Tanya Domi:
Hello, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project, recorded at the CUNY Graduate Center. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating groundbreaking research, assisting New Yorkers and informing the world. Today's guest is Professor Candace McCoy, who is a Professor of Criminal Justice at the Graduate Center. Trained in law, she applies legal concepts to social science research on a variety of criminal justice operations and organizations. She has published widely and has held several fellowships for research and teaching. From 2016 through 2018, while on professional leave from the university, she served as the Director of Policy Analysis for the Inspector General of the New York Police Department. Dr. McCoy has taught hundreds of students in a career spanning four decades and has worked with government agencies. She is a member of the Ohio Bar and has been a proud New Yorker for the past 15 years.

Tanya Domi:
In this episode of The Thought Project, we discuss how crime is at an all time low in the United States, yet Americans seem more fearful in New York City and across the country. The exception to low level of crimes is the dramatic rise in felony assaults, including a 25% rise in rapes in New York City. Crimes are also up on mass transit, including on subways and buses. Although these crimes are misdemeanors, they leave victims shaken. What is driving these serious crimes? The proliferation of gun purchases that occurred during the pandemic are playing a much larger role in New York City and across the country.

Tanya Domi:
During the last term of the Supreme Court, the court handed down its first gun decision in 30 years in the case of New York Rifle and Pistol Association versus Bruin. The court did not seem to take into account the growing number of mass shootings in the country and did not accept the legal arguments of the New York State Attorney General that argued, "highly dense population in New York City is a sensitive consideration", when the court struck down its rigorous efforts to limit people who are legally permitted to carry guns.

Tanya Domi:
We talk about this decision as well and why road rage and aggressive driving is up across the country. Welcome back to the Thought Project, Professor McCoy.

Candace McCoy:
Oh, thank you.

Tanya Domi:
So we are talking about crime in America, crime in New York City today. And you had the opportunity at the end of the last Supreme Court session where you wrote in Bloomberg Law on the ruling of New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v Bruin. You asserted that the Court's originalist thinking in this case was quite spurious. How did the justices reasoning affirm gun regulation in this decision? And while the court noted that guns have been regulated throughout history in the United States, Thomas, who wrote for the majority, asserted that the Second Amendment should be unshackled in essence.

Candace McCoy:
Yes.
Tanya Domi:
And his originalist arguments were not surprising given who he is. But nonetheless, his dismissal of the New York State AG's reasoning that Manhattan is a sensitive place was really kind of insulting, I think, to New Yorkers. And since this decision was issued, the city has moved to prohibit guns in Times Square. So what are your thoughts about this case? It was the first gun ruling in like 30 years.

Candace McCoy:
Right. I don't think there's any more important issue to think about today when we talk about violence in America than guns. And while certainly the horse has left the barn, as they say, we're not going to be able to ban guns. We're not going to be able to prevent people from having guns. Nevertheless, a culture change has to occur in America regarding the meaning of gun ownership and why you want them. So this case, the Bruin case, challenged what was a minority opinion, a minority of states at the time, New York being one of them.

Tanya Domi:
It was like six states.

Candace McCoy:
Six of them.

Tanya Domi:
Six, yes.

Candace McCoy:
In New Jersey, I think in any-

Tanya Domi:
California.

Candace McCoy:
Yes. They said that you had to prove to state authorities why you needed the gun in order to be able to carry it in public, which is not what the majority of the states do. They say you can get a gun permit if you fill out the forms and show that you've had training. It's similar to getting a driver's license. You show that you can operate the machine and that you know the rules-

Tanya Domi:
Properly.

Candace McCoy:
And then you get a license. And that was not the case in New York. You had to prove that you had a reason for it, like you're a security guard.

Tanya Domi:
It's part of your job.
Candace McCoy:
It's part of your job or you live and work in a very dangerous neighborhood, that sometimes was approved. In any event, it certainly limited gun carrying in New York, although the Supreme Court had previously said every state must allow a person to keep a gun in the home, so that applied to everybody. This is about guns in public. It's interesting, Tanya, your question indicates that it was a terrible decision for the people who want to limit gun carrying in public, and it was not a terrible decision. I'll explain why, if you are wanting to limit gun carrying in public, but it was a terrible decision in my opinion. As you said, the majority reasoning and any Supreme Court case, the question is why did they decide it like they do? Because that's setting the precedent for the future. What are the reasons for it?

Tanya Domi:
Exactly.

Candace McCoy:
And so that reasoning was, I said spurious, a cool word to put in an op-ed.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely.

Candace McCoy:
But this was Alito, joined by Thomas, both of whom are originalists, "originalists". And they say that the methodology, the social scientists out there and the hard scientists out there, as we say, know from social science or any kind of science, I'm sorry, that the method of study, scientific method, determines your thinking and how you organize your reasoning. And the way courts do it is a comparative case by case analysis. It's called Stare Decisis. It's a methodology that lawyers and judges use. So what is that method based on? There's a big fight, and there has been a big fight over the last decades, of the proper methodology for case law reasoning.

Candace McCoy:
Alito and Thomas are prime examples of the Federalist Society people who believe that history determines it. And it's not even the history.

Tanya Domi:
The originalist.

Candace McCoy:
The originalist. You look to the original intent of the framers of the Constitution. And as I said in the piece, you really don't know the original intent. They're dead. The only way you're going to know is to follow the cases through the centuries. But they don't do that, they rely on some romantic, in their mind, view of when we all had guns and we all were capable of being real men. I really don't know what they were thinking.

Tanya Domi:
You're right. The great sentence in your piece is, it conjures up the image of the justices meeting for deliberation around a seance table calling upon the spirits of James Madison and his fellow framers to speak to them from the dead and tell them what to do. Great sentence.

Candace McCoy:
Thank you, Tanya. Well, back to the case. They said, well the colonists had guns, et cetera, etcetera. Oh, please. So I was upset about that. But the actual impact of that case, because there were two justices in the middle, they voted with the majority.

Tanya Domi:
Kavanaugh.

Candace McCoy:
Justice Kavanaugh.

Tanya Domi:
Kavanaugh.

Candace McCoy:
Joined by Roberts and they said, well we can still have regulation because the framers had regulation.

Tanya Domi:
And they did.

Candace McCoy:
Right. They did.

Tanya Domi:
And Heller was Heller about regulations too.

Candace McCoy:
Yes. And so regulation is okay, you have to allow everybody to have guns, but under what circumstances, when, where is still up for grabs. So the arguments were about, as you said, well, the entire city, the entire island of Manhattan is so densely populated, having a gun in public is dangerous for the accidents that'll happen much less the shootings. And that was argued in the court specifically about Manhattan and specifically about Times Square. And those two middle of the road, if you will, middle justices who were concurring said that regulating the place based on likelihood of violence and accidents is still permitted. So folks who want to limit gun use in public actually are not necessarily upset about this case.

Tanya Domi:
Interesting. So we have that case and your great piece in Bloomberg Law. And now just recently, there was a petition submitted to the court by a person by the name of Alan Whitaker, who's a resident in Washington, DC who holds a handgun license and his handgun was taken away from him. It was in lock
box in his car and he didn't do anything wrong, per se, but he was in a location in a gas station where there was an altercation with other people and somebody saw that he had a gun holster, empty gun holster, and they wanted to know what he was doing. And so they searched his car, his girlfriend, and took some marijuana away from them and then found the gun in the trunk of the car in a lock box. Police took it away. So now, Whitaker is appealing to the court. This could come up next term, it appears.

Candace McCoy:
Yeah, I haven't read the case, so I'm not going to comment much on it.

Tanya Domi:
Sure.

Candace McCoy:
I would say that based on what you just said, the police were legally permitted to do that. There's no problem with the police action there, because there was an altercation at the gas station and they were called to break up a fight. And of course, they search people when that happens. Mr. Whitaker probably was not permitted to have a gun in public, which is exactly what we're talking about with the Bruin case. DC did not permit people to have guns in public. I don't know exactly why I haven't read the DC-

Tanya Domi:
Sure, sure.

Candace McCoy:
I would anticipate that this is a challenge to the red flag laws.

Tanya Domi:
Very interesting.

Candace McCoy:
And so next term, we're in trouble if you think that it is okay to do background checks on people. And for instance, in New York state right now, the legislature jumped immediately after that case and passed laws that are quite restrictive and they include a deep background check on a person's social media accounts before you get a gun permit to carry in public. And that could be, first of all, it's burdensome, but secondly, it is trying to flag people who are likely to be violent. And as we know, prediction of that sort is really dicey and inaccurate. So I can understand that there would be a challenge to this, but it's going to open up all kinds of cans of worms. So you'll have me back next year after that case.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely. Absolutely. So last week the New York Daily News issued a staff editorial on crime in New York City. And the Daily News indicated that murders are actually down by 10 and a half percent compared to this time last year. And gun arrests are at a 26-year high, yielding nearly 4,900 weapons, which is, apparently, they're confiscating about an average of 20 guns every day. That's all the good news, but the bad news is, and the Daily News notes that felony assaults are 51% higher than they were 12 years ago, that rapes are up by 25%, and in the subways and buses, crime is 49% higher than it was in
And also rising are misdemeanor assaults and hate crimes. Though not considered major crimes, nonetheless, they leave victims feeling deeply shaken. So this is perhaps why New Yorkers are feeling unsafe despite a lot of good work by the police department that has brought down crime. But still, many people in the city feel unsafe right now.

Candace McCoy:
Sure, absolutely. Two things to talk about there. One is the effects of the pandemic and let's put that aside, talk about it a little later, but I'd like to address it.

Tanya Domi:
Yes. Yes.

Candace McCoy:
And on crime and most particularly on fear of crime, which is your second point. Fear of crime is not necessarily perfectly correlated with actual crime. When I look at the statistics, any criminologist looks at these statistics and said, "Yeah, that's bad. It got worse." This is not too whitewash it away. Let's remember that in the last two decades, we, nationwide, not just in New York, have been enjoying the most crime-free, low crime era ever in the United States of America from what we know. And I'm not going to compare it to the frontier or whatever, but I mean, really, since we've been keeping statistics basically the entire 20th century and late 19th. And so what this leaves us with is a slight change compared to the 1970s and later into the eighties. Crime is nowhere near as bad as it was in the seventies and eighties for those of us of a certain age who remember that time.

Candace McCoy:
But that doesn't matter, it really doesn't because the question is the perception of the crime and how people try to protect themselves and how they live their daily lives, and it's effect on communal life in public, how you comport yourself and all of the wonderful things that we love here in New York that can come from our neighborhoods. So I would like to say, "Don't worry about it", but that's silly. You should worry about it. It's real. It's always been real. The concerning part of it is not the property crimes. It's bad enough if you have shoplifting and fraud, lots of fraud in the pandemic. But what you just talked about, Tanya, was assaults.

Tanya Domi:
Right.

Candace McCoy:
People hitting each other, people raping. The sexual assault, a high uptick. And that's not just reporting.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah. Exactly.

Candace McCoy:
This is a real issue. There's a lot of rage out there, there's a lot of anger out there right now. Maybe not as bad as compared to the past, but that doesn't matter because we're experiencing it now. And last point here, fear of crime is real. It doesn't help to say, "Don't be afraid of it. You have to live your life"
because we are afraid of it. Nevertheless, the circumstances under which these things happen are something that we can all be aware of. While we're still very, very cautious, it doesn't mean that we have to withdraw from our neighborhood life.

Tanya Domi:
Yes. I do think that one of the things that people talk about since the pandemic, because you did mention it, and we should probably talk about it in this way, that you just saw this pretty dramatic increase of mentally ill people, homeless people. And I think that, because the system just couldn't absorb all the needs and there were cracks in the system anyway, and I think that's where people notice that a lot in New York. Do you see that guy? Sure. You're on the subway. I was on the subway last night and this guy was really, he was mentally ill without a doubt, and he was becoming really aggressive.

Candace McCoy:
I was on a bus and a guy-

Tanya Domi:
Sure, sure.

Candace McCoy:
Last night.

Tanya Domi:
So one of my strategies now is I just try to sit as close to the door as I can if I have to get out. I'm just thinking that way because when somebody's mentally ill, they can actually move very quickly. And I'm not going to stand there, I'm going to move myself to get out of the way.

Candace McCoy:
But I'm really glad you were riding the subway and you will continue to.

Tanya Domi:
That's true.

Candace McCoy:
Because if you don't, the institution crumbles and you leave it to the folks who are mentally ill or homeless.

Tanya Domi:
That's true.

Candace McCoy:
And that's not going to help either.

Tanya Domi:
That's true. You're absolutely right.
Candace McCoy:
Do you want to talk about the pandemic?

Candace McCoy:
[inaudible 00:19:11].

Tanya Domi:
Well, it exposed so many cracks in our system. And I think, again, I will say this, I think we've always been asking police to do a lot of things that they probably shouldn't be doing and they're not trained to do it. And now it's more apparent than ever because of the pandemic, in my view.

Candace McCoy:
Well, remember that horrible, horrible month of March, 2020, how afraid we were? You want to talk about fear?

Tanya Domi:
That's true.

Candace McCoy:
Remember the fear. Remember, you didn't know what this virus was. You didn't know if you got anywhere near it, was it going to kill you? And it was killing people and everything shut down within a week. Just take yourself back to that.

Tanya Domi:
That was surreal.

Candace McCoy:
And remember how afraid you were. Well, fear tends to get applied. If you're afraid, generally, you're going to be afraid of crime, you're going to be afraid of viruses. It's fear. I remember very well at the time in March, 2020, many people were predicting a huge rise in crime during the pandemic when we all had to go home. They were afraid of burglars. Oh my God, there's going to be looting. What? No, no. No, this doesn't happen when people are at home. So street crime plummeted in the pandemic because everybody was at home afraid. What went up like mad was fraud on the internet, and domestic violence, as you would imagine.

Tanya Domi:
Right. Right.

Candace McCoy:
So crime plummeted and yet everybody had predicted, oh my God. So it's about the fear. And what happened then now that we are, I can't say exactly post-pandemic, but at least it's a low simmering issue.
It's still there.

Candace McCoy:
It's still there.

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Candace McCoy:
And we're afraid. We're still a little bit jumpy. And crime is up now that the streets have opened up. And as you mentioned, the institutions were so challenged during that time that a homeless person is really unlikely to hurt you, really unlikely. But it makes you uncomfortable. Makes you uncomfortable. And you say, "Wait, not only is this person maybe somebody with a knife, or God forbid, a gun. This person might give me a virus." So it's not just about crime, it's about our fear and our social institutions.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely. So this New York Daily News editorial revealed that a lot of good things are happening with the police despite this felony assault issue. So why does the mayor, we can see that the police are, the data shows that they are doing their job in many ways. Because there was a lot of fear that the police department just was going to stop, the blue flu and that sort of thing and not really do your job. But why does the mayor keep blaming crime on bail reform, on the bail reform laws? And what are your thoughts on bail reform, because I know you have many, and addressing violent crimes in the context of bail reform?

Candace McCoy:
Thank you. That was a softball question and now I'm going to hit it. We'll have a great time.

Tanya Domi:
Good.

Candace McCoy:
You're not going to be able to shut me up. So as I also mentioned on a Bloomberg Law op-ed, it was Rahm Emmanuel who said, never, and I think maybe even Winston Churchill before that, never let a good crisis-

Tanya Domi:
Go to waste.

Candace McCoy:
Go to waste. Yes. And so here's a rise in crime. Here's a rise in fear. So what do the politicians want to do? They want to roll back a reform that is really, really working to reduce the horrible effects of arrest on poor people. The bail reform, bottom line, is designed to help poor people not stay in jail and disrupt their lives, disrupt their families, disrupt their jobs when they haven't been convicted of anything. 40% of the people nationwide, by the way, this is happening everywhere. But New York State, God bless us,
along with New Jersey in a different way, and a couple of other states, DC, way before us have passed these limitations, I'd say, on the old bail system. It's money bail.

Tanya Domi:
Right.

Candace McCoy:
So the way the bail system works, the United States is the only nation in the world that premises pre-trial before you're convicted of anything, processes on money. The assumption is that a person who's been arrested for a crime and is waiting for trial will not come back to court unless the person posts money with the court and then the person will come back to court to get the money back. That's how the bail system is premised. No, people come back to court because they're coming back to court. They're told to come to court. They want to end their cases, they want to take care of this. And they're still presumed innocent, and many of them are. Well, if you don't have the money, you would go to jail and sit in Rikers.

Tanya Domi:
Until your trial.

Candace McCoy:
Until your trial, which can be months and months and sometimes even years. Now, nationwide, 40%, generally, of the people in our local jails have not been convicted of anything. They're sitting there waiting for their cases.

Tanya Domi:
Because they're poor and they don't have the money.

Candace McCoy:
And they have been predicted to be violent, so here we go again. Not predicted to be violent. See, this is the difficulty of it. The only prediction that should be happening, and the New York law says that this is okay, is whether you're going to actually show up in court. It's not whether you're going to do a crime. After all, you haven't been convicted of anything. And so this is what drives the opponents of this reform crazy. Because the reform says, "No, you go home. You wait for your trial. You get an app on your phone that tells you-

Tanya Domi:
When the trial is.

Candace McCoy:
And it tells you every day when it's coming up and it works, it's great. People come back. And of course, in New York, this has had a great effect on reducing the number of people in jail. And most particularly, it was also designed to reduce racial disparity. Because as we know, there's a great overlap in being a person of color and not having as much money. So what happens? Mayor Adams and the Republicans all across the state, strangely, they're embracing Mayor Adams as their standard bearer. I don't think he wants to be embraced, but they're all in the same area here.
Tanya Domi:
They all agree.

Candace McCoy:
They all agree that this is what's causing the rise in crime. No, it isn't. They will say, "Oh my heavens." Dermot Shea, the previous police commissioner, actually went and testified in Albany about this horrible case, which was a horrible case, truly was, of a man who was trying to snatch a purse. It was a robbery. The woman was holding on. It was terrible. The man had a record. And Shea was saying, "And he was on bail. He was on bail." Turns out, no, he wasn't. No, he wasn't on bail. It was a very bad thing that was happening, but to try to put together this bail issue with what's actually happening on the streets, and it's very problematic. People who are on release, they have been released into the community now. The Albany Times Union, God bless them, did a great study using the statistics statewide after the bail reform in January, 2020-

Tanya Domi:
Was implemented.

Candace McCoy:
Was implemented. And they found that the re-arrest rate of people who were released was 4.2%. 4.2%. Now, I'm not happy about those 4.2% of people, but the fact is that almost-

Tanya Domi:
It's not an epidemic.

Candace McCoy:
Yes. And 96% of the people who were released, who would've been sitting in jail.

Tanya Domi:
Returned to court.

Candace McCoy:
In jail and completely disrupting their lives and having to deal with Rikers. Rikers? You want to sit in jail, not a good place. They came back to court. They were not arrested.

Tanya Domi:
So just one last question on this. I remember you and I've talked about this before. One of your ideas was that if they want to do something about and address bail reform, then just make the criteria be that if you committed a violent crime with a gun, then you won't get bail.

Candace McCoy:
Oh, yes. Thank you for asking. I'm sorry, I just love this topic.

Tanya Domi:
[inaudible 00:28:54] I wanted to bring that out because the gun issue was such a major issue anyway right now. And so if somebody is arrested and they used a gun or had a gun during the transmission of a crime, that would give basis for denying bail.

Candace McCoy:
It absolutely would.

Tanya Domi:
And do remand to jail.

Candace McCoy:
Absolutely.

Tanya Domi:
Right.

Candace McCoy:
I should have mentioned this, and thank you so much for bringing me back down, because I was just going to go out all day. The way the bail law read is, there are certain "qualifying offenses", and they're all really serious felonies involving violence that a judge can say, "No, we're going to require money from you." And frankly, also, that it's going to mean that some people are held in jail pretrial. Those qualifying offenses are, as I said, all violent. And the original bail law did not include gun offenses, which I didn't understand, given what's going on with guns. And also, frankly, okay, you're carrying a gun in public in New York. You haven't used it, you haven't committed an assault with it. But if you are willing to carry a gun, that means you're willing to shoot somebody and that is potentially violent.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely.

Candace McCoy:
And what I wrote in Bloomberg there was that, I was kind of proud of myself because I wrote this, and many people were saying it, but I hit number one on US Law week that week. I couldn't believe it.

Tanya Domi:
I think that it's on the money. Guns have been proliferated. And again, back to the pandemic, lots of people bought guns during the pandemic.

Candace McCoy:
Oh, it's crazy.

Tanya Domi:
It was a major purchase during the pandemic.

Candace McCoy:
And if you carry them in public then, okay, I said, regard that as a violent crime and put it with the qualifying offenses. And that will mean that judges can, in fact, hold those people if they're predicted to be violent. And so what happens is, just because of me, of course, it's only because of me, ha ha ha. The legislature did in fact make that change. And the Republican pushback was, "Well, that's not enough. That wasn't repealing the law. That's not da da, da da." It has become a political issue in this current midterm run-up. And just generally, it's a silly thing. Many people don't even know what bail reform is about. But to hear the, what's the name of the Republican party chair who is running now for Congress? I forget his name. In any event-

Tanya Domi:  
[inaudible 00:31:55]

Candace McCoy:  
His entire platform is on bail reform.

Tanya Domi:  
Is on bail reform.

Candace McCoy:  
And trying to get everybody, again, really afraid of crime. That's all he talks about. Be afraid, be very afraid.

Tanya Domi:  
So I think we have done bail reform.

Candace McCoy:  
Thank you for letting me rant.

Tanya Domi:  
So speaking of violence, you actually mentioned to me a little while ago, and I looked it up. AAA estimates now nearly eight out of 10 drivers demonstrate aggressive driving behaviors while driving. Now, that's one behavior that means a driver, if they're aggressive, they're engaged in a series of moving violations while operating the vehicle. That's different from road rage, but road rage also involves aggression, but it takes things one step further into more violent and dangerous territory.

Tanya Domi:  
Studies show that younger drivers aged 19 and below are four times more likely to be involved in aggressive driving crashes than older counterparts. Indeed, 2021 was the deadliest year for road rage and an average of 44 people per month were shot and killed or wounded during a road rage shooting. Road rage deaths due to gun violence have doubled compared to pre-pandemic levels. What is going on here?

Candace McCoy:
Boy. Well, what's going on is just what you just described and it's scary as hell. You want to be afraid, get onto the roads. And so the reason I raised this point with you earlier is, it's a criminology point. I'm not a criminologist, I'm a criminal justician. I talk about the system and how it responds to crime. So everything I say here comes with an asterisk. I'm not a criminologist, I play one on podcasts. But what is the underlying cause of the uptick in violence that you mentioned before? The assaults, the rapes. Why is it upticking now? I mentioned that we should also look at other areas of behavior that we can measure in which violence and aggression are going up. And everything you just mentioned there, all those statistics, the road rage, the aggressive driving is more than an uptick, it's a steep rise.

Candace McCoy:
Again, another one that you want to look at, suicide. Steep rise in suicides. And it's among this younger group, as you mentioned, primarily male. Any criminologist will tell you the life course curve of crime, generally people under 25 are the criminals and the violent ones are men, generally. And we're seeing this incredible uptick in violence by young men in all walks of life in America. And they're taking their aggression out in different ways. You can have a gun in a city and be shooting people you know. You can have a gun in rural Wisconsin and travel and kill people in a protest. You can have a gun and travel to Buffalo and shoot 10 people in a hate crime. You can drive a very fast car at 130 miles an hour zipping in and out of traffic and not caring if you die or kill somebody else. And that's what happens.

Candace McCoy:
And then there are suicides and it's going up, up, up. What are the causes of this? I'm not a criminologist, I have an asterisk. But I'm going to say, people say it's the pandemic. There was a very famous sociologist, Durkheim, Emile Durkheim wrote about suicide, wrote about what he called anomie. There's a social condition that can develop when people are alienated, when people are not connected to each other, when people don't see a future for themselves. So the alienation and other things can lead to these high suicides. It's the same thing with crime. So why the alienation? One thing, again with an asterisk, the trauma of seeing so much death around you. In the pandemic, you're losing your relatives, you're losing the people you love. You're losing the people who provide stability for you, not just the pandemic, opioid. More people have died in the opioid epidemic than in the pandemic.

Tanya Domi:
That's right. And there was actually upstate New York yesterday, there was a report of an opioid situation upstate, which has been revealed that a number of people are addicted and dying. And this was just reported on the news yesterday.

Candace McCoy:
This has been going on for 10 years.

Tanya Domi:
Of course. Of course. It's interesting because it's in a lot of rural areas too, where this has been taking place, up in New England and West Virginia, across Ohio.

Candace McCoy:
Oh, this has been on-
Tanya Domi:
New York.

Candace McCoy:
It has devastated rural areas and devastated the families there.

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Candace McCoy:
I'm not a show for Hulu, but watch Dopesick.

Tanya Domi:
I've heard about that.

Candace McCoy:
It's really good.

Tanya Domi:
I've heard about that.

Candace McCoy:
And it sets out what it's like in rural areas. So more people have died of opioid overdoses in the last 10 years than have died in the pandemic of COVID. 110,000 people died of overdoses last year in America on opioids, last year. Just last year. So what does this do to families? What does this do to stability? What does this do to the people you love? And you get very angry at the world. You get really angry at the world and at the universe. I can understand that you would. There's something going on out there, but it's not only the pandemic, crime is an outcome of this sort of thing.

Tanya Domi:
Right. It's really interesting, because 22 years ago, Robert Putnam wrote Bowling Alone.

Candace McCoy:
Bowling Alone.

Tanya Domi:
I don't think he predicted any of this, but he actually put his finger on what was going on at that time and where citizen associations and people were just not working together, not being together, that communities were separating. And I think he actually did a second edition that I bought last year. And I give him a lot of credit because I think he actually foresaw what was going to eventually come full fruition in America. And I think we're reaping that now.
And he was talking about community life.

Tanya Domi:
Right.

Candace McCoy:
And it's really a powerful argument. Schools, communities, but I'm also talking about families.

Tanya Domi:
Sure. Well, that's the basic unit.

Candace McCoy:
And the people that you love and grandma dies and you're angry, and grandma was your stability. Yeah, it's bad.

Tanya Domi:
So just as you said, compared to the seventies and eighties, the national crime statistics in the US have decreased significantly over the past 25 years, 30 years. As you said, the rate is about 47 crimes per 100,000 people according to the data that I looked at. Nonetheless, homicides and major US cities are also dropping in 2022. But again, the total violent crime continues to rise, so that's the dichotomy here.

Candace McCoy:
Yeah. Yeah. I don't know if it's a dichotomy, I think it's all of a piece.

Tanya Domi:
Well, crime has decreased, but yet-

Candace McCoy:
Oh, okay. It's decreased over time.

Tanya Domi:
Over time.

Candace McCoy:
Most definitely. And we started this session by talking about [inaudible 00:40:33]. Most of us were raised in a time of incredibly low crime. Incredibly low crime.

Tanya Domi:
So one of my questions is, and maybe we can forgo my last question, but is the media doing a good job on reporting on crime? And what can leaders do to contextualize crime? Because if a leader is irresponsible, they are scaring the hell out of people. And if they're not being honest, that's not also good for building and sustaining communities. So what are your thoughts on the media's role and about the role of leaders?
Candace McCoy:
Wow, what a great question.

Tanya Domi:
Okay. And we're going to end with this.

Candace McCoy:
That's just such a great question. I had the honor speaking with a group of reporters just last week with a shout out to the Pointer Institute. They're the folks who do PolitiFact. And boy, we love PolitiFact. That's the-

Tanya Domi:
We do, indeed. And it's a good organization. It's an outstanding organization.

Candace McCoy:
Yeah. Yeah. That's the liar, liar pants on fire people when they fact-check politicians, which is really great. In any event, these journalists were very interesting. They were there to discuss criminal justice coverage and how to do it. One of the speakers, not me, but a wonderful, amazing woman, had a whole presentation on the eyewitness news mentality, she called it. She showed how eyewitness news had grown as a phenomenon from the 1960s to the present. That's the "if it bleeds, it leads" mentality.

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Candace McCoy:
And print media does the same thing. And so these journalists were talking about how they choose the stories. And they don't, the editors do. What story will get highlighted? Will it be the latest shooting or will it be the larger context of what's going on in that community? They make a very good point, the journalist. It's fuzzy talking about why the streets in X neighborhood are not having as many people on them and they're allowing gun violence to flourish. It's very fuzzy. But what you can cover is the actual shooting and their facts there, and there it is. So it's very hard for a journalist to contextualize. We have, not investigative reporting, but feature writing. And that'll be the same for broadcast. You can try to speak about these wider trends.

Candace McCoy:
We just talked about suicide.

Tanya Domi:
Right.

Candace McCoy:
You'll be talking about that, but we're still at a point where if it bleeds, it leads. And I think the only way to get around that, you can't get around that, that's how it's going to be. Social media is a bit different.
What gets reposted? The bleeding and leading is going to get reposted and the feature is not. So, Tanya, you control the Twitter for the GC. You're not going to-

Tanya Domi:
I just contribute.

Candace McCoy:
You contribute.

Tanya Domi:
I don't control it. I don't control it.

Candace McCoy:
Who controls Twitter? What do you post on Twitter, people? Is it the latest outrage trying to get people angry, trying to maintain your cred as a partisan? Is it bleeding and leading? Or is it you're posting some thoughtful overviews of what's happening? I don't hold much hope for a change in that, but at least we can try to be aware of it. And don't let the framing of crime in the media get done by people with an agenda.

Tanya Domi:
Yes. I think one of the trends I've noticed in local news is that there's more explanatory reporting going on.

Candace McCoy:
Good.

Tanya Domi:
I think that's a good development. You have in New York, as you know, you have Channel 12 in each borough, and they have a propensity to actually talk about something that happened and then do further reporting on it and explanatory, like you're talking, five, six minutes, which is a lifetime on television.

Candace McCoy:
Oh, it is.

Tanya Domi:
That's a long time.

Candace McCoy:
Retweet that. Don't do just about the shooting.

Tanya Domi:
Right. There was just another really terrible tragedy that happened in, I think it was in Queens. Three children were drowned and the mother was found and she was wet. And it sounds like she's probably mentally ill.

Candace McCoy:
An Andrea Yates way back in Texas. That was like 15 years ago.

Tanya Domi:
I'll never forget that case.

Candace McCoy:
Same thing.

Tanya Domi:
That was just an unbelievable case. And so I'm waiting for the next story about her and what happened.

Candace McCoy:
And now there's-

Tanya Domi:
Waiting for the next story.

Candace McCoy:
There's the example. I don't know what's going to happen with this story and what the facts are going to be, but I think back to Andrea Yates.

Tanya Domi:
Oh, that.

Candace McCoy:
Oh boy. She had I think five kids she drowned.

Tanya Domi:
That's right.

Candace McCoy:
And this woman, when it started to get contextualized and the framing changed when we realized she had postpartum depression. And of course, she was always postpartum because she was always having another kid.

Tanya Domi:
That's right.
Candace McCoy:
She was in an evangelical community in which the continuous childbearing was expected. She was at home with the kids and was told to homeschool them. I remember being a mom with a young kid, and I had just one, and it would've driven me nuts. But the woman had-

Tanya Domi:
She was really-

Candace McCoy:
It was so sad. And she had unaddressed mental illness.

Tanya Domi:
That's right.

Candace McCoy:
And of course, these five beautiful children dead in the bathtub. And did anybody think about, along the way that there were ways to intervene? No. That story changed in a heartbeat once-

Tanya Domi:
That's true.

Candace McCoy:
The investigation of who she was and what her circumstances were, became known.

Tanya Domi:
What about our leaders though? Now, we talked about the media, but what about our leaders like Mayor Adams blaming bail reform-

Candace McCoy:
Well, I'm not happy, as I said.

Tanya Domi:
I'm not happy either.

Candace McCoy:
Yeah. Get off that bail reform thing.

Tanya Domi:
It's like it's become the be all, end all to solve all of our problems.

Candace McCoy:
Well, it used to be quality of life. Quality of life. And you could make so much political capital on getting people all upset about "quality of life crimes and broken windows ideology". Thank you, Rudy Giuliani.
And in fact, crime did go down when we addressed those things, but it would've gone down anyway. It went down in Western Europe where they weren't doing this. It went down in cities that were not using broken windows. But at the time, I'm old enough to remember when it wasn't bail reform they'd be yelling about, they'd be yelling about quality of life. It's a way to rally people who want more social control over other people, generally. And there may be reasons for that.

Candace McCoy:
We all are concerned, but the social control over other people, if you're going to put the institutions of government, police, the jails, the prisons behind it, you have to think very carefully about what is that going to do to your community. And so I guess the answer just generally to what you've raised here, Tanya, is we should learn from the past as to when the politicians are harping on a particular crime control strategy that is going to solve everything, it's not. Pushback.

Tanya Domi:
Right. Well, I want to thank you so much for being with us today.

Candace McCoy:
I really, really had a good time. Thank you for letting me rant.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely. Great conversation. Thanks for tuning into The Thought Project and thanks to today's guest, criminal justice professor Candace McCoy of the CUNY Graduate Center.

Tanya Domi:
The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering, and technical assistance by audio engineer Kevin Wolff and CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.