BOOK REVIEW

Reckoning with Racism: A Challenge for Deliberative Democracy

Maegan Parker Brooks and David S. Gutterman

Drawing upon four recently published books, one booklet, and a dialogue guide, this review aims to deepen understanding of both scholars and practitioners about how to reckon with racism in the midst of overlapping and intersecting crises. The works reviewed here extend calls made within deliberative democracy scholarship and activist practice to disrupt harmful patterns of dialogic engagement. Several of these works also challenge reductionist conceptions of civility that perpetuate systemic inequality, even as they uphold deliberative democracy's long-held commitment to honor the human dignity of participants across dialogic contexts. By putting the community organizers, activists, clergy, scholars, and professors who author these works in conversation with one another, this review promotes potentially transformative approaches to dialogue and deliberation about racial injustice. In the end, this review urges readers to imagine how these potentially transformative approaches can be adapted to virtual settings given the legacies of physical distancing measures wrought by the global health pandemic.

Keywords: dialogue; racism; pedagogy; call out culture; cancel culture; online deliberative contexts

Books Reviewed

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'If justice is what love sounds like when it speaks in public, then patience is what mercy sounds like out loud, and forgiveness is the accent with which grace speaks. None of this means that white folk don't face

Williamette University, US

Corresponding author: Maegan Parker Brooks (mpbrooks@willamette.edu)

a huge moment of reckoning. How they handle this can shape the nation's history for years to come.'— Michael Eric Dyson

We have been physically isolated from one another and now gather remotely as reified rectangles on computer screen galleries or through 280-character bids for connection. When we do venture out, face coverings obstruct our encounters—all that is apparent are our wary eyes. But COVID-19 protocols only make abiding conditions more pronounced. The wariness and fear, anger and mistrust, were already palpable for so many and have been for generations. The challenge of communicating across such enduring divides and in such conditions can be overwhelming. Yet, deliberative democracy presumes that the solutions to our most pressing problems arise out of tolerance of alternative viewpoints, an openness to altering our own perspectives, and a commitment to collaborative problem-solving. So what happens when our ability to hear others is altered by technologies of remote engagement and obstructed by dehumanization, trauma, and cancel culture?

The works under review are each informed by these strained conditions of contemporary public life. They provide helpful perspectives regarding the essential roles dialogue and deliberation play in the process of reckoning with racism. They are written by community organizers, activists, clergy, scholars, and professors. Accordingly, they are distinct in tone, content, style, and intended audience, but they all share the conviction that we *must* reckon with racial injustice. We must reckon with the

unequal distribution of power, wealth and opportunity, vulnerability, pain, and grief. And we would be well-served to consider how dialogue and deliberation might build bridges across the silence and suspicion, the anger and the fear, that separate us.

While the works reviewed here are primarily focused on reckoning with race in the United States, their insights regarding how to engage whiteness, anti-Blackness, and questions of civility hold potential for reimagining dialogue and deliberation in other countries as well. Furthermore, several of the authors acknowledge the transnational impact and interconnectedness of the Movement for Black Lives, pointing to the global circulation of images of police brutality and protest marches in solidarity, for example. To be sure, none of these works is blithely convinced that people in the United States are ready for this reckoning, though each work is motivated by a longing and a sense of responsibility for how we might live our way toward such transformative engagement. Each in their own way seeks to help explain the fraught conditions in the contemporary United States and offers a vision of what might be done in the nation, in our communities, in our classrooms, and in ourselves if we sincerely commit to the work of living well together.

All the authors whose works we review here seem to agree that the United States is grappling with a series of what deliberation scholars characterize as 'wicked problems.' Drawing upon the influential work of Australian public policy scholars Horst Rittel and Melvin Weber (1973), scholars of dialogue and deliberation (Carcasson & Sprain 2012; Carcasson 2013; Drury et al., 2016; Lawrence & Bates 2014) identify those communal problems that extend across time, are central to social identities and involve competing value systems, while concomitantly resisting clear or permanent solutions as 'wicked problems.' Moreover, as communication scholars William Keith and Robert Danisch write in *Beyond Civility: The Competing Obligations of Citizenship* (2020): 'Wicked problems are multilayered and elusive and characterized by interdependencies between attempted solutions and aspects of the problem in ways that make their best solutions deeply enmeshed in trade-offs; solutions to wicked problems are trade-offs 'all the way down'' (Keith and Danisch, 49). Each of the works we've selected for review is deeply attuned to complex processes involved in dialogue and deliberation about wicked problems, reminding us that reckoning with racism and sustaining democratic pluralism demands vigilance and determination over the long haul.

Reading across the works featured here prompted us to think of democracy as a garden—the growth is slow and often incremental. It requires careful attention and may be stricken by forces beyond one's control. Not every seed will bear fruit. But there is nourishment in the process of cultivation as well as the produce. The authors of these works are committed to cultivating the land and to training more gardeners. They do so not simply from a belief that many hands make light work, but rather from a recognition that the work *is* heavy—even wicked— and that transformative justice depends on grappling with these challenges of interdependence.

Our Current Crises

Why now? We are in the midst of overlapping crises. We are experiencing a global pandemic, white supremacist terror, and environmental catastrophe; the temptation to find quick solutions in a desperate effort to avoid further death and destruction is strong. Quick action, charismatic and decisive leadership, and the enactment of emergency measures, however, often foreclose slow and messy processes of dialogue, deep listening, and deliberation. Philosopher Lauren Swayne Barthold argues in *Overcoming Polarization in the Public Square: Civic Dialogue* (2020) that 'particularly in highly polarized situations,' deliberation about public policy alone will not be sufficient to meet the pressing crises. At the outset of her book, Barthold differentiates her vision of dialogue from debate, suggesting that '[u]nlike debate and argumentation, dialogue does not aim to convince or persuade the other that one's own position is correct and the other's false.' Further still, she suggests that her vision of dialogue is also distinguished from 'some of the more classic forms of deliberation,' in that dialogue:

> neither seeks consensus nor requires a regulative ideal or mutual justifiability. Neither does dialogue ask participants, as some forms of deliberation do, to critically evaluate policy options. Dialogue's currency is neither reasons nor justifications. Rather, dialogue draws on personal experiences articulated in first-person narratives (2020, 4–5).

Arguing that deliberative discourse cannot overcome 'intractable polarization held fast by the belief that if one's own side has the truth and is good then the other side lacks the truth and is evil' (2020, 126), Barthold contends that dialogue should be used as 'a precursor or supplement to forms of civic discourse that privilege rational argumentation and persuasion' (123). Dialogue, she concludes is crucial to foster a civic discourse that can 'improve the soil' for citizens to listen across difference and tackle 'the implicit cognitive structures that hinder the formation of a just, equal, and pluralistic society' (123).

Anchoring her analysis to recent studies in cognitive science, in a particularly strong chapter on the capacity of dialogue to loosen the constraints of implicit bias and habitual association that limit the success of deliberation in polarized contexts, Barthold acknowledges dialogue's potential to 'expose the values that underlie and motivate explicit beliefs, working … in such a way that proves effective in ultimately promoting more productive moral discourse,' as well as dialogue's 'ability to utilize facilitated encounters to diminish threatening speech,' and 'to shift the focus from identities that divide to identities that connect' (136). Dialogue, as Barthold's multifaceted account suggests, holds promise as a first step toward sincerely reckoning with the systemic racism that undergirds each of our contemporary crisis points.

As scholars and practitioners of deliberative democracy have begun to demonstrate (Brooks 2017; Cramer 2016), even these ostensible first steps follow a path well-worn by a collective past of trauma. The existence of this trauma and its continued influence must be acknowledged within

the dialogue itself. Sociologist Michael Eric Dyson's latest book, *Long Time Coming: Reckoning with Race in America* (2020), is a vital read for scholars and practitioners of deliberation and dialogue because his work enriches our discussions of collective trauma and provides a poignant account of the long history of racial injustice in the United States. Dyson's book both names and details how the legacies of racism actively challenge and influence contemporary engagement with issues of justice, equality, identity, and, ultimately, with the future of democracy in the United States. What's more, Dyson deepens our understanding of the visceral impact that failed efforts to reckon with racism have had upon the bodies and spirits of people today. Each chapter of *Long Time Coming* includes a letter to a Black martyr, and with each such eulogy, Dyson expresses an agony that is somber, plaintive, outraged, disappointed, and ultimately, fighting off despair, modestly hopeful. Such hope is not offered quickly or cheaply; rather, Dyson's hope is extended with a set of demands for our current moment. For example, in his letter to Emmett Till, Dyson connects the lynching of this fourteen-year-old child in the summer of 1955, whose open-casket funeral engendered widely-circulated images of white supremacist brutality, with the murder of George Floyd, captured on video and circulated across the globe in the summer of 2020. Dyson calls our attention not only to the brutal violence, but also to the effects of the global circulation of images of suffering. Addressing the way technological innovation has collapsed time and space, Dyson directly addresses white people: 'Can you imagine how we feel when we see the moving pictures of yet another one of our people slaughtered in the streets?' These are 'moments that crystallize trauma, flood time with memory, and wash us [Black Americans] into emotional peril' (2020, 17). Though white America has promised 'time and again to change from within, motivated by some crisis, moved by some uprising, shamed by some catastrophe that wore on our consciences,' Dyson declares: '[s]omething feels different now' (2020, 48). Perhaps, he reasons, 'the racial pandemic, much like the global health pandemic, has changed some things forever' (2020, 188). This moment, its culmination of centuries of struggle and a confluence of crises, broadcast via hand-held communication technologies and into isolated contexts of reception, feels *kairotic*.

Reckoning and Resistance

If the moment is indeed opportune for a long-overdue reckoning, then the question becomes: will we seize it? Dyson is instructive here as well. *Long Time Coming* both names the patterns of behavior that have brought us to this crisis point in the history of race relations and sets forth a series of conditions that must be met to alter the abusive pattern. Dyson frames the overarching pattern of race relations in the United States as a struggle between the 'Black "next"' and the 'white "again"': 'every Black effort to move, mobilize, shake off white obstruction, and advance to the next stage, the next arena' each 'Black "next"' has 'struck fear in the heart of white America,' eliciting the 'white "again"' response, which he characterizes as 'a refusal to let true democracy take hold' (2020, 118–19).

Reckoning with race in the United States has always and will continue to be met with white resistance. Interrupting this dynamic requires emotional and complex work that demands white people sit with the discomfort wrought by feelings of fear, guilt, shame, and perhaps confusion, anger, and resentment, too. Considering the intergenerational Black trauma that Dyson's book foregrounds, white discomfort in the process of racial reckoning seems like an infinitesimally small 'trade-off' to addressing the wicked problem of racial injustice. Nevertheless, as professor of psychology Cyndi Kernahan argues, resistance to learning about race and racism must be addressed before any substantive, let alone potentially *transformative*, dialogue can ensue. In her book *Teaching About Race and Racism in the College Classroom: Notes from a White Professor* (2019), Kernahan combines research from psychology, sociology, history, and pedagogy with anecdotal experience drawn from her own classrooms and those she has observed to explicate an approach to teaching about race and racism that walks the 'line between being forthright about the realities of racism while also making space for our students to have their own feelings' (2019, 101). The approach to teaching about race and racism that Kernahan's book outlines will be of particular interest to teachers, scholars, and practitioners of deliberative pedagogy, as Kernahan's expertise enriches insights from Longo, Manosevitch & Shaffer (2017) regarding 'space-making' and the ways in which 'creating and holding space for authentic and productive dialogue' can engender conversations that are 'not only educational but also transformative' (xxi).

Put simply, Kernahan's approach to space-making 'is about teaching race and racism in a way that is not blaming or shaming, a way that is compassionate but also relentlessly honest about the realities of racism and White supremacy in the United States' (2019, 5). The approach to teaching that Kernahan sketches is in the vein of what Barthold highlights in her study of dialogue models. This includes meeting students where they are, affirming their experiences, avoiding shame, blame, and alienation, co-creating learning environments through collaborative expectation-setting, and carefully structured group engagement. Models of dialogue provide a process for enabling people to see often divisive challenges 'in new ways … by helping them reframe issues in ways that affirm their social identities while also revealing those values held in common' (135). Such dialogue, Barthold explains further, 'is not a magical incantation that makes difference disappear; rather it provides a way to reframe and understand difference by decreasing negative stereotypes that feed polarization' (135).

To better understand the approach to dialogue about which Barthold theorizes, we reviewed the Essential Partners' 'Race in America' Dialogue Guide (2020), a model of facilitated dialogue that she includes in *Overcoming Polarization in the Public Square*. The Essential Partners organization has been working in local communities across the United States for more than thirty years to help build trust and understanding across lines of difference and polarization. This Essential Partners' Dialogue guide employs the Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) process of engaging in conversations about race. RSD

'leverages the power of personal reflection and structured conversations to create mutual understanding' (Essential Partners 2020, 5). Notably, the goal of RSD 'is not to change anybody's beliefs or arrive at a solution (though that happens sometimes).' Instead, explains Essential Partners, '[d]ialogue helps people wrestle with their differences openly, honestly, and with dignity. It encourages a stronger sense of community, which is what makes real and lasting change possible' (4). Furthermore, RSD 'creates new understandings, new relationships, a new level of trust, and new opportunities;' this approach to facilitated dialogue works 'because it lets people practice new ways of communicating. It disrupts negative habits and patterns that make people feel unwelcome, unheard, or at odds' (5). Kernahan's approach to teaching about race and racism in the college classroom and the Essential Partners' RSD guide both hold potential to move racial reckoning efforts beyond the recursive pattern of the Black 'next' and the white 'again' that Dyson identifies. The strengths of these approaches for scholars and practitioners of dialogue and deliberation lie in their recognition of race talk as relational and emotional work, as well as in their ability to predict resistance, describe its varied manifestations, and provide suggestions to avoid the triggering of further traumatization for People of Color or the forestalling of productive engagement. In other words, the complex and emotional work of reckoning with race in America must account for the inevitability of white people's resistance that often leads to withdrawal and sometimes to backlash. In their advocacy of transformative dialogues about race and racism, the works reviewed here extend recent deliberative democracy scholarship that calls for direct attention to breaking patterns of abuse and harm through, for instance, 'discursive openings' (Heath and Borda 2021) and 'interruptive voices' (Brooks 2016).

Between Call Outs and Cancel Culture

'Call outs' are an increasingly widespread approach used to draw attention to patterns of abuse and harm. 'Isn't shame a good thing?' asks Kernahan rhetorically, '[w]hen people feel free to express racism, doesn't that normalize it, making it more likely that people will feel free to act on their biases? If so, isn't it important to push back on our changing norms, calling out and sometimes shaming those who perpetuate racist ideas?' (2019, 120–121). Noting the precipitous shift in communicative norms following the 2016 election of US President Donald Trump, Kernahan empathizes with the impulse to shame while also acknowledging the connection between degraded norms for behavior and social emulation. Furthermore, she is clear that research conducted within classrooms and broader cultural contexts suggests 'forcing or pressuring people to change their attitudes through … the threat of shame or sanction typically just results in backlash;' noting that, rather than 'increasing understanding or changing attitudes for the better, we see increases in prejudice instead' (121).

Keith and Danisch share Kernahan's acknowledgment that the temptation to counter racism with shame is strong. And for good reason. Shaming someone for racist behavior, argue Keith and Danisch, can play an important role in movements for social justice. But they are careful to counter the claim that 'advocacy for social justice *requires* a rejection of civility,' asserting 'we should not cede civility to racists, sexists, and other oppressors' because 'civility can, and should, *help create* social change' (Keith and Danisch 2020, 152–153; emphasis added). Rooted in their nuanced account of 'strong civility' as 'dynamic and flexible enough that it can challenge defective parts of the status quo while preserving relationships and communities needed to maintain democratic functioning,' Keith and Danisch posit that far from a tone-policing tool of oppression, strong civility promotes an ethic of care within the process of social change (153). Attending to this ethic of care is a sorely-needed intervention into our pervasive patterns of democratic engagement. 'One of the most troubling features of our current deliberative and critical imaginaries,' observe Keith and Danisch, 'is the extent to which we speak and write in ways that reduce, essentialize, and overgeneralize both problems and people. These are dangerous habits that quickly devolve into forms of incivility that target and demonize members of our democratic culture' (169). Strong civility, thus, helps create conditions where individuals can, as Hannah Arendt (1958) would say, disclose and be recognized for *who* they are, and not simply generalized as *what* they are. Strong civility demands countenancing other people, rather than reducing or subsuming them as representatives of an identity category or ideology. These habits of engagement must be reimagined and reanimated if we are to transformatively reckon with race.

In her booklet, *We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice* (2020), abolitionist movement activist, adrienne maree brown sees radical political efforts being corrupted by divisive modes of demonization that are a product of the very capitalistic and punitive systems that the movements are seeking to abolish. Although she is writing with and for an audience of transformative justice advocates, brown is sharing a vision of movement activism that holds the potential to radically remake the very 'democratic way of life' about which Keith and Danisch, Barthold, Dyson, and Kernahan write. 'In the longest term vision I can see,' imagines brown,

> when we, made of the same miraculous material and temporary limitations as the systems we are born into, inevitably disagree, or cause harm, we will respond not with rejection, exile, or public shaming, but with clear naming of harm; education around intention, impact and pattern breaking; satisfying apologies and consequences; new agreements and trustworthy boundaries; and lifelong healing resources for all involved (2020, 11).

brown's long-term vision seeks to end cycles of harm and abuse rather than perpetuate them through further demonization, dehumanization, and a disposability politics that simulates the pitfalls of capitalism.

To be clear, brown's booklet should not be understood as 'a case against call outs' (52). Adamantly, brown argues, '[t]here is absolutely a need for certain call outs—when power is greatly imbalanced and efforts have been

made to stop ongoing harm, when someone accused of harm won't participate in community accountability processes or honor requested boundaries,' then 'the call out is a way of pulling an emergency brake. But call outs need to be used specifically for harm and abuse, and within movement spaces they should be deployed as a last option' (52). Even as brown writes about the 'social destruction of call outs and/or cancelations,' she is careful to note that '[c]all outs have a long history as a brilliant strategy for marginalized people to stand up to those in power' (40). Call outs waged against 'those out of alignment with life, consent, dignity, and humanity,' against people or institutions 'who will only stop when a light is shined onto their inhumane behavior' have their place in both brown's long-term vision and Keith and Danisch's democratic way of life (brown 2020, 40). And yet, call outs used to 'shame and humiliate people in the wake of misunderstandings, contradictions, conflicts, and mistakes,' clarifies brown, enact 'the destructive power of punitive justice' (41). Or, as Keith and Danish observe, this specific type of gratuitously shame-filled and vindictive discourse corrodes and degrades the quality of our civic life (Keith and Danisch 2020, 158–159). The significant distinctions brown and Keith and Danisch draw illustrate the Janus-faced role call outs play in public discourse and in so doing, these works contribute to a recent turn in deliberative scholarship and practice toward 'managing the dialectic of calling out while calling in' (Heath and Borda 2021, 9).

Further still, brown offers a list of questions to consider when the temptation to cancel a comrade arises, including: 'is the only acceptable consequence to those making the call out for the accused to cease to exist?' (48). Just as brown acknowledges the irony of cancel culture being deployed as a social justice strategy in transformative justice movements, Dyson warns against 'the temptation to steal an idea, that of cancel culture, that promises justice but delivers chaos' (2020, 136). 'Being locked out of society and deprived of benefits and rights that one should enjoy creates the conditions for the rise of cancel culture,' Dyson admits, '[b]ut in the effort to bring racial reckoning, we can't borrow ideas and behaviors that we claim to oppose. At its worst … cancel culture is a proxy for white supremacy' (2020, 148). The type of cancel culture described by brown and Dyson—one that metes out punitive justice without due process or the possibility for reconciliation—does not 'deepen a sense of community' nor does it 'help communities move toward nonviolent systemic change' (Keith and Danisch 2020, 18). As brown and Dyson explain, there is a fundamental difference between calls for the kind of accountability necessary for transformative justice and irrevocably casting someone outside the bounds of community. Indeed, Keith and Danisch resist conceptualizing civility as 'a set of rules to be applied amidst people presumed to be equal,'; rather their book—not unlike the long-term vision imagined by brown—provides a commitment to, and a useful framework for 'realizing a kind of democratic equality between people … toward relationships that are more equal; less conditioned by economic, political, or social power; and more respectful of mutual humanity' (2020, 7). In this manner, strong civility, like brown's vision of transformative justice and in line with the racial reckoning Dyson urges, can be understood as an ongoing process of learning to live well together. For practitioners and scholars of deliberative democracy, reflecting on both the ironic aspects of cancel culture and the necessity of call outs heightens our sensitivity to fundamental concerns of access, power, and equity that ought to inform each dialogic encounter with which we engage.

Toward Transformative Belonging

The state of being that brown envisions abolitionist movements bringing about is an 'end to the cycles of harm for Black and Brown people, which, in the spirit of the Combahee River Collective[1] necessitates ending these cycles for everyone' (2020, 9). An end to the cycles of harm is the foundation of that Black 'next' about which Dyson writes, 'a deep belief in the nation, a love that is persistent, unshakable, and yes, necessarily tough. Black rage is hope turned inside out' (2020, 118). Outrage, hope, and a firm belief in the transformative power of the learning process, is also what motivates Kernahan to keep teaching about race and racism amidst resistance, withdrawal, and backlash—behaviors that are tethered to the very cycles of harm her courses seek to interrupt.

How do we break these cycles of harm? How can we progress in the direction of the Black 'next' without falling back into the white 'again'? How do we learn to process emotion and to reason well together? These are the core questions that animate the works under review and though their responses, as sampled here, vary in meaningful and informative ways, each work shares our interest in cultivating a sense of belonging. Belonging, in its broadest, most multilayered, most radically democratic sense, can be understood as both the means and the end these works seek. But how far does this sense of radical belonging stretch? How encompassing are the environments out of which transformation grows? And how sealed off from the broader ecosystem are their boundaries?

As the works reviewed here make clear, boundaries and conditions are vital to the trust-engendering process of dialogue, which can, in turn, establish a foundation for deliberative engagement. Further still, the writers insist that dialogue is no panacea. There are clear limits to what this discursive process can accomplish and the ills it should be prescribed to cure. Dialogue alone is an insufficient response to abuse; bridge-building requires willing and skilled engineers. Barthold, Kernahan, brown, and Essential Partners are all thinking about relatively controlled environments. They are thinking about classrooms, mediated movement meetings, and facilitated community discussion groups. Returning to the democracy-as-garden frame with which we opened the essay, we conclude by suggesting that scholars and practitioners of deliberative democracy might usefully think of these controlled environments as both 'test gardens,' where participants can learn the skills needed to cultivate fertile relations in ever more expansive

settings, and also as 'seed banks,' that serve as sites of renewal when such efforts falter. Theorizing and engaging participation in relatively controlled and supported environments, as such, primes scholars and practitioners of deliberative democracy to recognize how discussants within more controlled environments could become gardeners planting seeds in fresh locales; this is, after all, how movements are built and how democracy might be transformed.

But such hopes are arrayed against the reality that these test gardens are also besieged by weeds and pollutants. Even as these environments might benefit from previously established connections, however tenuous, they must also nurture participants' ongoing willingness to engage in the difficult processes of dialogue and deliberation. Within controlled settings, participants may collectively create guidelines for engagement, and in so doing build bridges of relational trust, but the power of a cruel tweet or the pain evoked by viral images of trauma, can collapse even the most thoughtfully-constructed dialogic environment. Environments, no matter how ostensibly controlled, cannot completely guard against the compression of time and space and the mediation of experience through screens; these communicative features permeate our contemporary moment. Of the works we reviewed, brown is most attentive to the complex dynamics of these communicative challenges; she instructs her readers to be mindful of the unfolding of time in dialogic spaces, which is 'particularly important in the age of social media, where we can make our pain viral before we've even had a chance to feel it' (2020, 72). And she advocates for transformative justice work taking place in 'real time,' observing that 'real time is slower than social-media time, where everything feels urgent. Real time often includes periods of silence, reflection, growth, space, self-forgiveness, processing with loved ones, rest, and responsibility' (72–3).

We hope more community organizers, activists, clergy, scholars, and professors will join brown in imagining the radical possibilities of transplanting seedlings first sown in test gardens. We also hope that these gardeners will follow brown's lead in tending to the contamination that occurs within test gardens through the inevitable cross-pollination of contexts in our contemporary communicative ecosystem. Moreover, we urge researchers and practitioners concerned with improving democratic dialogue and deliberation to account for the alterations of our communicative environments engendered by the COVID-accelerated turn to video-conferencing platforms. We might begin this work by asking how we can make technologies of remote engagement more accessible. And then we should ask how we can generatively facilitate difficult dialogues about wicked problems using the tools of shared screens, breakout rooms, and chat waterfalls— all the while recognizing that private chats, separate tabs, and the demands of work-from-home life compete for participants' care and attention. Doing the hard work of cultivating transformative democratic possibilities in the midst of overlapping and intersecting crises is our generational challenge, with all of the longings that present in our era of immediacy and all of the cries for

justice too long delayed, too long denied. Reckoning with the wicked problem of racism, as the works reviewed here suggest, is an ongoing process of nurturing a permeable and ever-changing environment; this potentially transformative process requires patience and persistence and it benefits immeasurably from the wisdom of other gardeners.

Note
[1] The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist organization active in the US in the mid-1970s, issued a statement naming the interlocking oppressions of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, and advocating for a revolutionary politics inspired by anti-colonial movements across the globe. Within the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), the members reason: 'If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.'

Competing Interests
The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Author Information
Maegan Parker Brooks is Associate Professor of Civic Communication & Media and American Ethnic Studies at Willamette University. She teaches and writes about race, memory, and public deliberation; she has also created a variety of media about the human rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, including a contribution to the Library of African American Biography series entitled Fannie Lou Hamer: America's Freedom Fighting Woman (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020). Her website may be found at: https://willamette.edu/arts-sciences/ccm/faculty/brooks/index.html.

David S. Gutterman is a Professor in the Departments of Politics, Policy, Law and Ethics and Women's and Gender Studies. He teaches courses on Ethics, Religion and Politics, and the politics of the body. His current research explores civil religion, civic engagement, and public space in the United States. He is the author of Political Religion and Religious Politics: Navigating Identities in the United States (Routledge, 2015) and Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy (Cornell University Press, 2005). David can be reached at dgutterm@willamette.edu and @davidgutterman.

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