SYMPOSIUM: THE POWER OF A VOICE: REWRITING POLICY AND IMPLEMENTING CHANGES THROUGH PROTEST MOVEMENTS

COLLOQUY[*] BETWEEN STATE SENATORS JAMILAH NASHEED[**] (MISSOURI) AND DWIGHT M. BULLARD[***] (FLORIDA)

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MODERATOR: The first part of our program is going to discuss protest movements as a right, and we're going to discuss some of the limits and limitations. For this portion of our discussion, we have State Senator Jamilah Nasheed from St. Louis, Missouri and Florida State Senator Dwight Bullard. We have Sarah Hager from Amnesty International USA, Brian Fonseca who is from Florida International University, the Director of Public Policy and Citizenship, and the wonderful Lisa Maya Knauer who is from the University of Massachusetts, and she is an anthropologist. So the first part of our discussion is going to open up – I'm going to ask some questions to some of the senators, and the panel members are also free to ask questions and join in the discussion.

Senator Nasheed and Senator Bullard, as black senators, what are some of your experiences with the Civil Rights Movement? What are some of the stories that you might have heard?

SENATOR NASHEED: First and foremost, let me just thank you for inviting me here today, I am happy to be here. I can say to

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[*] This colloquy was moderated by *Ms. Astrid Lopez*, J.D. 2015, St. Thomas University School of Law, and Symposium Editor of the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review*. Some of the questions have been redacted for formatting purposes. In order to view a full recording of the Symposium, please visit https://echo360.org/media /12c868439e5292a61ca1bc2846b0c081c24edeb91c5109585d47d24a0099a8857a6ae15f366c499c/public.

[**] The Hon. Jamilah Nasheed, Missouri State Senator (Dist. 5, Democrat).

[***] The Hon. Dwight M. Bullard, Florida State Senator (Dist. 39, Democrat).

you that before I became a politician, I was an African-American book store owner—the only African-American female book store owner in the St. Louis area. And during that time, I decided to enter the world of activism.

It was back in 2002, there were major issues with African-Americans and non-African-Americans competing in the area of construction. We had a major project going on in the St. Louis area on the highway, and there were no African-Americans, or Latinos, or any minorities to say the least, on the job site. And so myself and many other activists, we took notice, and we decided to organize, galvanize and strategize, so that more African-Americans—or minorities—could participate on the project. So we decided to take to the streets. We went to the highway, we were expressing ourselves peacefully, and we decided to take it up a notch. So what we did, was civil disobedience. Now, we had the right to protest, but we didn't have the right to shut the whole highway down—and we did just that. And we went to jail for the cause. But as a result of going to jail, we were able to get concessions as a result of our efforts. And so, we thought that we would have to do more, but we didn't because we went to jail for the cause, and when we went to jail, the media took notice, and the powers that be didn't want that negative energy and that negative picture in the frame. So they hurried up and they got us out of jail immediately and they said, "listen, now let's come to the table." So we went to the table, and as a result of our efforts, we were able to secure a construction training center for minorities in the area of electrical, plumbing, pipe fitting, and things of that sort. We were also able to bring, through that training center, approximately 300 young minorities with new skills. And that was really, a part of my experience in terms of civil disobedience and having the right to express my discontent with the establishment.

MODERATOR: And Senator Bullard, I am going to ask you the same question. Growing up, what was your personal experience with civil rights movements, unless you consider this the civil rights movement, what was your experience growing up?

SENATOR BULLARD: Well, you know, when you think of the civil rights movements, I think that people look at them in sort of this linear, microscopic view of a finite period of time. You know,

you look at the Montgomery bus boycott and say, well that led to the march on Washington, which led to the Civil Rights Act. I view the Civil Rights Movement in more of a cyclical view that has been continuous, and that's one thing that we all have to recognize. Since African indentured servants were brought to the shorelines before this country was founded in the 1600s, there was an initial desire to be set free. Even in indentured servitude, before the institution of slavery, you still had a ravenous desire among the folks that were here to make themselves equal to those that oppressed them.

That being said, it's easy to recognize—even if you haven't recognized—that black doesn't crack. Senator Nasheed and I are one generation removed from the atypical 50's and 60's Civil Rights Movement, so we were kind of born into that. We had a particular spirit based on the folks that birthed us into this world, to somehow have a level of involvement. In my case, my mother was inspired from a radicalized standpoint after the stabbing of her brother by a white gang on the South side of Philadelphia; she was inspired and pushed into the movement. She was one of those organizers who felt inspired to do something substantive, but also envelop that in policy.

That was born to me, and so my involvement in the civil rights movement from a youthful standpoint, many of you here weren't around during the time of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United States. Prior to the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in South Africa, there was an international movement for divestment—international companies taking their money out of South Africa until apartheid ended. So from a small standpoint, you had the ripple effects impacting even me at a young age, when someone says "We're no longer buying Coca-Cola products until they divest from South Africa," or "We're no longer buying Proctor & Gamble products until they divest from South Africa." So for me, having meager means, being 9, 10, 11 years old anyway, I wasn't going to go and spend the little money I had on Coke when I had alternatives, whether it was any other soda that was out there. It was easy to say, "I'm not going to involve myself from the economic standpoint."

Now that actually boils over into something that was very specific to Miami. A few years after the release, actually about one

year after the release of Nelson Mandela, before he became the first black president of South Africa, he visited the United States. Because of [Nelson Mandela's] interaction with Fidel Castro prior to his imprisonment, many Miami-Dade residents felt it proper to snub his appearance in Miami-Dade County. That led to a financial boycott by the black community of several businesses, and ultimately it led to the creation of the first black-owned hotel and resort in Miami Beach. And so, again, because my parents were involved in the process, I was pulled into the process. And it was simple, it was very indicative of where my political appetite was to begin with. Here's a man who spent 27 years in prison, fighting for a cause. He comes to the city of Miami to speak and cannot get a key to the city—or cannot get a proclamation, because someone feels that him shaking hands or meeting with the Castro brothers in the 1960's was somehow problematic.

And that sort of shows you the power of the protest movement, because from that, not only did you get a boom in black economic development, but more importantly, I think it's safe to say that from that [boycott], the international reputation of Nelson Mandela was heightened even more. And so when you saw what would happen in South Africa with the vote, with folks standing in line, having the first opportunity to vote for someone of their ilk in a long time, part of that was rooted in the fact that Nelson Mandela had gone on this nation-wide tour of the United States, and had the unfortunate circumstance of coming to Miami and being snubbed, that ended up with him then selling out the Meadowlands Arena in New York—that ends up with him being able to go to the Rose Bowl in Los Angeles, because folks felt it embarrassing that one of the largest cities in the country would snub someone like Nelson Mandela, so that's kind of where my protest roots begin.

MODERATOR: Before I move on to more questions for the Senators, I would like to invite our other panelists to share their experiences with civil rights movements and protests.

LISA KNAUER: I grew up in the South-side of Chicago; I lived in Hyde Park which was at that point a somewhat racially and socioeconomically mixed neighborhood, kind of between the South-side near the University of Chicago. It was a neighborhood—I think I

lived in a little cocoon of this neighborhood where Dr. King came to speak, where Jesse Jackson's movement "Operation Push" had some of its headquarters, and I was very fortunate to grow up with parents who, although they were white people, they were very committed to the cause of racial justice. We went to protest marches all the time, whether it was around schools, whether it was around funding, local issues, poor conditions in housing as well as what was happening in the Civil Rights Movement.

I was very much affected by this; I remember when I was 8 years old, and my father went on the march from Selma to Montgomery, and I wanted him to take me with him. He refused to take me with him—I didn't know anything about police brutality or anything like that, I think as eight-year olds in the 1960's we had the privilege of being a little bit more innocent, and the media wasn't quite so pervasive, so you didn't see this on the local news quite so much. I didn't know that people were getting shot and that police dogs were being loosed. So I just thought "Daddy, you're going on this march, I want to go with you." I wanted to meet Dr. Martin Luther King—he was my childhood hero.

But he wouldn't take me, so I organized my third grade class to write letters, I gave them to my father, and the family story goes that he met Dr. King in the airport and gave him the letters from my class. We had to edit them a little bit, because some of them had nothing to do with the Civil Rights Movement, you know "Are you having a nice day?" "Do you have a dog?" stuff that wasn't really exactly relevant. So we did a little selection at home before we gave them to my father. According to my father, and I have no way of proving this because both he and Dr. King are dead and I can't ask them, Dr. King said to him, "You should have brought her."

I want to say this, because I think we've had a lot of discussion in this political season about white people kind of riding on our coattails, like "How can you call me racist? Because I marched with Dr. Martin Luther King." But it's not like a "get out of jail free" pass for the rest of your life for something that you did at one time. What I did when I was eight-years-old is what I did when I was eight-years-old, and we're now 50 years beyond that, at least. And so I think that I can't say that that makes me a fighter for racial

justice, or that means that I have dealt with issues of white privilege; that's kind of constant, you have to keep on renewing it, year after year after year. And so, what am I doing in my day to day life now? What am I doing in my classroom? How am I educating my students? And you know, I'm an educator, and I teach at a predominately white college, although it has gotten less blinding over the years. How do I talk to my white students about this? How do I create space for my students of color? How do you address it and how do you deal with the consequences? And these are things that I'm going to have to figure out when I go back to class on Tuesday.

MODERATOR: Brian, do you have any personal experiences with the Civil Rights Movement?

BRIAN FONSECA: I wasn't quite into the world yet, but I will tell you anectodally—so I'm a Latin Americanist by trade, and I was talking about race in a course on Latin American and Carribean politics, and we were focused on the island of Hispanola, particularly talking about racism in Haiti. One of my students, she was ready to quite passionately jump into the discussion, so I asked her for her thoughts, and she decided she was going to stand up and say "Professor, you're wrong. There is no racism in Haiti." She went on this monologue to tell me about how I had this completely mixed, how I was completely backwards. And in the corner of my eye, I could see a student in the back just ready to get into the conversation, and I was hoping that she was going to save me, because I was thinking "Uh-oh! I must have this entirely wrong." I called on the student in the back, and she stood up and she goes, "Professor, I think the reason she's saying there is no racism in Haiti is because she is high yellow. I have experienced [racism]." And that was a really profound moment for me. To try to grapple with that, and to try to diffuse nicely, but it allowed us to transition into a conversation that I hadn't been a part of yet in that kind of context. But it was a really enlightening moment for me.

MODERATOR: Being State Senators and representing the government interest, how thin is the line between exercising your First Amendment rights and being a politician? What is that like, and additionally, are there many protests that go on in the Senate?

SENATOR BULLARD: Yes, to answer your last question first. There's not nearly as many as I think there should be. I definitely think there needs to be a heightened level of outrage when people are facing atrocities out there in the real world, and government should then intercede. The expediency of government—everyone talks about government being relatively slow—but it's not until you see the expedience of government in favor of one group and not in favor of another one.

I'll give you two sort of glaring examples that I've experienced since I've been in the legislature. If you remember Caylee Anthony's death, and the controversy around Casey Anthony and the trial that played out. So Casey Anthony—for those who do not know the back-story—she was a young mother, she was out partying, most of the evidence pointed to the fact that she was in some way involved in her child's death—whether it was directly or from negligence. When the trial happened she is of course exonerated because of lack of substantial evidence. How does this play into the legislature? My colleagues from both side of the aisle who generally happen to not be African American or people of color, reacted in such a visceral way by saying that we have to do something to impact laws, so immediately within six months they passed a law that said if you lie to the police and it was found that you were lying to the police, then it would result in a felony. So I thought, wow government does act quickly.

Fast forward to a young man getting shot in Sanford, Florida which was just a year or so later. We have a law on the books that clearly was problematic—the idea that someone is able to shoot someone and basically say because I felt threatened by that individual, I am therefore justified in the execution of them. And for those who watched the trial play out on television, the idea that this unarmed teenager in choosing to fight back then became the aggressor and thus, justified his own death by fighting back—irritated everyone—white, black, and in between. So of course we raise the issue of legislation, and say Casey Anthony—you guys were outraged, it took us a couple of months to pass a bill. We are not asking you to get rid of Stand Your Ground, we are asking you to tweak it so that it no longer negatively impacts these folks, the

George Zimmerman's of the world cannot use this as an excuse for murder. The law is fine, the law does not need to be changed, the law is working as it was intended to work. These are some of the comments that I received from my colleagues. Now I do not think that anyone can fully appreciate the gut punch that it feels like when someone says the law is working the way it was intended to work and it results in the murder of a black teenager. I wear this bracelet every day that simply says, "I am Trayvon Martin and You Are Trayvon Martin" and I have worn it every day since I have gotten it as a constant reminder of what my work is in the legislature—that I have to constantly be there as a conscience—if my presence is not established when I walk in the door, it will be and can be easily forgotten and that was what the 2012-2013 sessions reminded me of with such glaring, sort of malice in my opinion.

MODERATOR: Senator Nasheed, what kind of thin line might you have to kind of tip-toe across, being a senator and of course being an American citizen.

SENATOR NASHEED: Well, when it comes to the legislature, I do not walk a thin line, I go all of the way out. And I will give you a case in point. After the Ferguson unrest we took to the street during that time. It was August the tenth; Michael Brown was just killed on the ninth. So, everyone—we were angry about it. Here you have a young, unarmed individual fleeing and was shot and killed. And so, people decided that they were going to take to the street and not only because of that, but because of the economic and political oppression that they had to encounter for so long in North County.

What we had in North County was what I call "debtors' prison" where you have individuals that lived in the municipalities—they were literally going to jail and being locked up because they could not pay their fines. And that was a major problem because what they were creating and sustaining their budget on the backs of the poor. So when the unrest occurred, individuals came to me and said, "What are you going to do on the state level?" So, what I had to do was go to my colleagues—Republicans as well as Democrats—and say listen we are going to have to do something about it. So we crafted a bill that dealt just with that issue. Right now, today, we had

a lot of push back and I had to take the protest to the floor, against those individuals that were pushing back, but we were able to pass legislation where to date as a result of the Ferguson unrest, individuals can no longer go to jail simply because they cannot pay a fine. Individuals can no longer go to jail because they are driving without insurance.

But the biggest fight and the biggest obstacle during the time we were in session this past session, was the fight to end force and mandate body cameras. See in the state of Missouri, we have Republicans that if you even attempt to talk about body cameras, you are anti-law enforcement. And what we were trying to do was get them to understand that we are not. We are pro-law enforcement because we truly believe that if you enforce body cameras then it protects law enforcement from fraudulent lawsuits and it protects communities when it comes to police brutality, because cameras do not lie. And so, we have to protest on the floor, argue on the floor, the importance and the need to bring forth legislation that would bring the community and law enforcement back together.

Well, it fell on deaf ears, so we are going to go back and protest again next session. And one other issue that we protested as a result of the unrest was the fate of Missouri right now. We are not in alignment with *Tennessee v. Garner*. And what we need to do is turn that into a reality in terms of aligning the state statute with *Tennessee v. Garner*, but right now, we are not in alignment. And so what we wanted to do was file a piece of legislation to make sure that we are on the same level playing field as the Supreme Court's *Tennessee v. Garner* ruling. And again the Republicans, they felt like we were against the law enforcement community and they did not even want to bring the statute in alignment with *Tennessee v. Garner*. So again, we have an unconstitutional law that they did not even want to fix—I am ready to protest that next session. So I do not walk a thin line. I go above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to trying to right the wrongs and being a voice for the voiceless.

MODERATOR: Speaking on Ferguson, what is it about St. Louis that makes it so controversial or either so far ahead or behind? Recently we heard about the University of Missouri incident and I do not know if you want to tell that story since you were closer to the

incident, what the biggest misconception is right now that people do not understand about Ferguson.

SENATOR NASHEED: Well the biggest misconception is that all of St. Louis is Ferguson. So when you talk to individuals and say I live in the city of St. Louis, they think oh you live in Ferguson. No I do not live in Ferguson, I live in the City of St. Louis not North County, so that's one. I think that again, Ferguson and the people in Ferguson, they were tired of being sick and tired, and the political and economic oppression boiled over.

MODERATOR: And what was this oppression?

SENATOR NASHEED: Poverty, not being able to find a job. The fact that young men—they made mistakes in the past, and they go and knock on the doors of opportunities and the doors are slammed in their faces each and every day, because they walk in the door with the stigma of being an ex-felon. They cannot find jobs and so they are angry, frustrated; and when Michael Brown was shot and killed, it only put more fuel to the fire. And so I believe that yes it was an issue where a young, unarmed black man had been killed by law enforcement, but at the same time, again those individuals felt like their voices were not being heard and that the only way that they were going to be heard was to take it to the street and they did just that. And what we saw was appalling. I mean I have never seen anything like it. Police officers—I mean they totally violated the First Amendment and I do not know if that was because it was a new area and arena that they stepped into and had never experienced anything like it, but you are talking about militarization at its highest level. I mean they told individuals that you can no longer assemble here, we are going to put a safe zone where that is where you will go, and if you decide to come out of that safe zone then you are going to jail. I mean it was appalling to see the injustice and the disrespect of the First Amendment with law enforcement.

MODERATOR: You know we also talked about the University of Missouri, the story is that there was racial discrimination going on in the university campus—and I am going to get to student activism in a minute—and one of the students, it was a black male student went on a hunger strike in order to protest some of the racial discrimination or some of the bad practices that were

going on and some of the lack of response from some of the higher up officials and directors of the programs. What is your, not necessarily your opinion, but experience with what is going on, now that a lot of student activism is taking place in Missouri.

SENATOR NASHEED: We are dealing with a major issue throughout this country, you know a lot of young folks are ready to rise up and they are rising up, and they want to see change. With what happened on the grounds of MU, the young man, they made verbal racial slur attacks, and they were sick and tired of it. So they went to the administration and they asked the administration to do something, the administration did not do anything. And so the young man said, listen, if you are not going to listen to our concerns and try to change the dynamics here on campus then I am going to go on a hunger strike, and he did just that.

And so, two days later I receive a call from one of the students that is a part of the 1950, and they said this young man is on a hunger strike and it has been three days. I said "No, tell him to go pick up a book by Dick Greggory. Dick Greggory understands how important hunger strikes are, and you can live beyond three days." I said "What you need to do is call a press conference and call for the resignation of the president." And so they did just that. They started protesting all day and all night on-campus, and I think the straw that broke the camel's back was when the football players said they were going to go into the pockets of the MU. When they decided to strike with those individuals, MU truly understood that we have to do something now, either we were going to pay him $400,000 a year or we are going to lose millions. And so he decided to resign. That was a great victory for the protestors, but now where do we go from here is the question. How do we rebuild, how do we bring MU back to where it used to be in terms of its fineness?

MODERATOR: Senator Bullard, how do you think Florida has reacted and what is your personal experience with the interactions of some of the protest movements that have occurred here after Ferguson?

SENATOR BULLARD: Well you know, protest movements in Florida actually pre-date Ferguson. The Dream Defenders, who have become sort of an organization of relative national prominence,

cut their teeth post-Trayvon Martin, you know thirty-one days sitting in the capital of the State of Florida. But even before that, some of the leaders that ultimately organized Dream Defenders were right there when there was a protest over Martin Lee Anderson.

And I say these names because folks need to understand that—and this is one of the things that drives me crazy about Florida—Florida, and I say this as a state senator, so if you have recordings, feel free to quote me on it, but historically speaking, Florida has been one of the most racist states in the country. And what do I mean by that? And what I mean by that is, Florida, even during the height of lynching, there was a greater possibility of being lynched in Florida than any other state in the South. That's what a lot of folks do not understand. When Alabama and Mississippi were getting all of the attention, if you set a foot in this state, you ran a greater chance of not coming out of it alive. And what ends up happening is this notion of Florida being kind of being even keeled, you do not have to worry about it—it is kind of progressive-slash-racist, whatever that means, state is a misnomer right? So once people get that in their minds, you have to understand sort of the pushback that ends up impacting a number of the protest movements. Now when you think about Martin Lee Anderson—just a little back story on that—this was a kid who was being held at a prison camp and was choked to death by some of the guards. Those guards never saw a day in jail. That frustrates people—again bringing up Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman still walks the streets. That frustrates people. You know the gentleman that shot Jordan Davis was convicted of attempted murder for the three people that lived, but not convicted of murder for the one person who died? That frustrates people.

And so we are sort of akin to what is happening in Ferguson here to what is happening in the State of Florida because we have to use the Ferguson moment as a catalyst to make change here; and that is unfortunate because there has been multiple circumstances of racial injustice in Florida that are documented, that are understood, but there has been no national outcry that this has to change. So here is what I mean and I will sort of wrap it up with this. The same way we were able to lift up Ferguson as Senator Nasheed tells the story

about being able to make those changes in law, there was no similar rising tide for us here in the State of Florida. What we were screaming at the top of our lungs that it is time to change Stand Your Ground here in the State of Florida, it was just Florida folks talking, you know people put on hoodies, people did other things, but that is kind of the thing, we have to take the moments that are happening in Missouri as an opportunity to make significant change to some of the laws that have problems that we are facing here in Florida and we need law students to be there to help us out because protest movements need organization. There could not have been a Dr. King had Thurgood Marshall not being doing his work on the other side.

MODERATOR: Senators, my final question is what are some solutions and recommendations in an official capacity that we need to be vocal about as students and as American citizens.

SENATOR NASHEED: Well, we have individuals rising up against systematic racism throughout campuses all over America right now. I think one of the demands that should be on the table right now is student loan debt. If you have the ear of President Obama, where he is responding to Missouri University and the Justice Department, then I think that throughout the country that should be one of the biggest demands right now while you have the ear of every politician in the United States of America, even those that are running for President. We need to reign in on student loan debt immediately and it should be a major demand right now.

SENATOR BULLARD: I will piggy back on that and when you think about things like student loans or voting rights or economic injustice, understand that it all carries over. Here's what I think Senator Nasheed was alluding to: when someone is saddled with almost insurmountable debt that silences your voice as a protestor because you are more concerned about making that minimum payment and not losing that job than you are about the concerns of others. So the system that ultimately keeps all people oppressed regardless of race is able to keep moving because it is constantly able to make you think that you are working your way out when you really are not. You know what I mean, you will get your job clerking or as a Public Defender or State Attorney or even if you work for a private firm, and you will be so content that you will fail

to realize how jacked up the system is.

So I will give an example of what a Public Defender here in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit is talking about. He is talking about the idea that the justice system impacts poor people most negatively. How is that? By putting in a system of fines and fees that poor people cannot pay. So by law you are too poor to get a private attorney so you get a Public Defender, someone that tells you to plea out and pay a fine of $1,500. I did not have enough to give a retainer for a real attorney, but now you think I have $1,500 to pay? And then they say, well if you cannot pay within this time, you are going to have to do time and that is on your record and that creates this vicious cycle of un-employability and the cycle of poverty continues.

All of that requires a level of intervention by folks who have a level of sanity, but also for those in the room because you all are the privileged folks who are attending a great institution and being able to get a level of understanding. I can tell you right now just based on 2014 statistics, everybody from my legislative assistant to that guy did not vote period. In terms of per 100 people, everybody on that side chose to stay home—who was eligible, who was registered—and then we sit there and wonder why laws impact us in a negative way. So I am going to again jump on this bandwagon that everyone says, does voting change things? Yes, voting ultimately changes things, but lack of voting also changes things. So when you are sitting there mad at the world about not getting the candidate of your choice or winning a particular race—I can tell you that it is better to play defense than to always have to be on offense because I promise you this, you get the wrong person in office and they will make your life miserable. I can tell you that because our governor is that kind of person, right?

MODERATOR: Okay, we have a question from the audience. What is your name?

AUDIENCE: My name is *Mike Jones* and how do you claim that student loan debt is a problem when the entire problem is that education is a good? And it has a cost and a value and by trying to infantilize student decisions within student loans and taking out money, they are borrowing knowingly, you are only making their economic intelligence lower and making the problem more severe

and increasing the fact that colleges have nothing but an incentive to increase cost and raise prices, particularly when you forgive that debt and pay for it on their behalf. Why do you think that is an issue?

SENATOR NASHEED: That is a great question, however, all too often individuals were told to knock on the door of opportunities—that education is the key that opens the doors of opportunity. They come out and we see it time and time again, they come out with student loan debt that they cannot pay. They are not able to find a job to pay the student loans because the recession went up in flames, so they are not able to find jobs. And what you find is individuals working a nine to five at $30,000 a year when they got out of school they were supposed to make $80,000 to $90,000 a year. And so I am saying, we know that is happening so at some point we have to figure out if know that those are the dynamics, we have to figure out how can we reduce the amount of student loans or debt that those individuals who are going to school are having to pay back and that is what I am saying.

AUDIENCE: Hi, how are you doing? My name is *Denzel Burns* and I am a Social Justice Advocate for the Miami-Dade area and I am proud to see you senator from Missouri and I am really excited to hear about the work that you are doing after this. I work a lot with black youth in terms of social justice from [Florida International University and University of Miami], and so it is very interesting to hear the young man's statement in reference to student loan debt, because one of the biggest problems that we are having here is—and especially at Florida Memorial—is trying to connect those segmented communities to understand that there is a global problem that is taking place amongst young minorities. And one of the questions that I am trying to figure out, as it were, and maybe more so to the individuals who are in this room who are pursuing higher level education degrees and so forth is it going to take for people to have an empathetic stand. Because I do this all of the time like you do, I go to forums, I yell and then behind that I have to educate young youth how to take this emotional conversation and push it into a policy conversation which is where we lose. And the biggest problem I see when I go to all of these movements, when I go to these forums and no shade to Dream Defenders or any of those

organizations, is that we do really well with the yelling and screaming and I say it all of the time, black people and as well as my Hispanic brothers and sisters, we have a really good way of long term pain, but very short term memory. And what is scary to me is that here it is in this room right now, the composite of what the senator said in reference to the voting age which is we are not seeming to get youth to be engaged as well as our counterparts in white communities to say, "Look all we are looking for most times is for you to be able to check the guy that is in the circle that we cannot talk to and tell him you are dumb as hell, and look at the situation from another lens," so how do you police that kind of behavior?

SENATOR BULLARD: Well, I think one of the things, and I appreciate the question, is you take the intelligence in the room right—alright so by a show of hands, who here is a college student currently? So here is what is crazy about this—we have a lack of policy initiatives from a progressive standpoint so all of this chaos is happening right and we are all sort of screaming and yelling and being upset about what is happening and then when it comes to how do we make actual changes to statutes that impact? No one is doing the reading of the statute so all of you have a law library or access to one, and you might see a law on the books that is clearly antiquated, but no one is proposing to change that law.

I'll give you a prime example, on the books of the Florida State Statutes up until 2011 was the Chinese Exclusion Act, that we had not eradicated that from the State Statutes until 2011. Not to say that it was being enforced, but the idea that it was still on the books means that for all of the lawyers that have come through the legislative process, no one thought it problematic to say you know what this might be the law we should get rid of, but it is those kind of things that we have to be mindful of and we need you all to do it. I mean we look to spare and comb through the statutes every year to see what do we take out or what do we tweak, but it cannot just be the job of the Senator for American Progress or a couple handful of other organizations to come up with policy notions because they are *money driven policy organizations. You all have spit in the game as* future lawyers, so let's make some policy changes.

AUDIENCE: Good afternoon my name is *Carmen Gimenez*,

don't you think that we can exercise our right to protest through resolutions or counter resolutions or state resolutions instead of going out there and disturbing the people's peace?

SENATOR BULLARD: I do not think it is an either or thing, I think it is everything has to be on the table. If you go to your city and get a resolution passed, that is phenomenal. But I am sure the senator can attest to this in her own state—we have this thing called local preemption, if you have never heard the term, get used to it because it is something that the Florida legislature can do to the local government by basically saying that the local government cannot make a law that in any way impacts or supersedes state law. And so what they will sit there and say is, "Oh you want to clean up your local environment? Sorry, we will not do that." And the reason I bring that up is because currently everyone talks about plastic bag use or environmental impact. Currently state law prohibits individual cities from banning plastic bags in the State of Florida, so you cannot do it. So let's say you are in Miami Beach and you say let's reduce the use of plastic bags by state law you cannot do that, so it definitely impacts your ability to protest when local preemption becomes a tool that state government uses to create a death blow to your protest movement.

MODERATOR: Okay, I want to say thank you to the senators. I think the answer to your question was both of them, even if you have to disturb some people just because right now at the current moment, protest movements may be a little alarming for us or we hear the word "protest" and are thinking violence, non-violence, or riot. But as we mentioned earlier, the power of a voice implementing change through policy, protest movements have been in our history for a long time. I want everyone to give a hand to the senators and thank you guys for answering.