Hi, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to the Thought Project, recorded at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting-edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

Joining us today are Rosa Squillacote, a PhD candidate in Political Science at The Graduate Center and an adjunct assistant professor at Hunter College. Her dissertation examines the limits of diversity within the New York City Police Department as a vehicle for police reform. She is an organizer with Mott Haven families organizing against police brutality in the South Bronx. Rosa is also the vice president of part-time personnel for PSC CUNY and his mother of twin toddlers.

Milo Ward is a PhD student in political science, where he is studying Political Theory at The Graduate Center. He works on the political theory of the police and is writing his dissertation on the political thought of Prof. James Q. Wilson, who is known for his theory on broken windows. This theory states visible signs of crime, anti-social behavior and civil disorder that can create an urban environment that encourages further crime and disorder.

In marking the first 100 days of Pres. Joe Biden's administration, the Thought Project podcast today is viewing our conversation through the lens of racial justice. Indeed, Biden has repeatedly remarked that black Americans voice had his back. It is also believed that Biden won the Democratic nomination for the presidency and the general election due to the overwhelming support of black Americans dominating the discourse of social justice in America during the past seven years since the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri that precipitated the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has been animated by the cries for racial justice by demonstrators and demonstrations throughout America. It has become apparent that Police Department's have repeatedly killed black men with little if no accountability.

What will the Biden administration do to address racial injustice? How has this issue been acknowledged in the first 100 days? What should be the next steps by the Biden administration with respect to racial justice in the second 100 days and throughout the first year of his administration? We will discuss these questions and more with today's guests. Welcome to the Thought Project, Rosa Squillacote and Milo board.

Thanks so much for having us.

Okay. Well, we're here today to talk about the Biden administration's first 100 days with respect to racial justice. Hundred days is not a long time, especially at the beginning of a new administration, one that had very little transition, coordination or cooperation by the Trump administration. With respect to racial justice, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act has not been passed, the proposed
Institute on National Police Oversight Commission is reported to have been dropped, and at the moment, the George Floyd Policing Act is in a congressional informal process of negotiation in the house and in the Senate. Are we really surprised? What are your thoughts, Rosa?

Rosa Squillacote: I'm not surprised at all. This transition was always going to be difficult moving from trams very explicit attack on people of color, both in terms of immigration, in terms of voting rights, in terms of criminal justice, etc. Made more difficult, of course, is the fact that both Biden and Kamala Harris are not clearly committed to racial justice given their past legislative records, and of course, Kamala Harris having been a prosecutor. That, the task force on policing was dropped, not surprising, but I think what's a big ratio and what's bigger roadblock to things like the Voting Rights Act and the George Floyd bill isn't the dedication to the legislation itself, but rather simply the fact of the filibuster, and as long as the filibuster is there, just one [inaudible 00:05:16] movement that we want to see on these issues in Congress.

Tanya Domi: In this context about the filibuster, Mr. Manchin from West Virginia and Ms. Cinema from Arizona loom large, and Manchin is reported to have said in an interview, what don't you get about NEVER with respect to filibuster reform? They loom large and what's problematic about that is that all these bills, if they are going to pass in the first year, must really be done by no later than next September, because we are getting into the midterm cycle. There's not a lot of running room here, so the Democrats have to make up their minds about what they're going to do. Milo, who I'm bringing in here to discuss as a political theorist, his work with regard to James Q. Wilson and the centrality of policing, is part of his graduate work, while he's not a policy expert according to him, let me hear your thoughts about the first 100 days, and as a theorist, how do you perceive this scenario?

Milo Ward: Well, in terms of if we're talking about the George Floyd Act, my larger question here is what could Biden do at all or what do Democrats want out of police reform. I'm very skeptical of this legislation, changing police violence. I think it will hold more accounting of police. I'm very much in favor of this bill passing, so that people can literally see what the police are doing, and that there is more observation of what is happening in police departments. Don't think that this will necessarily change policing or its function in society, and that's, I think, a greater question for Democrats, certainly, but in general those who are interested in the point of the spear of conflict right now in the streets, which is that we're going to continue in the next hundred days seeing please kill people and we're going to continue to see police and citizens clash over that, and what's going to happen when this bill is passed, if the schools past when that continues.

Tanya Domi: Yes. I think those are really good points, because this administration was elected based upon some promises they have made and as an alternative to Trump, who was an out and out racist and has been his entire life, what is probably the
biggest change is not advancing racial justice legally, but an overall positive attitude about racial justice in the office of the President. He may have the values but it has not been manifested yet in law. Let’s just say it’s unbelievable but he was the first president to acknowledge white supremacy and in an inaugural address and this is too remarkable about just how much of an uphill piece of work that is in front of not only the administration but the American people.

This is a function of leadership that, in terms of his values and priorities which should be transmitted to all federal agencies of the US government, but just as you’ve pointed out, Milo, local engagement where police brutality and active discriminatory acts take place, have to be addressed at the local and state levels. In that vein, Rosa, with regard to police brutality, this has been the most visible and repetitive scenario in America, and I would argue as a human rights professor that these are indeed atrocity crimes as defined in international law, and there has been assertions most recently that the police in America under what we see is a pattern and practice are probably engaging in not only atrocity crimes but crimes against humanity that could indeed in an international tribunal could be determined as genocide. What are your thoughts? Since you two are working on police brutality with regard to your dissertation, what are your thoughts about the limitations right now and the urgency of addressing police brutality in America?

Rosa Squillacot...: I think Milo is a hundred percent right to ask the question what can Biden do. Policing is ultimate, as you said, a local issue, a city issue, a state issue. Part of what makes police brutality and police misconduct so difficult to grapple with as a society is that it operates in 50 different ways, more than 50 different ways, hundreds and hundreds of different ways across the country. For example, the same week that you have the Minneapolis Police Department willing to throw Derek Chauvin under the bus rightfully so, having killed George Floyd, and one of the very few instances of a white police officer beyond guilty of murder of a black man. That same week in Minneapolis, in Chicago and, oh gosh, McKia Bryant, I think, was in Columbus.

Milo Ward: Yes.

Rosa Squillacot...: You have three other deaths at the hands of police across the country in the same week. As to the question of urgency, there is nothing more urgent in my opinion than to address state actors killing civilians randomly and consistently without either accountability or any sort of justice. But even beyond that, one of the other things I do is organize locally around police brutality. I live in Mott Haven in the South Bronx, and last June 4, there was a very big protest in my neighborhood about the George Floyd murder. The Police Department, the NYPD organized a mass crackdown of the protest in my neighborhood. They brought in hundreds of cops from other precincts. They brought in what we think are ICE agents, although they could have been, they were HSI agents. We
I don't know if they were working with ice or homeland security terrorism department, but either way.

I mean, it was like living under a military occupation that day. They kettleed hundreds of protesters and kept people from leaving, made unlawful arrests of medics and legal observers of whom my partner was one, and then proceeded to just straight up beat dozens and dozens of people. I have a friend who lives on that block and she says her kids came up to her and were like why are their people in stretchers. The human rights watch actually issued a report about that response and found indeed that the NYPD was guilty of human rights violations. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean much in American political culture.

Tanya Domi: Or legal culture under international law.

Rosa Squillacote...: That's right, that's right. I think the urgency is hard to overstate.

Tanya Domi: Milo, you have already spoken about how you believe that even if the George Floyd Act is passed not much will change. What's interesting is that Prof. Candace McCoy, who is a criminologist and also a lawyer, agrees with you and she says, "Yes, it'll address federal police officers like the FBI and ice maybe. Qualified immunity would be restricted to the federal level, but this does not extend to local police departments," and as Rosa has pointed out, it's more than 50 when you think about multiple jurisdictions in every state, where you have police departments in various cities throughout a single state. What do you think it will have to take to drive reform all the way down to the smallest towns in America? I think that's the million dollar question.

Milo Ward: Reform?

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Milo Ward: I think that many of the reforms that you see in the George Floyd Act have been enacted locally. I think they have shown stunning failures. How many millions of dollars have the NYPD utilized in discrimination training and chokehold trainings? The same chokeholds that killed Eric Garner. That does not seem to be effective, I think, on two levels. I am dubious that you can legally, you can make the police act with the force of law. I think that they act in states of emergency, which is where they get to use discretion. The street will never be limited by law, and that's the point of the police, is they act outside of the force of law and with it, so they straddle the two in an interesting way, which allows them to do all the parts of governing that we have pushed into the private realm.

The liberal democratic project was about limiting coercion. We brought it down to civil society with the police, which act as our government over things that are very vital, like the police come when people call them, whereas people don't call their legislatures very much.
Tanya Domi: Right.

Milo Ward: That's how we'll interact with government in this huge way. I think there's a couple of questions. One is, if you want to ask how is police going to be changing this country, I think you have to change what democracy means, because I think that participatory democracy in the US looks a lot like policing. It's a problem to threaten the role of the police, which is what's been happening in the street protests with the defund and the abolish. Once you're going to see huge reaction, the majority of people will oppose this, and I think because a lot of people would say, "What would we do without them?" This is what holds together the fabric of our society is policing, they do so much. Reformers will say, "Let's find other things, services that can replace many parts"-

Tanya Domi: Like social services and working with psychologists, with emotionally disturbed people, those kinds of things, yes.

Milo Ward: But I think that also misses the central problem of the police, which is a problem with authority, which is that the way in which the police act is that they maintain private forms of authority, which is authorities call the police when their authority meets its limits in the private realm. It's a third party that can come in and bring it. It's parents.

Tanya Domi: Right, wives.

Milo Ward: Business owners.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Milo Ward: You have landlords, these sorts of people bring the police in.

Tanya Domi: [crosstalk 00:17:30].

Milo Ward: Why I look at this conservative [inaudible 00:17:31] is because he wrote the Broken Windows theory, and I think the way that he is often misread as simply trying to impose a kind of order, when really I think what he was saying is that this allows local authorities. If you bring in the police to do what they really do, which is not enforce the law, it support local authority in their own sort of vision of what that means, then you can give control back to neighborhoods in this way, so you really [inaudible 00:18:04] of the intimate connections that people have with the police. I think we have to recognize that the Blue Lives Matter, which is obviously a reactionary, very racist movement-

Tanya Domi: Mm-hmm (affirmative), right.

Milo Ward: But at the same time, it appeals in this large way. It's quite strong and you can see the way that the Blue Lives Matter has become to animate the politics of the right. Those flags are as common as American ones now at Trump rallies or
regular conservative rallies and probably more popular now than the Confederate flag was. These are the sorts of levels. I'm skeptical about ... Wilson had all these reasons he wrote some of the first books on the studies of the police. You have him studying varieties of police behavior, the Berkeley attempts in the 60s to reform the police with many of the things that we’re talking about today.

Tanya Domi: And during the student rights movement, yes.

Milo Ward: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. You had this really liberal police force that came out of local control, and what you had was much an increase in police violence because what you said is that you were making the police race neutral, trying to act out on every law, you increase the number of stops, you increase the number of interactions, and you didn't end up decreasing the amount of discretion that's being used, because in the end he looks at it as a patriarchal relationship.

Tanya Domi: I see.

Rosa Squillacot...: I think, yeah. If I could just piggyback off of that.

Tanya Domi: Sure.

Rosa Squillacot...: I think that's ... the discretion of officers is crucial in my opinion, both how much they have and how little they have. For example, with the NYPD officers, well, sometimes if they are in a position to speak freely, will talk about their lack of discretion in, for example, being forced to meet quotas, and that there is the rigorously enforced quota system on the NYPD that drives a lot of these bad practices, and that either limits officer discretion or shapes officer discretion maybe more accurate to say, "Well, I have to stop a hundred people, the middle-class white people drinking wine at Central Park are more likely to complete, so I'm going to focus my attention on populations that are less likely to complain."

Tanya Domi: Right.

Rosa Squillacot...: Or will get less credit for whatever complaints they make. I think the other thing, Milo you said, that I think is really interesting is this question of how police reform conversations are being molded by liberalism. I think both with the shows in trial and with the New York State Attorney General's investigation into the NYPD, which is in a lot of ways the first of its kind. It's not literally the first of its kind, but it's a very big, rare step, and I think those two examples plus the George Floyd bill are examples of liberalism trying to save the police. This is an institution we can fix. Right? All of these problems are bugs in a system that, and we can fix the bugs. Of course, as Milo says, it's not bugs in the system, the system itself is the issue, right?
Tanya Domi: Right.

Rosa Squillacote: It isn't unless and until you get mass politics behind really divesting from police, really. Taking funds from the police and inserting them into other social goods that can provide public safety, that can provide goods and services that currently we're only investing the police in to provide. Until you get that movement, I'm skeptical that any meaningful reforms are going to take place.

Tanya Domi: Okay.

Milo Ward: If I can add just one thing to that. Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Tanya Domi: I do want to say this. That connects to what Milo was saying about the form of democracy that you have, that the police departments are doing what they do because democracy and our polity doesn't provide those services and the access to benefits or functions at the lowest level of our society. I just wanted to make that comment, I was listening to you Milo. Let me just also add, really just quickly say that as a genocide scholar, I must interject and say, I just did a podcast a week ago with two genocide scholars and practitioners, that the police in the United States are an early warning indicator that when the police can act with impunity, we indeed are threatening not only our democracy but our public well-being in this country.

That if they know they can get away with murder, then all bets are off about where we stand as a society that is in fact has a number of earmarks of a society that is extremely fragile and given a shift in the political split in this country is very narrow from an electoral standpoint, that is really an unfair electoral system, that's another problem we have. What happens with these police in the hands of somebody who is in fact a nationalist and a fascist? I just want to say that as someone who really is sconced in genocide and atrocity crimes, this is where America is really ... this profile is very, very dubious at this moment. What were you going to say, Milo?

Milo Ward: I was going to respond to a historical matter. Much of the assumption under and in political science, much of political science, has a presumption that the state, our government, our liberal state, it's going to progressively develop in such a way that we can solve a lot of the most barbarous activities, most barbarous behavior through increasing enlightenment, irrationality, market wealth, these things.

Tanya Domi: Mm-hmm (affirmative), right.

Milo Ward: That the police, starting in the mid-century, people are starting to say, "Oh wow! Look at this barbaric vestige. Why do we have so much police murders in the street? Why are black people rioting? What's going on here?" You get this response by conservatives who are, at this point no one sees how they're about to become ascendant, this is the late 60s. They launched a critique, which is a
critique of what were the liberals, the new deal post-war liberals who are the pluralists, who had been arguing that what we have to do is we have to rationalize our police forces like we have to rationalize everything else, make them more professionalized, more legalistic and put these reforms in, and then we'll smooth out these local barbarities that are left over from machine politics, ethnic boss politics in the cities.

How they responded was that, first they would launch a critique at the idea that bureaucratic rationality is possible, that our bureaucracies can become perfect, and they say that they're are limited in all these ways. In the same way that we look today at the police and say, "Look, what they can do is really limited. There are so many constraints in what they can do and all of these things happen. They're juggling laws and then they're juggling what's happening on the street, and they're responding, how do we deal with that? Then, on the other hand, how do we smooth out racial bias? When we've arrived at this problem of dealing with the police as a racial justice issue and the level of our analysis is looking for the hearts of police officers and how to change them, this is like a human resources question.

What I would consider a much more materialist racial justice question, which is why are large populations of black people in America so poor and so heavily policed, which is a much harder question to answer than just whether or not police need to learn to not be biased. If you're policing in an all-black neighborhood, everyone there is black, and you're going to be policing poor people. To go to Rose's research, when you have an all-black police force in a majority black city, you start to encounter some questions of, is this going to solve the problem of police killing black men and women in this country? That's not going-

Tanya Domi: Right.

Rosa Squillacot...: Right, yeah.

Tanya Domi: Let me just say this as it actually segways into the next question I wanted to bring up and that is, let's remember how police departments were instituted in America to begin with, and that was to control and arrest runaway slaves. The property of white plantation owners and those people that owned slaves even in the north. The beginning of the country was based upon a slave-generated economy, and this is, as far as I'm concerned, America's original sin. What we're also witnessing in just recent days is that the Biden administration has made grants available through the Department of Education to schools who want to pursue providing a 1619 project curriculum, which came out of the New York Times talking about the beginnings of slavery in America, and some people are just going crazy.

I actually saw some video on television, I believe it was in the last two days, where this woman said, "I don't like critical race theory taught to my kid, and
I'm not a racist." I am a believer in education, but here you have education being twisted and being basically maligned by the right-wing, and the facts are the facts. We have intergenerational poverty as a consequence and an outcome of slavery, which has, I think, brought to the forefront the reparations discussion and discourse, which I think it is actually appropriate, and good action and education and activism by those of you who are active in these movements, because reparations really has come to the forefront and you're beginning to see municipalities around the country act on that, which I think is important.

Now, I think this is intertwined with police brutality, and so both of you have already plunged into this much better than I can because you're studying it. Rosa, I know you wanted to make some comments before I moved into this discussion, but I wanted to bring this up because it's the 800-pound gorilla in the room, so to speak, or elephant. It's part of what animates our politics and the prejudice behind it, particularly by the right wing, which is really brazen now, in-your-face racist.

Rosa Squillacot...: There is so many things you said that I want to respond to, so let me see if I can.

Tanya Domi: Okay, go to it, go to it.

Rosa Squillacot...: First, I think when we talk about the history of the police, I think it's very important that we talk about the history of police, because I think it's important to talk about the fact that for the first hundred semi-years of this country, we didn't have a police force. When we talk today about abolishing the police, it's seen as radical, socialist vision and, sure, it is. As a society and as a country, we existed without police for, again, over a hundred years, and so I think that reality is something that is always worse stating ... the other thing about the history of the police is that, while it is true that the armed apparatus of the state was organized to pursue runaway slaves, in a more formal institutional sense, the police were created to put down labor organizing and riots around class issues, basically and particularly in the north but across the country.

I think both of those things are so deeply intertwined, which is why, of course, reparations as a question of material redistribution is so relevant. With that, question of reparations, I wanted to mention that the Bronx defenders actually has this interesting innovate platform or issue that they're pushing. The Bronx defenders is representing a lot of people who were swept up in the police repression of the George Floyd protest last summer including the June 4th protests. The comptroller's office, the city has money that's set aside to settle lawsuits. When we talk about the NYPD having a $6 billion budget, that does not include the money that's used to settle lawsuits, because there is a separate fund for that.

What the Bronx defenders are doing as part of this one lawsuit representing some of the activists is to say, "Well, we want damages, but we also want a settlement that has a reparations fund attached to it." The activist who were
targeted by the police for brutality can identify community actors in community organizations that would benefit from an infusion of 100,000, 200,000, half a million dollars. Just one last thing in response to Tanya, your earlier comment about the relation of police institutions with some nationalist in office, that is, to me, something that doesn't get talked about enough but a very real concern.

Tanya Domi: Just look at January 6th as an example.

Rosa Squillacot...: Absolutely, January 6, and then also last summer, Mayor de Blasio was afraid of the NYPD. He could not contain them. He could not make them stop, and the police department is meant to be an administrative agency under the executive. The mayor is supposed to be their boss and he was afraid of them. I am just very nervous about what that means for the future. Given the current political landscape where, Trump had a lot of support in New York City, and I think it's important that we remember that when we talk about what the threat of police really means for us.

Tanya Domi: I think your points are merited. Let's also remember that at the beginning of de Blasio's administration, he lost the police early. I don't know if people recall that when he walked into some public event, the entire NYPD turned their backs on him in formation. That is chilling, that is chilling. I also want to acknowledge what you've said about what happened in Mott Haven and what happened on the streets during the BLM demonstrations and marches that continued across the country and into New York City, and I think watching video of the police kettling and beating, it looked like it could be on the streets of Kazakhstan or Belarus. There is no difference to what is happening in the former Soviet Union, excuse me, in Russia today with what they're doing to demonstrators there across the country than what took place in New York City in various places throughout the country, where the police were absolutely violent attacking demonstrators who were not doing anything. I saw it with my own eyes on video and your points are well taken, Rosa. Your thoughts, Milo.

Milo Ward: I think one of the points is that even with reparations, say reparations somehow was on Biden's agenda, which they're not, they ought to be. But even if they were, one of the reasons that they wouldn't is not just that giving some comeuppance and some redistribution to those who have been excluded and dominated by racial capitalist practices for a very long time, a payment, some sort of retribution-

Tanya Domi: Right, right.

Milo Ward: Would not fix the problem of racial capital itself. What would be the system that we have in place would only have been given a moral payment here. I don't think that would change really this, the situation that we're facing here today maybe would change the composition of who lives in really policed neighborhoods. Maybe it would just become much more Latin X or something, or a larger number of poor whites. The question with a redistributionary
policing question in terms of the police reform and the way in which the protests are, politicizing local budgets is really interesting to me. I think on the policy level is really interesting to me, because what we saw this last year was in the midst of corona, the Republicans coming out with a huge bailout, huge amounts of cash bailouts, huge amount of just cash transfer, and at the same time you have a explosion of anti-police protests in mostly Democrat cities.

Tanya Domi: Right, Democratic cities, yeah.

Milo Ward: Controlled by Democratic mayors.

Tanya Domi: Mayors.

Milo Ward: Who then watch, as their police beat and arrest people en masse, attacker with chemical weapons terrorized protesters and say that, "Well, there are good people on both sides. There are some good cops, most protesters are good. There's a misunderstanding here, there is really nothing we can do about it, they cede their ability to do anything, but actually it turns out, they just act like a mediator between two hostile parties that they have no control over. Meanwhile, the Republicans say, "Look, the Democrats are useless. They are unable to confront the situation." Trump says, "We're going to send in Federal."

Tanya Domi: Yeah, that was Trump then, yeah.

Milo Ward: Yeah, we're going to send in Federal police, we'll use ICE to do this.

Tanya Domi: Which is what happened in Portland.

Milo Ward: Yeah, as if the police needed any help being more violent. Local police were certainly doing that job on their own, but what you have is this real, long period of Democrats being really uncertain of what they can say or do about police.

Tanya Domi: It's true.

Milo Ward: Because they don't want to appear racist. That was the thing for the election year. If they say that we don't like these riots, we don't like these protests, they're going to be against racial justice. They certainly don't like these protests or these riots in their city. It certainly was causing a problem for them. They were letting their police officers try to squash it. That's already there, so this was a huge, I think, a crisis for them that really didn't go away until January 6, which I think presented a new opening for Democrats to reassert claim over the reform language. The fact that we had abolitionists, the fact that we had defund the police as something that Democrats had to consider as not preposterous, had to take seriously for that period of time before we go back to the Georgia Floyd Act, which is a recapitulation of the same thing that you had in Obama's 21st task force on policing, which is almost a watered-down version of the [inaudible 00:39:53] report. We're really dealing with really old legislation here.
Tanya Domi: True, true.

Milo Ward: 60-year-old.

Tanya Domi: This is not groundbreaking. I would just add, keep your eyes on the following, and that is the Republican-controlled states and cities, there aren't that many cities, but they would be in the red states, are now passing legislation that would, in fact, arrest leaders of efforts to march and demonstrate, and they're going to throw them in jail. They're not even going to allow you to get on the street. Now, this truly is reminiscent of some of the worst practices carried out in Eastern Europe, and in Hong Kong, and in places where there is a lot of oppression, Myanmar right now. This is happening where people, there is wholesale arrest, they are not going to permit it, and they're going to use some of the most severe penalties under their laws that they are passing.

Milo Ward: What we did to the Black Power of the Civil Rights Movement or earlier labor movements-

Tanya Domi: That's true.

Milo Ward: Yeah, we definitely have our own history of these practices.

Tanya Domi: This is true.

Milo Ward: I think you're completely right that we're going to see a real reaction on the right, also in the center. We are probably going to have a former police officer as the next mayor of New York who wants to bring back a stop and frisk. That's in New York City. We're absolutely going to see a reaction to it, but I think one thing that's interesting about the Jan 6 on the Capitol, is that it really allowed ... Trump was immediately spirited away by Twitter and Facebook and Instagram never to be seen again.

Tanya Domi: I hope so.

Milo Ward: Yeah, I know.

Tanya Domi: I'm sorry. I am so-

Milo Ward: Sure, sure, yeah. He's suddenly gone, but all of a sudden you have Democrats who were able to make their own case for the police that they hadn't been able to make for a very long time, which is that, okay sure, we've known that the police have been a conservative group, historically,

Tanya Domi: Right.
Milo Ward: But we could not accept them as Republican. We cannot accept them as a Republican police force. We need to go back to, this is why we need the police to protect us from this activity.

Tanya Domi: Uh-huh (affirmative), right.

Milo Ward: We need to reconstitute the police as neutral, perhaps even a liberal, like have liberal-

Tanya Domi: Construct.

Milo Ward: Yeah, there's literally, if you want to do training, we want to do ideological training of the police to make them liberal. This is literally what the plan is now, is that we are going to have to have some liberal police officers, which is an interesting plan. I don't know if they're going to be successful.

Tanya Domi: There is a discussion, and I'm not an expert on this, but it's more and more frequent where you hear that the police are asked to do a lot. They're asked to do lots of things that they shouldn't be doing. Like how they deal with emotionally disturbed people, homeless people, just arrest them. People are saying, "Hey, these are human needs. These people are on the margins. They deserve to have services," which segways into the next thing I want to say about Biden, is that the American Family Rescue Package and all the money that is being proposed to invest in people would probably, not seeing the details yet because I haven't read the bill, and I'm sure there's various drafts of it, but we're talking about investing in people in a way that we have not seen since, really, FDR.

That will mitigate some of the most cruel aspects of racism and poverty in this country. Not all of it, but it'll help if it's leveraged in the right way. This is a new social welfare policy that we haven't seen ever. The Child Tax credit is another thing that people like Miriam, one of our excellent professors who has been pushing a Child Tax Credit forever, and people like Wendy Littrell and Irvin Ed talking about creating a more caring society. We're talking about a society where care is extended by children for children when their parents leave in the morning.

We have 10-year-olds taking care of 8-year-old, 5-year-olds etc. We're talking about child welfare as well, where child care is going to be extended and women can come back to the economy. In this context of all this terrible stuff, and it is what it is and how you've described it, we now have a proposal that would in fact invest in people. Is there any way into this conversation that is tangential to police, but this is about people maybe not being on the street, maybe being in a house, maybe being in an apartment, maybe getting some job training, the possibilities are attractive to look at and consider. Rosa, you want to say something, please.
Rosa Squillacot...: Yeah, sorry.

Tanya Domi: I'm sorry. I'm throwing a lot out here at you, guys.

Rosa Squillacot...: No, no, no. It's very much related. One of my broader takes on the entire system of mass incarceration is that you cannot talk about decarceration or abolition or anything like that unless you simultaneously talk about reinvestment. Because if you just de-institutionalize, this is what caused the homelessness crisis.

Tanya Domi: Part of it, yes.

Rosa Squillacot...: One of the de-institutionalizing psychiatric hospitals. Anything else?

Tanya Domi: Exactly. This goes back to Reagan.

Rosa Squillacot...: Exactly.

Tanya Domi: This goes back to Reagan.

Rosa Squillacot...: Or even before.

Tanya Domi: Right, right.

Rosa Squillacot...: Then who fills in the gap? The police, right? You can't talk about one without the other. To the extent that this plan wants to fully fund community colleges, we're CUNY people so like, "Yay! I support that", to the extent that this plan has a specific investment in HBCUs like that's part of this reparations conversation, I support that. I have two kids.

Tanya Domi: Of course.

Rosa Squillacot...: [inaudible 00:46:17] and whenever they show up.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Rosa Squillacot...: But and yet, it is not enough. In the same way that, as much as I'm glad that Leticia James is doing an investigation into the NYPD, my fear is that this is, again, as I said earlier, just part of liberalism trying to save itself and not really being up to the task. I think that without actually, and I mean this literally, taking money from the police, making there be fewer police, unless we actually disinvest from policing and from mass incarceration, bureaucracies broadly, which is like a whole-

Tanya Domi: Other-

Rosa Squillacot...: Other thing.
Tanya Domi: That's right.

Rosa Squillacot...: Unless we do that, we will continue to rely on carceral mechanisms of one kind or another. New York State had this big push to reduce the prison population. It was a successful push, the prison population was reduced. What happened? The jail population increased. With more higher turnover in Rikers, you had more targeting of low-level offenses instead of higher level offenses. The carceral state has become such a behemoth that unless and until it is understood as a totality and attacked-

Tanya Domi: And interconnected.

Rosa Squillacot...: Interconnected, that's right. Unless and until that happens, I hate to be a downer, but I am pretty pessimistic.

Tanya Domi: I get it. Milo?

Milo Ward: I think that is right. I think looking at a lot of it is in terms of a liberalism saving itself, I wouldn't want to massage out any of the wrinkles and all the things that are actually happening. If it's consciously saving itself.

Rosa Squillacot...: For sure, yeah. No, it's more complicated.

Milo Ward: We're still in a major economic crisis, we're in a huge pandemic, it's literally trying to save itself because you are having riots in the streets. The breadlines during COVID are miles long. The levels of suffering are now pretty out of control in this country. I definitely don't think there's enough money in the police forces to pay for the things that we want. I think that critics of defund movement are like, "You want these other things, why don't you just pay for those, because that's going to require a lot more than the budgets for the police to do." The question is, I think, the political confrontation between the police and people right now, which is I think driving a lot of movement from below in ways that we haven't seen in so long in this country.

Tanya Domi: Sure.

Milo Ward: Every one of these uprisings is a new moment for struggles over articulation. The left can certainly lose those. We can see that in New York City. We don't really know what direction the city council and the mayor is going to go here. We can certainly lose. What we still can see is that the problem with the confrontation between police and people over these things is, I think, what's the point here in an abolition democracy question isn't just, are we going to be able to get rid of the police? We certainly aren't so much, not right away. That's not going to be a policy thing that Democrats vote on on a federal level in the next 200 days or 20 years probably.
The question is that, in the confrontation over this form of rule that people are recognizing as being incredibly coercive and sustaining relations that it's not about the police. People are in conflict in their neighborhoods with all sorts of other forces. There is a social conflict happening in this country. We have it right now with the court getting rid of the moratorium on evictions. That's going to continue to tighten these conflicts, because people are becoming houseless all the time now, and who they fall to in those moments is the police or other services.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Milo Ward: Shelters aren't going to answer the question, housing is. In order to get real housing, James Bond is lying. He was a activist and Marxist thinker and black power activist. His argument about this moment that he was facing that was very similar about power and he was like, "Power is what you take and what you make." That's something that's necessary for these movements that are having to recognize, and that's what I think we see with the city budgets is people saying, "Wait, we can actually seize things? We can make our own imagination of what politics in the city can look like?" That I think is very frightening to a lot of people, that creativity right now on the ground.

Rosa Squillacot...: I completely agree. Sorry, I just want to interject. One thing, which is, I really agree with a lot of what you just said, Milo, but just to be pedantic, we could at least achieve one really significant public policy goal just by defunding the NYPD, which is the new deal for CUNY, the new deal for CUNY to make a little plug for it.

Tanya Domi: I think that's an interesting proposal. Let me also say that one of the ways that we could make our country safer all the way around is to get a prolific gun-toting country under control. We need to deny access to just anybody to buy a gun, and that's one of the things that actually Dr. McCoy has talked about quite a bit. The police themselves are armed to the teeth, because they are frightened of the public, they also carries a lot of weapons. New York controls it more, but nonetheless, we have more guns per person than any other country in the world. It's out-of-control. It's completely out of control.

I'm not justifying anything that the police does in terms of shooting somebody, because so many of these people who are killed are not armed at all. They just happened to be black, and that's why they're shot. Let's get to the last question and that is, what should Biden do in the second 200 days? I'm just going to start off by saying, "Well, you've got to do something about the filibuster, and if you don't do something about the filibuster, there is going to be millions of Americans deprived of access to the ballot next year, and that in fact is probably one of the most dangerous things that could happen. What are your thoughts, Rosa?
Rosa Squillacot: Yeah, I agree absolutely, the filibuster is top priority. I think, also frankly, the court. The court needs to be packed. We need more budgets because this court is much more emboldened than previous conservative courts. It's still early days, but my prediction is that they are more emboldened and are more likely to reverse recent precedent of an unjust rollback restrictions on life without parole sentences for juveniles, which had been a [inaudible 00:54:01] his last term or the term before, but a recent one, he was like, "Nah! We're not going to do that."

On a policy level, I actually think that the pro-ACT is crucial because I think organizing the working class and I think this is maybe getting a little bit, Milo, you were talking about in, correct me if I'm wrong, but if the question is empowering people, people on the street to defend their own rights, to confront the police, to demand taxing the wealthy, then fighting organizing protections is a crucial part of that, because if you're safe in your job or relatively safe in your job, if you can and have some control over their working conditions, that lays the groundwork for political engagement and other aspects of life.

Tanya Domi: Milo.

Milo Ward: Yeah. I absolutely agree with Rosa. I think there's a lot of exciting things happening in Albany. I think there's a lot of huge openings that have been closed forever, especially for activists working in the criminal justice. There's just a lot of opportunity to do things in public and political offices with our new legislators who are much more willing to take real strides and introduce real progressive legislation. I think that this is going to be a really exciting period of time legislatively. I think in DC, we have the problem of the Senate and I think that really serves both parties in this really poor way. If we didn't have a Manchin, we'd probably have someone else. I think that has to go. I don't think that we're going to see that much happening there until that does.

But in state and local places, absolutely. We have so many opportunities to get a lot done. I think to your gun control point. I think if Biden can start slapping down menthol cigarettes, he can shutter the production of handguns or different things like this or assault weapons, you could probably just say we are not going to allow that to be manufactured anymore or something.

Tanya Domi: Sure.

Milo Ward: Go ahead, why not?

Tanya Domi: We did it. We did it in the 90s with a 10-year sunset on it. Clinton banned automatic weapons.

Milo Ward: Right, but the production of them?
Tanya Domi: No, not the production.

Milo Ward: That's what I'm talking about because this is the banning of the menthol production, right?

Tanya Domi: Personal, no, of course.

Rosa Squillacote...: Yeah, I don't know. That's hardcore, I don't know.

Tanya Domi: Fair enough, fair enough. Okay.

Milo Ward: We are a big exporter, right?

Tanya Domi: Okay, you're right.

Rosa Squillacote...: Yup, you're right.

Tanya Domi: So is France, and so is Russia, and so is Israel, by the way. They sell to everybody. By the way, this has been an incredible, incredible conversation. I could not have imagined that it would be as interesting and engaging. You're both amazing. I agree with Prof. Fortner's assessment, you're both fantastic.

Rosa Squillacote...: Thank you for the conversation, Tanya. It's been great.

Tanya Domi: It's been really great.

Milo Ward: Yes, a real pleasure.

Tanya Domi: A wide-ranging, interesting, fascinating conversation. Thank you. Thanks for tuning in to the Thought Project, and thanks to our guests, PhD candidate, Rosa Squillacote and PhD student, Milo Ward, both in the political science doctoral program at The Graduate Center, CUNY. The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering and technical assistance by Kevin Wolf of CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi, tune in next week.