Edited transcription of the intro and main part of a talk given by Jeremy Brecher at the Cornwall Library on Zoom on January 17, 2022 in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

(First part is edited. For the Q&A at end, transcription was auto-generated and not edited)

Okay let's get started. This is one of those days where you're glad we did we're doing library events on zoom. We didn't have to spend the whole day panicking about the weather and the roads and did we want to leave our houses. I'm Susan Klaw and I'm a part-time Cornwall resident and I'm on the board of the library. I helped set up this program and I'm going to introduce Jeremy Brecher and then we will get started. I wanted to say before we get into his talk that we have a large collection of Black Lives Matter materials and materials about Martin Luther King for both juveniles and adults and Margaret, our wonderful librarian, will have those out on display over the next period of time so that it's easy access. As Jeremy talks, as we always do, you're all muted but please put questions in the chat and I will read the questions or maybe even call on you to read your own question when the talk is over.

Jeremy Brecher has lived in the Yelping Hill community of Cornwall since 1949. During the 1960s he and his family were active in the Northwestern Connecticut Civil Rights group [called] Concern. When he proposed to organize support for the freedom riders, the Principal at Housatonic Regional High School, called The Regional then, forbade him to raise money for the freedom fighters in the school. Maybe this prompted him into a life of political activism because since then he's written more than a dozen books on labor and social movements and has written or produced more than 20 video documentaries. I've known Jeremy [from] around town since I was a little kid. I remember particularly admiring his tree house that he lived in for a while and wishing I could live in a tree house too and I thought how cool would it be to be in a tree house. I think Jeremy spent his summers in the tree house but I reconnected with his professional side as an historian when his book *Strike* was published in 1973. This history of the labor movement in America argued that ordinary people can have power because it's their activity that makes up society and that working together they can effect change. This idea resonated really deeply with the alienated working class youth I was teaching social studies to at the time in an alternative Cambridge [MA] high school and we read and talked about things in *Strike* frequently. Jeremy's talk today is based on the research he did for a number of TV and radio documentaries on the history of African Americans in Connecticut. I think it's fitting that we know more about this history and use this knowledge to prompt us into activism. As Dr. King said, " The time is always right to do what is right." At the library we're trying to do our small part of what is right and that is to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. Thank you for being with us, Jeremy.

-End of intro-

JEREMY BRECHER:
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I want to thank the library and the people who organized this occasion for pulling it together and making it possible for us to be together this way in spite of weather, distance, and Covid.

So, look through any biography of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that was published in the 20th century and you will find barely a mention of King's experiences in Connecticut. But in 1944, a fifteen year-old Martin Luther King spent the summer working on a tobacco farm near Simsbury, Connecticut. His experiences there made a profound and lasting impression on him and that's what I'm going to talk about today. So how did it happen that a young Atlanta student Martin Luther King was picking tobacco in Simsbury, Connecticut?

Let's go back to the beginning of the story. Even before European settlement, Native Americans grew tobacco in Connecticut and it continued to be grown in colonial and statehood times. As a matter of fact, tobacco was grown at various times in small quantities here in Cornwall.

But the tobacco industry in Connecticut took off around 1900 with what was known as shade grown or Sumatra tobacco and some of you, I'm sure many of you, once or twice, have seen farms laid out around Connecticut, Eastern Connecticut, East of the river, with huge white sheets of gauze staked out over the fields. That was an effort to simulate the conditions that existed in Sumatra and other jungle areas to grow what was known as shade grown tobacco and it became a tremendously successful and tremendously profitable industry in Connecticut because the soils on the East side of the Connecticut river were also ideal, like the soils in Sumatra, for growing the shade grown tobacco, which was used as wrapper for cigars. So by the lead into World War I around 1915, there developed a labor shortage in the tobacco fields in Connecticut. Some of the Eastern European workers went back home to their home countries because they knew the war was coming and they wanted to get back home before the war. Factories in Hartford started gearing up for war production and....everyone who could, stopped working in the tobacco fields and went to the factories where the wages were much better and the conditions much better. And so the tobacco farms were left with a severe labor shortage and as they discussed it and tried to figure out what to do about it, they decided to try hiring Black workers from the South. As a matter of fact, many of the farmers in the tobacco industry in Connecticut had been plantation managers in the South and they're sometimes quoted as saying, "oh we're fine with that, we're familiar with Black labor, we're used to working with Black labor, let's do it."

But they had a problem - they actually sent buses to New York City and tried hiring people off the street and they found out this was not a good way to recruit a labor force and so they decided, "let's go to the Urban League" which has was a fairly new organization devoted to helping migrants from the South who were trying to establish themselves in Northern cities. They said, "well why not in the Northern farm country also?" And they went to the Urban League and they said, "we understand why you would be suspicious of what we're up to here but we're

not trying to find a labor force with cheap labor, we want to do it right, that's why we came to you" and they made an agreement with the Urban League for standard labor conditions, wages, and supervision by the Urban League. Inspection of the camps, and the Urban League arranged for students from the..what we now refer to as traditionally black colleges.. [HBC's] of the South to come to Simsbury and elsewhere in the tobacco fields and work. And to give you some sense of the scale of this, there were 1400 students from Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, and Georgia who came to work in the tobacco fields in Connecticut during World War II. And it had a bigger impact than that because when the Black students came, often supervised, by the way, by their professors and staff people from their own colleges, they went back and said to people, "hey, you might want to try checking out this Connecticut scene" and there were 1500 Blacks in Hartford in 1916 and there were 4,000 a year later. So what was known as “The Great Migration” had its beginning with the students who came up to work in the tobacco fields.

This of course declined during the years of The Great Depression but again labor shortage hit the tobacco fields in World War II and again under supervision of the Urban League, Black students began coming up in organized groups to work in summer jobs in the tobacco fields and there were over a hundred from Morehouse [college] who came...with the... and that was the group that the young Martin Luther King came from. One hundred came to one farm in Simsbury, primarily to earn college expenses.

So now we get to Martin Luther King and what this experience was for him. It was King's first exposure to racial attitudes outside the segregated South and he was astonished by what he saw. He wrote a series of letters home which were unknown until they were finally published in 1992 in the papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. and up to that time there was an occasional mention of the fact that astonishingly, Martin Luther King had worked in the tobacco fields in Connecticut, but there was virtually nothing that was known about it. Certainly nothing that was being published about it, but King wrote a series of letters home which are now very available historical documents. He wrote his father: "Dear Father, On our way here we saw some things I had never anticipated to see. After we passed Washington, there was no discrimination at all. The White people here are very nice. We go to any place we want to and sit anywhere we want to." Then a little bit later, he wrote his mother. "Dear Mother, Yesterday we didn't work, so we went to Hartford. We really had a nice time there. I never thought that a person of my race could eat anywhere, but we ate in one of the finest restaurants in Hartford and we went to one of the largest shows there."

King sang in a boy's choir. He joined a boys choir in the tobacco region and sang with them and the choir appeared on a local radio program. If it had been TV, maybe there would have been more problems but the fact that it was on radio, what did it matter that one of the singers was Black? He also led religious meetings that were held on Sunday nights in the dorm in the barracks, which were kind of like World War II soldiers' barracks, pretty much modeled on that. Bernice Martin, who was widow of the choir director at The First Church of Christ at Simsbury recalled having the Black students in the church was also an education for the White parishioners: "That was the only time that we'd had any Colored people in the church."

William Pickens was one of the Black students who came up from Morehouse. He later became a professor at Morehouse and he came north from Atlanta and became a friend of Martin Luther King's at the camp. Somebody tracked him down - in fact we tracked him down for the documentary that we did for Connecticut Public Television and interviewed him and he said, "...it was just an unfamiliar situation that one could chat with a White person who was a peer. There were workers just like we were and we could talk with them briefly during lunch time and not get taken to jail for it. I do believe that the experience probably did have an influence on Martin's ability to decide in favor of the ministry because he could see a society that was vastly different from the one in which he had been born. One that was hospitable to African-American males in a way that was new." Pickens said, "In Connecticut we felt freer than we had ever felt in our lives." By the way, the Coleman Brothers tobacco farm where King and Pickens worked has recently been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and purchased for historic preservation.

Now the next section of my talk is titled "The Connecticut Back Story: What King Couldn't Know."

While the youthful Martin Luther King could observe the blatant differences between race relations in Connecticut and the South, he had no way of knowing less visible aspects of race relations in Connecticut or their history. The Connecticut Colony practiced race-based slavery from its inception. The Massachusetts colonists sent an expeditionary force into Connecticut before the colony was actually established (the Connecticut Colony) and conducted a massacre on the Pequot Indians who controlled the gateway, the entryway to Connecticut in the Northeast part of this, what became the Connecticut Colony, and then the state. They went in and slaughtered men, women, and children. Their indications and their statements that their purpose was in fact genocide to wipe out the entire tribe and then the people that they didn't kill, they enslaved. And so you had Native American slaves from the time that the first colonists of European descent came into Connecticut. But they had a problem, which is that the Pequot knew the territory a heck of a lot better than the Massachusetts English settlers did and they were constantly slipping away going out into the swamps and it was practically impossible to effectively enslave them. So the Connecticut colonists took a group of captured Pequot and took them to the Caribbean and exchanged them to be enslaved there. They exchanged them for slaves of African origin and brought them back to Connecticut and used them as slave labor in Connecticut, again from the very earliest times of the colony. By the way the principal slave owners in Connecticut from then on through to the abolition of slavery were the Congregational ministers who were usually the wealthiest people in the town. They needed somebody to do their work on their farms while they were preaching.

I will now go fast forward here. Connecticut in the early 19th century engaged in what was called "gradual emancipation" and as a matter of fact it was very gradual. The last person enslaved in Connecticut remained a slave until she died in 1848. Connecticut was also the only New England state after the abolition of slavery that did not allow Blacks to vote. There's a series of Black proto-civil rights organizations that I'm just going to mention. One of the first was the Connecticut Equal Rights League which was predominantly predominantly Black with White

allies. It was formed to demand the right to vote in Connecticut for African Americans, which was refused then and continued to be refused until the 15th amendment to the federal constitution required the enfranchisement of Blacks. However as that was happening, there was also a major migration from rural to urban areas on the part of Connecticut's Black population. Blacks became overwhelmingly concentrated in the major cities and they were effectively disenfranchised by Connecticut's “rotten borough system” which some of you, I know will remember, was a system that gave every town two votes in the state legislature whether, like the town of Cornwall they had 1,000 or 1500 residents, or like the cities of Hartford or New Haven they had a hundred or 150,000 residents. And so the vote of a Black voter in Hartford or New Haven was worth a tiny percentage of what the vote was of a citizen of Cornwall. So the struggles for greater equality for Blacks continued. In the 1890s, Blacks and allies formed something called “the Sumner League” named after Charles Sumner who had been a great figure of Abolitionism in the slavery period. And they submitted legislation to outlaw discrimination in public places in Connecticut. However the Hartford hotel owners decided that they didn't want that and so they organized and mobilized and defeated the attempt to have a public accommodations law guaranteeing the right to public access for all to public accommodations.

The economic exclusion in Connecticut was, if anything, more extreme. So a study by the Hartford Urban League in 1921 found there were 900 employed Black workers in the Hartford area. Most were on the lowest rung of the economy - servants and porters. 110 of them were domestic workers. The biggest industries in Connecticut were insurance and industrial production factories. There was one Black worker in insurance and eleven in factories. Meanwhile white immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe had been pouring into Connecticut and they were filling the factories while Black workers were excluded. And the resistance also applied in unions which, in many cases, refused to allow Black workers to join the union and then made union control of hiring be the basis for excluding them from working in skilled labor jobs.

Housing: A study in Waterbury in 1920 found that 90% of Blacks were concentrated in one neighborhood and similar findings could have been made [and] in some cases, were made, for the other major Connecticut cities. At the level of, let's say ideology, or to use a more dignified term, theory, Connecticut and specifically Yale University was a....I was going to say hotbed, but let's say font, of what was known as "scientific racism." The Sheffield School, which was a major scientific institution at Yale...its president was one of the leading proponents of scientific racism, which made a hierarchy of the capabilities and natural abilities of different racial groups. And by "sheer coincidence" the Whites who were the major European... whites of European origin... who happened to be the people who were the professors at the Sheffield School were at the top of this hierarchy and the...as they would have said in polite terms, "their negros....the negro race” which happened to be very much involved in cooking and cleaning and other service occupations at Yale happened to be at the bottom of that hierarchy.

The resistance...organized resistance in Connecticut continued. The first chapter of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) was formed in Hartford on the initiative of a remarkable

woman named Mary Seymour Townsend who also organized a union of women tobacco workers in the area where Martin Luther King a decade later was going to be (actually closer to two decades later) was going to be picking tobacco. However there was another side to Connecticut counterposed to the Civil Rights movements over the decades that I've described. Connecticut was also a major national center of the second Ku Klux Klan. And matter of fact, in the mid 1920s there were twenty-three chapters of the Ku Klux Klan in Connecticut with 18,000 members.

So these are all things to keep in mind when we think about what Martin Luther King observed in his time in Connecticut. He could observe racial integration in such areas as public accommodations and churches, but Connecticut's more subtle forms of segregation and discrimination were less visible. These were documented almost simultaneously with King's visit by Connecticut's fledgling interracial commission which was actually the first official state Civil Rights agency in the United States. They conducted a series of studies in 1943, ‘44, ‘45 and found some things that Martin King was really not in a position to observe. So example, for example in 1940, there were only 16 "Negro" stenographers typists and secretaries employed in the entire state and this is a state that had a huge white collar...predominantly in the insurance industry but also in various other white collar industries. There were no "Negro" sales clerks in major department stores in 1943. In 1943 there were no "Negroes" in any school of nursing in Connecticut except at Yale University. The commission surveyed the nine municipalities where most Connecticut Blacks lived. They found of these nine places only Bridgeport has "Negro" firemen, only Hartford has "Negro" librarians, only three cities have “Negro" teachers. Did you get that? Only three cities in Connecticut where the major Black population was centered had Black teachers and only four places have "Negroes" in administrative or clerical positions with the municipal government. The commission also found that much of the residential property in the state was covered by restrictive covenants under which owners agreed not to sell to "Negroes" or other specified racial ethnic and religious groups. I'm sure many of you have seen or heard about the movie "Gentleman's Agreement" which is actually set in Connecticut and it's actually about restrictive covenants designed to prevent purchase of property by Jews. So if you imagine that these restrictive covenants were even more ubiquitous against Blacks, you would not be barking up the wrong tree. It's also little known today that other groups were definitely included. For example, around some of the lakes in Connecticut the restrictive covenants included Poles, and then no Poles were allowed to buy land around prestigious lake… residential settlements. And one more fact here that I didn't know - I just learned it while I was doing the research for this talk. In 1944 at Bradley Field which we know as I think, Bradley International Airport, that's got an even newer, more fancier, more impressive name, but in some of our days it was known as Bradley Field. 50 miles away from the farm where Martin Luther King was working, segregation was so strictly enforced in 1944 that Black servicemen were forced to eat in separate canteens and use separate facilities.

So fast forward: what about Connecticut today? So let's start with wages. In the United States as a whole, a Black worker makes about 83 cents for every dollar that a median worker, that is, including both Black and White workers makes. And that's, in my opinion, a shocking and

outrageous fact: 83 cents compared to a dollar. However, a typical Connecticut Black worker makes 68 cents for every dollar that the median Connecticut worker earns.

The 2020 study of the Hartford metropolitan region called...I love this title... "A Steady Habit of Segregation"... and most of you are familiar with Connecticut being called "The Land of Steady Habits." So "A Steady Habit of Segregation" by Brandeis University professor Susan Eden found, by all available measures, both the state of Connecticut and the Hartford metropolitan area have extremely high levels of racial and ethnic segregation in housing and public schools relative to other metropolitan areas in the United States. In Connecticut more than two-thirds of people of color live in only fifteen of the state's 169 cities and towns.

Contemporary evidence related to zoning, housing, and lending indicates ongoing discrimination and disparate harms to Black and LatinX residents of Connecticut. And apparently this is not an accident, according to the study. Continuing exclusionary zoning in suburbia coupled with state government housing-related policies and program practices reinforces segregation. State government's active rejection of regionalism and housing in schools cemented segregation in place and operationalized political power of White suburbia. The evidence here indicates that in housing and particularly in the area of school desegregation it was lawmakers' deference to White suburbia through unabashed allegiance to local control that fatally circumscribed state practice and policy over the decades.

So let's get back to Martin Luther King. A few years after his sojourn in the tobacco fields, Martin Luther King, Jr. recalled his return from Connecticut to the segregated South: "It was a bitter feeling going back to Segregation. It was hard to understand why I could ride wherever I pleased on the train from New York to Washington and then had to change to a Jim Crow car at the nation's capital in order to continue the trip to Atlanta." King's experiences in the North stayed with him. He later referred to his experience in Connecticut to 1944 as formative: "I felt an inescapable urge to serve society, a sense of responsibility which I could not escape." In the years following the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Dr. King returned to Connecticut to lecture and preach. In a speech at Yale's Battell Chapel, King proclaimed: "Negroes and Whites must learn to live together as brothers or they will perish together as fools." He also said, "We stand at the border of the promised land of integration." Looking at the realities of Connecticut today, many decades later we must ask: "Have we yet crossed that border into that promised land?"
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Unedited, auto-generated from You-Tube from here on:

thank you jeremy that's great let's see if we have some questions here so people take a minute put your questions in the chat um

jeremy my question listening was there had many but one i was struck with what you said about the clan that connecticut was like the second biggest with did you say the second biggest is one of the six one of the six largest centers of the clan now how did that come about do you know

well the um first of all let me say there's a superb book on the second clan that if anyone's interested i recommend um and i will dredge up the uh author and title from my failing memory shortly um but the uh second clan uh was to a great extent directed against um jews and uh it was not particularly friendly to african americans but it was really the cultural threat and more broadly job and political threat presented by european immigrants

both catholic and jewish that really rallied the second clan and that was a very large population in connecticut it had a huge uh influx of eastern european uh immigrants um down in the in the period leading up to world war one uh and a substantial number of them were jews and the continuing jewish immigration uh thereafter and that was the rallying target for the second clan and especially in connecticut uh and it had a strong christian nativist christian anti-jewish anti-catholic uh drive to it uh and it was quite substantial for example uh there's a newspaper clipping uh uh showing from the um i believe mid-1920s with reporting on a induction of

new members uh on a hillside over looking new haven uh with induction of 300 new members is a nighttime outdoor event uh inducting three uh hundred new members with an audience of about five thousand so that's the scale outside new haven so that's the scale that it went on and um it was a little different from the first clan uh in the sense that it wasn't uh well known for lynchings um it was a huge uh

advanced public events like this one and it used them as a recruiting tool it did a lot of selling of merchandise uh it was supported by a lot of ministers and um so it was more of a public gala type uh rather than night riding and lynchings uh as his modus operandi but it was still we would not say in accord with um

the um uh

what would hope would be regarded a different version of americanism that was a little more friendly to uh different kinds of people and some uh and my dear friend dolores hayden has put in the chat linda gordon is the author of the book and can somebody remember the title we put in the chat thank you for that i i had no idea i didn't know anything about the second question this sounds like a stupid question but did they still did the second clan wear the white robes and things over their heads uh yes and they were they were very um and very into uh ritual and a lot of a lot of play acting i think uh and the book is called the second coming of the kkk by lynda gordon and thank you delores it's great to see you here anyone else with questions and here is the book and thank you to my sister-in-law virginia

we have 106 people here so i can't see you if you're raising your hand so if you could put a question in the chat that would be great if people have questions

my other question is you were talking jeremy was white students come to pick in the summer to the tobacco was it like fruit for raising funds or did was this something just black students did from the black colleges the uh original workforce as far as i know going back to the beginning of the industry was primarily a local workforce initially and very much included local students who

would have been entirely almost entirely white who worked in the tobacco fields and barns in the

original period as family members or neighbors uh and they were a major part of the workforce um in the summer uh uh which was when the work needed to get done um and that so that remained the case um uh until we come world war ii come sorry excuse me world war one comes i believe they continued to be uh working at least some of them if they were old enough they could go to hartford and get a factory job and make substantially more money uh but i believe in general they continued being part of it uh there was definitely uh not a influx uh from the south of white workers coming to work in the tobacco fields uh there may have been some who just came because they heard that there was you know better jobs in the north and i mean certainly there was massive massive um uh white migration uh both at the in so at the same time to northern cities the white workers generally could have access to the factory jobs which were much better paying and generally better conditions and so in general if white workers were coming up from the south both during world war one and during world war ii they would be much more likely to go to uh the major cities and work in the factories we have a couple more questions here about the clan uh jane duber wanted to know where's the second clan now uh the second clan you'll find a fascinating account of its demise in linda gordon's book and it became

progressively

visibly corrupt more and more the leaders were prosecuted for uh embezzlement essentially and it also became less and less respectable the the idea of this kind of racism became something that was kind of frowned on in growing circles not obviously by everyone but it became um more subject to criticism and uh

to being regarded as not not really okay uh and the person who was the it was started largely as a financial operation it was a an attempt to make money uh kind of like the scopes trial if anybody if you know the real backstory of the scopes trial uh which was also cooked up uh uh as a kind of promotional deal to make some money uh out of out of the publicity so uh and the the person who became the most visible national leader of the clan eventually was prosecuted for a number of crimes which included not only financial crimes but also murder and overtones of cannibalism and this kind of um undermined their credibility to some extent someone is asking myself is there i'm sorry if i'm pronouncing your name on nasa wasn't the kkk headquartered in shelton connecticut under david duke in the 1980s there was a resurgence first of all let me say hello to my dear dear friend mais tisdale who although not a cornwall resident has visited me here a number of times who is the um uh

founder and moving spirit of a wonderful black history

preservation and education program in bridgeport and my myisa if you can put your website and [__] and any other information in the uh chat i'm sure there will be people who will be interested in following up on it um and the answer is yes there was uh there have been kkk

revivals uh repeatedly um and there was indeed uh a center uh of activity in sheldon connecticut also in uh which is uh in the nargotech valley south of waterbury uh and also in scotland connecticut where there actually were fairly substantial kkk public rallies that were held and so it definitely it definitely was the case um they i would say it never in that period became anything of a mass movement i think um uh there were scores of of people who were active perhaps 100 200 who were identified within publicly associated with it but these were not mass movements in the same way that previous clan uh things were but it certainly um you know helpfully blade the groundwork for some of the uh more outrageous uh things that that are regarded as acceptable in a lot of quarters today peter demi wanted wanted to know could you talk about reparation as a method to rectify past economic and social injustices uh it's not something that i'm an expert on um but i i was for a long time pretty much a skeptic of it about it mostly because i couldn't see how you would identify the people to whom you would give reparations and you know is there one person whose

17 great-great-great-great-grandfather or grandmother were enslaved by somebody who you can find whose great great great great great grandmother or grandfather enslaves them and then would you figure out the value of the labor and apply it to um the uh you know make one of them pay reparations to the other one and i just couldn't see how it would work um but actually that was a lack of my own imagination and intelligence in understanding how it could work uh and in fact there now are cities which are uh actually have reparations programs uh um and uh done in a way that i thought was absolutely brilliant which was not to try to deal with it as an individual matter where you're compensating someone for a wrong that was done uh to some person that they were descended from uh but rather uh identifying the overall harm that was done to african-american people uh and then looking at the aspects of today's society that still are resulting from that so instead of trying to compensate for a wrong that was done a hundred years ago you say what we first of all have to compensate for is the wrong that is still being done today uh the wage gap that i talked about would perhaps be an example of that uh the educational exclusion would perhaps be an example of that um and then say this is a harm that it can for which compensation for which a remedy can be forged and before the rep the remedy is not to give individuals cash grants but to have extra programs in the schools for example that provide compensatory assistance for

african-american students and numerous other very thoughtful very intelligent approaches to how do you make a remedy for this kind of harm so i have completely changed my views on it and come to see that as an entirely appropriate thing to do i i have to say i have to phyllis knox said i'm stunned by the discrepancy in connecticut between black and white wages why is connecticut so much worse i can't actually tell you because i just discovered that um as i was doing the research for this talk uh and so i haven't had a chance i very much had the same question and want to go back i can tell you that de-industrialization basically had a terrible hit on the connecticut black workforce also on the white workforce but uh industrial labor by the time you're getting into the post-world war ii era uh blacks were in the factories and it was a major source of employment and as the connecticut factories closed down it hit black workers even harder than white workers uh i think you'll also find but i don't have doc well i don't have documentation for this that in the uh major white collar employments uh such as what's left of

the insurance industry real estate finance which is so fire as is sometimes called the big white-collar employment areas are very still very very large in connecticut and they are still not particularly hospitable to uh african americans so those would be at least two of the reasons uh i'm sure there are others um actually and this was referred to in the in the studies that i was mentioning uh another has to do with the extreme separation between the towns so employment which was primarily concentrated in cities is now overwhelmingly in suburban areas in connecticut and there is uh concentration of uh blacks and de facto exclusion in the suburban areas and concentration in the urban areas uh and the jobs are predominantly in the suburban areas and that makes a major deterrent to african-americans being able to get jobs and especially higher quality jobs and relegates them to low-wage low-quality jobs and this is greatly exacerbated by the connecticut transportation system

because it's so difficult there's a lack of public transit makes it impossible for people in the urban areas to get jobs in the suburban areas and i could go on i think the housing discrimination is a major part of this again people can't live near where the jobs are and then there's just discrimination as discrimination not hiring people because they're different or because they're prejudiced against them and i find it hard to believe that that does not continue to exist in connecticut jeremy roxanna robinson said i'm curious about your comments about congregational ministers being the most affluent and biggest slave owners in connecticut communities from my limited knowledge of cornwall that wasn't the case uh was that an anomaly many towns could barely pay their ministers and they got paid in firewood and poultry so um first let me say that this is not a field in which i'm an expert on i'm not a colonial historian i do know that it was frequently said at the time of the great schism in the cornwall church that the underlying motive and this is somewhat articulated in some of the documentary evidence uh uh but i can't prove it uh that one of the there is a dispute over how much reverend gold the minister should be paid and many of the cornwall farmers didn't want to pay that much to the richest man in town so at that point and this could be checked perhaps probate records if someone really wanted to research it uh but um uh i think uh and i can't give you a reference right off but i i think it's pretty prominent in the literature on early connecticut uh and certainly in the 20th century would be a different story but if you're talking about um 18th early 19th century the ministers were generally speaking the leading men in the cornwall

actually in the connecticut communities and

generally were the what was known as the standing order the um uh wealthiest and most powerful segment of the community now uh roxanna you may well be right and i may well be wrong and i would love to be corrected um but that's the the

picture as i understand it and maybe i should stop there because my ignorance uh has just uh reached this point of manifestation tom zetterstrom has his hand raised so go ahead you have to unmute yourself or maybe i have to unveil you let me say

now i think you should be able to unmute yourself

yeah jeremy are you reading me yeah let me just say tom is a friend of mine from high school uh and many many points in between go ahead tom um can you bring a reflection on uh racism uh to the present moment uh with um you know the uh manipulations by donald trump v and uh contrast those with connecticut's embrace of obama

the um

i i think the uh election of barack obama as president of the united states is one of the most remarkable phenomena in american history as you say connecticut's strongly supported obama uh in both elections um and uh i think that the uh it's and the fact that he was elected nationally is illustrative of the fact that racial attitudes are malleable uh that under the right circumstances they can be substantially modified what gets expressed and what doesn't get expressed can be very different and we need to approach it historically the fact that connecticut or in spite of the long history of racism that i described also has a very very long history of resistance to racism of efforts both rooted in black communities but also rooted in

white allies

shows that the fact that we are not dealing with uh immutable

phenomena that are just the way things are and that is not subject to change and not worth fighting against to make the important point here uh but we can also see from this history that i recounted that there is a tendency of

the racist attitudes to be very deeply embedded in american society including in connecticut and to come roaring back in situations where there isn't a continuous struggle against them and uh i think that that's something that obviously we've seen a lot of lately and unfortunately we're seeing a lot of today i think on that we should end um i'd like to thank jeremy very much we had an amazing audience i think we all learned a lot of stuff i didn't you know that we didn't know and hopefully we will i think that the historical society this summer is working on um an exhibit which is going to deal with issues of enslaved people in cornwall or in the area so touching on some of these subjects so you know maybe we'll be able to continue this conversation this summer for those of you who are in cornwall okay so goodbye everyone thank you for coming remember the library always welcomes your donations um and we will see you at our next program i hope you're all on our mailing list

thank you so much