk about us being immigrants. Like the totality of us, we immigrated to this country. The truth of the matter is that they took people -- they took scientists, brilliant people from Africa and they enslaved us and denied us the ability to look in the mirror of life as we experienced life throughout the world. We look out the window and see other people's experience being reflected. And they get the opportunity, if you have the complexion for acceptance, as they say, they got the opportunity to see themselves in the mirror of life reflecting every facet of it, whether that be social media, news, movies, super heroes, all of that, even black super heroes have to die. But they continue on. And so the work, I think that is very, very important with regards to the innocence project has to be understood with this number. Over 2,000 people have been released from prison, exonerated through DNA evidence. DNA is the litmus test that proves whether you were there or not. Some of the people have been in there for over 40 years. I'm 46. Some of the people have been there for over 40 years and they are just finding out that they didn't do this crime, that they were supposedly sentenced and guilty of. The real question is -- I'm sorry, the real reality is when they get it wrong we suffer. In the central park jogger case there was a young pregnant Latina woman who was raped and murdered after the central park jogger was raped and almost murdered and the system could have gotten it right. But they were stuck with the wrong people. It was too sexy for it to be the truth. They needed this story to follow a

narrative that had been given since the inception of us being freed from the so-called slave system. We see it play out with Emmitt Till and we see it continuously play out all throughout history, whether it's the black Wall Streets or the central park five. As soon as they cry, we die. And so the number I'm talking about that I want to draw people's attention to is when I got to the adult facility, they gave me the prison number 95A1113. Every single day, every single time that they would come around every single day and hear the words on the count, on the gate, you had to get up and present yourself at the front of your bars and say your name and then say your number and you could go back to doing what you were doing. One day one of the elders who happened to be an original member of the black panther party, who just happened to be an original member of the black liberation Army he stopped me in the yard and asked me young brother do you know what your number means? I had to admit I didn't. He said well there's a three part serial to your number. The first part tells you when you got here, the second part tells you what time of year it was and the third part is your position in line. My number was 95A1113. 95 was the year I was sent to the big house. The next part, the time of year is either AB or R. AB signifies the first half of the year January through June. The second part B represents July through December and R means you got caught in the door of recidivism. You left and you came back. Here is where it gets really interesting. Your position in line. I was the one 1,113th person to enter the door. Now that has no real significance until you realize that they gave me that number on February 27th, which is my birthday. They gave me that number -- so from January 1 until February 27th at that time of day was the 1113th person to walk through the door. That wasn't even half of a year yet. I looked at the elder's number. And I was so saddened by what I saw. His number was like 72 something. It would have been different had he had an R on there because that meant he would have left and came back. He never came home. Many of them die there. This is what that reality is like.

>> Thank you so much, Dr. Salaam. My name is Russell, by the way. It's so wonderful to meet you. Thank you for joining us. For the questions that we have rolling in, one of them says, how do you invoke confidence your children need to face this world that wrongfully accused you and the others without becoming hardened by the pain this world abundantly throws at people of color?

>> Part of the challenge is to remind them that they were born on purpose all the time. Never is there a moments where you can't remind them. Because their whole world is screaming at them that they are worthless. So the challenge that we have as parents, as mentors, as teachers is to remind ourselves and also to remind those

around us that we were not born a mistake. Because if we believe that we were born a mistake, we begin to move through our lives like a mistake. When you believe you were born on purpose, and you believe that you have to find your purpose, there's an urgency that is wrapped in that reality. And the beautiful thing is that Dr. King was the one who really gave us a beautiful idea of what purpose is when he said, when you find your purpose in life, do it as if God himself called you to do it at this very moment. Instead of giving us a grand idea what purpose could be, perhaps the President of the United States, the CEO of a corporation, a person 100 making it on the top of their game, they are part of the 1%, 2% or 5%. He said if your purpose in life is to be a street sweeper, sweep the streets like Michelangelo painted pictures. Sweep the streets like Beethoven created music. Like Price sang before the opera. It's about being unapologetically excellent. It's about believing you were born with the right skin, hair, eyes and nose and lips. The whole world is telling you that you are ugly but they are trying to look like you. This is the beauty of us fighting back. Because the truth of the matter is that we always have been at war and the bulk of the war is not physical. The bulk of the war is mental. If they can get your mind, then they got your body. This was one of the secrets I found out in prison which allowed me to be free every single day. That as long as my mind was free, my body was free even though I was in bondage.

>> Thank you so much. That's very true. I agree everything that you said. Honestly as an older sibling myself, I've had to struggle with a lot of the things that you have spoken about and even my little brothers. To be able to teach and show them that they have a purpose, that we have a purpose, that we all were born and are here for a reason. Thank you so much for that incredible message. I actually can -- can I follow up a little bit and ask you to expand just a little bit whether I say can -- is there a way that we can get that message out to the masses? Like -- because there are a lot of college students, young people, black and brown, especially our age, that I don't feel that they have that message, that they don't maybe know that message. How is it that we can kind of get that out there, get that out to the masses so that we can win this war?

>> Well, I think -- I think the beginning of that really has to be teaching people methods, the methodology. Right? It's a -- I saw a person walking around once and they had a shirt on that said stop being poor. I thought it was a pretty cruel thing to say. I thought it's like people telling people to pull themselves up by the boot straps and they don't have boots. The truth of the matter is there's always been a concerted effort to keep us down underneath the foot of the oppressor. It's been concerted -- if you look at the 13th amendment, the 13th amendment says -- I want to get the language right. In my

book punching the air coauthored by me we say on African-American, too, while we talk, shout, whisper, she writes on her poster board the 13th amendment.

She writes more words Dr. Nods you should know this and understand this. Constitution of the United States of America, 13th America, section one neither slavery nor involuntarily servitude except as a punishment of the crime where the parties have been dually convicted shall exist within these United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction. Section two, Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation. The reason why I bring up the 13th amendment is because slavery was so called abolished. And then we realized that there were loopholes placed in the system that allowed slavery to continue by another name. And part of that is really examined in the book the new Jim-Crow. You see the prison system is now the new cotton fields of America. What we have to do and the overwhelming task we have in front of us is we have to disallow ourselves to be participants in the definition that they have given us of ourselves which is that we are worthless, that we are born a mistake, that we were not born on purpose, that nobody loves us, nobody cares for us. And a lot of us, we begin to walk around in that truth. Part of the methodology that I'm -- I want to get at is when I was talking to my good friend Les Brun, he wasn't necessarily talking about the same shirt I had seen. He was talking to me one day and he said, you know, poverty can be overcome by what you do. He said if you look in our communities and you see what they provide us, the food that they give us, the things that we consume, the fact that we have welfare all over the place, we have TVs in our homes. They want us to watch things that are of low value. They want us to be able to consume things that will imprint on our brains a reality that is not true. And so even in the era of social media, instead of us really being about the work, we gotta -- in the words of the Quran it says most certainly after difficulty there's relief. Many of us take this relief time. We do these memes that we see. I can't remember the names of them. People walking around or doing the walk or silhouette challenge. I challenge people like others have said to be unified because our unity is more powerful than auto atomic bomb. Even in that verse in the Quran it says when you are free from your immediate task still labor hard, continue working, continue pressing forward. We have the overwhelming challenge to refuse to accept any definition that doesn't give us life. Because by accepting that definition, they have just defined for us a truth that is not, that is absolutely untrue. So part of the thing that is beautiful, I think, especially with college students is I tell them to do this, right? If you can close your eyes and imagine yourself at your graduation and I want you to imagine it with all kinds of imagery that you can muster. I

want you to see yourself in your mind's eye taking the tassel and moving it from one side of the hat to the next as the announcer says ladies and gentlemen, I represent to you the class of and whatever that class of is. This is where the beauty happens. Marry that vision with what you think it will feel like to be in the room being celebrated. Your loved ones are there, your family, your friends are there. Perhaps it's post COVID. Maybe it's not. I want you to imagine it and I want you to imagine what it will feel like the victory of being a victor as opposed to a victim. This is the secret to what they call the law of attraction. Because once you have imagined something, the imagination is the precursor of what is to come.

If you are consuming poor information and you go to sleep dreaming about poor information, they have just arrested your development. And I'm not saying that we shouldn't -- like these phones that we have, right? This is called a smart phone. But the phone is not smart. It's just a phone. What you do with it makes it a smart phone. I'm not saying we always have to be on our post but stay on point. Just like my mother used to tell me when you are walking around in New York in particular you can't have both head phones on your ear. One head phone has to be off and the other one is on. Especially in the era I grew up in 70s, 80s and 90s because you had to be able to duck when somebody said duck. People were being killed indiscriminately. Of course, now we see what is going on with the systems that are supposed to protect and serve us. But this is part of the secret of how we can allow ourselves to rise above the gravitational pull of everything negative trying to keep us down. We have to do the work. And a lot of the work is not that difficult. Once we begin the process, it gets easier and easier. They talk about vision boards in this same way. You can have a vision board or you can have a vision board in your mind. I had to have a vision board in my mind because if prison if they saw something like, that they might rip it up. So you had to put in a place that they couldn't get it. You had to keep it in your mind. But the beautiful thing about being free is that if you have even the opportunity to encourage yourself you could write little reminders on sticky notes, put it up in your mirror, put it next to your bed. Put it in places that as you get up and begin your day instead of turning on the news which may upset your mood, just look at that. For 5-15 minutes allow yourself to meditate on the positive as opposed to the negative. And then start your day. Still check the weather. You know? Still make sure you going down the right roads and the roads aren't blocked. You gotta be on point. But utilize what we have in order to understand that we have to be on purpose. The beautiful thing about folks like Dr. King and John Lewis and countless others is that they were all on assignment. Some of us are on assignment. Some of us don't have the opportunity to kick our feet

up. Sometimes those of us who do, just remember, like my good friend Raymond Santana always says, keep your boxing gloves next to your bed, you never know when you gotta put them on.

>> This has been beautiful. I mean -- I'm going through waves of just emotion, understanding, appreciation, valuing. I know based on the chat and some questions being asked other people are seeing themselves in the words that you are saying and digesting them. One of the questions in here I'd like to ask you from -- I'm so glad a black Muslim like myself is doing such great work. How do I incorporate faith and activism? Can you speak more to that?

>> I think the beautiful thing it's one in the same. You can't divorce yourself. In America we've been taught that there's a separation of church and state. The truth of the matter is everything matters. We learned that. Perhaps in one of the harshest ways. The past four years people were thinking it's just politics. Matter of fact the then president says what do you got to lose? A lot of people lost everything. Some people lost their lives. People were being told everybody is going to get COVID sooner or later, why put a face mask on? To protect ourselves and to protect others. And more importantly to protect our loved ones because we may not know. We may just be a carrier. We may not be exhibiting any symptoms and then we go to our mother's house, grandmother's house, grandfather's house and next thing they know they get sick because we think it's not that serious because the President said so. See, I have a deeper connection with the President. Because my connection was that two weeks after we were accused, not two weeks after we started trial, not two hours after we started trial, not two days, two weeks after we were accused of one of the heinous crimes you can go to prison for, Donald Trump took out a full page ad and it ran in almost all of New York's newspapers calling for the reinstatement of the death penalty specifically for our case. You see, there is never a moment -- the system wants you to believe -- you know, like there's a divorce in the Quran that allows to something like act. We too are acting. I thought about that for a moment. I said, you know, I'm married. I have ten beautiful children. It's a blended family. We have seven girls and we have three boys. Imagine if I was an actor and I said to my wife, listen, babe, I gotta kiss the person they want me to do a love scene. Is it a fake kiss if you really kiss? It's a real kiss. Right? And so I'm saying that because in our workings we tend to want to separate our faith from everything else. And the truth of the matter is if you are Jewish, if you are Christian, if you are Muslim, whatever faith you follow, that is the navigation system inside of yourself. That what is allows you to auto correct as you are moving through our life. Because one day you'll look up and say to yourself oh, my goodness, how did I get all of this mold on the

counter? You will never know that the mold is there and growing until it begins to turn colors. And so our job is to continuously clean up our hearts. Our job is not to be angels. But our job is to make sure that as we move through our life, we can try to be better tomorrow than we were yesterday. And we can find to move in better and better ways. The beautiful thing about spirituality is that you know, if you really know that the greater you challenge yourself to be on point, the greater challenges you will receive. It's almost as if God is saying, okay, you ready to work out. I got you. This is your partner in this. God is gonna -- I think I can push some of the weight up. God saying you got more. Put another 45 plates shall not 45 pounds but 45 plates on the bar. You doubt yourself and realize that you can do it and you make it and you become strengthened by it because life is about that. It's about creating the survivors. It's about chiseling self. It's about stepping into the mold of being. You see when I was in prison I found out that my name means God will increase the teacher with justice and peace. I found this out six months into my prison bid. Imagine the wow. Like -- the light bulb went off in my head. I'm reading the Quran, I'm reading the bible. I'm hearing about this young man named Joseph or Yusef if you want to use a name who was sent to prison for a crime he didn't commit. I thought I'm reading my story. This story is in the bible. This story is in the Quran. A young man sent to prison for a crime he didn't commit and not just any crime, the crime they sent him to prison for was rape. I'm saying that the mold of being able to realize that this person that became a prophet of God, this mold that you can continue to try to step into is always there but you have to be able to fit yourself into the mold. You have to be able to figure out, oh, I might have to chisel this part, chisel that part to really make it a BeSpoke fit. You know? That's where the beauty is at. If you wear a BeSpoke suit, whether you male or female and you look good in it, man, you tell yourself wow, I didn't know -- I clean up real nice. Start posting stuff on social media. Clean up nice, hash tag, you know? Never separate church and state. Because if you really, really want to deep -- if you really want to get deep, the separation of church and state allows for man to make law. At one point in time it was legal in this country to own people. It was legal in this country to dehumanize the people you owned. Part of the conversation wrapped around the confederate flag is that that flag is a representation of state's rights that is only part of the statement. That representation is about state's rights to what? Own people. When you saw in Charlottesville people shouting as they March. Ed. They were shouting things like blood and soil. What was that about? It was about the war they lost that allowed us to be seeing by the color -- I think it's the color of law as people but not the letter of

law. This is why we still see the atrocious way that they respond to our color of skin. Drop the weapon and we have our hands up with no weapon. Our skin becomes weaponized. We can never be disarmed. The other day I saw a video and they had a young woman and her whole family, the children were told to lay on the ground. It looked like slave catchers. That's exactly how -- that is exactly as -- how I described it. So it's important to understand that they want what they want. But we have to understand who we are. We can never keep our eyes off the prize.

>> Dr. Salaam I -- I would spend the rest of my afternoon and I believe our panelist and people would too, with you, in hearing more about your thoughts on where we are as a society, a community and as people. But unfortunately, we are run on time. And we'll have to conclude this but I wanted to say thank you for your message about worth, value, being born with a purpose, continuing to motivate yourself and others to press forward. I think that message is resounding. I think that is something we all can learn and reflect on as we go about 2021 and about our daily lives. But I just want to say thank you again for joining us. I appreciate. It's been a journey. It's been a beautiful journey that you've taken on us in opening up your world and experiences to us. So I wanted to say thank you again for attending and coming here. I also want to say thank you to the panelists, special thanks to Chris Grant for putting this program on and the folks who put the observance of Martin Luther King together. We appreciate all the great work. Thank you to all of our sponsors and I just want to say, again, Dr. Salaam, thank you again. I hope you come back. I hope we can have you back. We would love to have you back at the University of Hartford but this concludes our conversation. Everyone, please be well and stay healthy.

>> Thank you.

>> My pleasure.

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