

'The Melissa Harris-Perry Show' for Sunday, Spril 28th, 2013

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MELISSA-HARRIS-PERRY

April 28, 2013

Guests: Marion Nestle, Ricardo Salvador, Ramez Naam, Tom Colicchio, Raquel Cepeda, Andrea Plaid, Jane Junn, Jelani Cobb, Raquel Cepeda, Andrea Plaid, Jane Junn, Kathryn Joyce, Tarikuwa Lemma, Karen Moline, Jacqueline Pata

MELISSA HARRIS-PERRY, MSNBC ANCHOR: This morning my question. How does talking about women change the immigration conversation?

Plus, the trouble when ideology meets adoption.

And the writers' corner is back featuring bird of paradise, how I became Latina?

But first, you are what you eat from your head down to your feet.

Good morning. I'm Melissa Harris-Perry.

If you are a person who cares about your health, then eating right is at the top of your list. Think for the 1990 nutrition labeling and education act, any food in a package must have labeling consistent with health and human services definition.

All right, so the label on this bag of chips. Honestly, it tells me, girl, don't even think about it. At least that's my translation. And on this bag of cookies, yes, it also tells me that even though I might like to eat the whole thing, it is not going to make up for nutritionally balanced meal.

Reading labels is what a responsible consumer does. But what if there are no labels. Take this apple for instance. I mean, it seems perfectly fine, nutritious. I mean, that's what an apple is supposed to be. It grew on a tree. It's an apple, for goodness sake. I don't need a label. I know what it is. But maybe I do need a label because sometimes an apple is more than meets the eye.

When it comes to our food, even if it is not in a package, it is important to know what happens from the seed to your table because not all foods are created equally. Many foods we consume daily are genetically engineered more modified. And under the current law, if a food is genetically modified, it does not need to be labeled. So, it begs the question, if a food isn't labeled, how can consumers be responsible? Especially when some of the biggest commercialized genetically modified crops in the United States include soy, cotton, canola, sugar beets, corn, Hawaiian papaya, Zucchini, yellow squash.

Because if you know what a genetically modified organism were GMOS you might, so it just maybe might think twice about eating it. GMOS result when genes from one species are forced into the genes of another animal or plant. Most interesting than what genetic engineering is though, is how it`s accomplished. You see using viruses or a bacteria to infect animal or plant cells with new DNA. Firing DNA into cells a special gun injecting new DNA into fertilized eggs with a needle or using electric shocks to create holes in the membrane covering sperm and forcing DNA through the holes.

You see, to date, there have been no human clinical trials of genetically modified foods. The one human feeding study showed that genetic material put into genetically modified soy transferred to intestinal bacteria and continued to function.

GMOS studies are done on lab animals like rats. And some of that research shows that GMOs have been linked to sterility, damage to organs and toxic and allergic reaction in the animals.

But, here`s the deal. The foods are not required to be labeled. It was under the administration of president George H. W. Bush that the FDA promoted bio-technology and formed its GMOS policy which states the agency is not aware of any information showing that the foods derived from the new methods differ from any other foods in any meaningful or uniform way.

But seriously, I mean, in my world, if a food grows faster and bigger than its cousins, well then, it is different. And not only are they growing faster, but so are the profits, forecasts for the companies at the fore front of the GMO market.

"The New York Times" recently reported that Monsanto, the world`s largest seed company raised its full-year profit forecast on Wednesday after reporting better than expected earnings in the second quarter driven by strength in its global corn and herbicide business.

Yes, you see that last part is the important point. When you have new super plants, you have to have new pesticides. And if your company is creating both the seed and the pesticide, you are making out pretty well.

Those in favor of GMOs, note they are positive possibilities, providing food for the growing population. Lessening the agricultural impact on the environment. Creating more sustainable foods. While those are admirable goals, this is not just about providing for the world. It`s also about providing consumers with information which is why this week senator Barbara Boxer and congressman Peter Defazio introduced the genetically engineered food right to know act.

People have a right to know what they are eating so they can make informed choices about what they`re putting in their bodies. Labels might help us to accomplish that, or not.

At the table, Tom Colicchio, the chef and owner of Kraft Restaurants and often head judge on Bravo`s "Top Chef," Ramez Naam who is the author of "the infinite resource, the power of ideas on a finite planet" which I spent all night last night working on, Ricardo Salvador, director of the food and environment program at the union of concern scientist, and Marion Nestle, professor in the department of nutrition food studies of public health at New York University.

Thank you all for being here.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Thank you.

HARRIS-PERRY: All right. So, this is a tough one for me. I have been trying to read in -- I have a thousand books on the table today trying to think through it.

Marion, let me start with you. How do we balance between our very real concerns about genetically modified foods on the one hand and our -- and the realities that GMOs do seem to create really positive impacts on the other.

MARION NESTLE, PROFESSOR, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY: I don't see any problem with reconciling it. I was on the food advisory committee of the FDA in 1994 when the FDA approved GMOs. And as a consumer advocate on that committee, we said go ahead, try it. But for heaven's sake label it. Consumers need a choice, consumers want a choice. And if you don't label it, you're going to raise all kinds of questions about what are you trying to hide? And I think they're trying to hide plenty. And that's really what the problem is.

HARRIS-PERRY: What do you do think -- I mean, do you agree, they're trying to hide something?

TOM COLICCHIO, OWNER, CHEF, CRAFT RESTAURANTS: Whether or not they're trying to hide something, I think this is really about freedom. And you know, we fight wars in the name of freedom. We send our kids to fight in the name of freedom. You know, we export freedom around the world. And yet, we don't have the freedom of choice to know what's in our food. And I think, you know, I'm looking at this as a consumer, as a father, you know, to three kids. And I want to know what's in their food. Simple as that.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes. It does feel to me like that most basic question, of just OK, if you're going to have GMOs, fine, we will make that choice. That's the freedom of entrepreneurship, the freedom of ideas in part. But why not then give consumers the freedom to know this information?

RAMEZ NAAM, AUTHOR, THE INFINITE RESOURCE: Well, I think before we talk about labeling, we should talk about GMOs, what they are and safety. The reason that the FDA don't require labels is the FDA rules say if it's chemically identical to the other food, it should be labeled the same way. And they FDA can find no difference between a GMO corn and a normal corn.

And we look at safety studies. Every major scientific body is the world, the national academies of science, the American medical association, the European commission and the French Supreme Court ruled that they can find no evidence of any harm to humans, no credible evidence from the hundreds of studies that have been done. So, that's why we haven't required labels thus far.

HARRIS-PERRY: So Ricardo, that notion, however, that an apple that is not or rather in this case, it's usually a seed, right, that is corn or something that actually ends up often in our packaged food is simply not different.

Also seems to fly in the face of the very idea that the reason we do the genetically modified foods is to make them different, to make them

resistant to pests, to make them more nutritionally valuable. I mean, that's the entire reason for them. So, they must in fact be different.

RICARDO SALVADOR, UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS: Well you're quite right.

And so, the basic premise is that you're crossing the species barrier with genes. The important thing to understand technically, is that what the gene will do is create a -- you must ask what is that protein going to do. The protein could be an allergen. And in very extreme cases it could be a toxin. The key thing is we know what to test for. But, we only find what we're looking for.

And as you pointed out, these are novel organisms with the DNA. So, we must be temper about this, but always be aware of the fact that with new organisms, without the experience overtime, we must be aware that there could be unintended consequences. And that's what the precaution needs to be.

HARRIS-PERRY: OK. So, that slightly different from the question of labeling, let me push on that hey little bit.

SALVADOR: Sure.

HARRIS-PERRY: You're saying to me we can only look and find potential -- you can't sort of ask is it harmful. An allergen is different than a toxin for example. What are the questions we ought to be asking scientifically before we get to -- what is the science set of questions we need to be asking about genetically modified foods?

SALVADOR: So you need to ask, what is the product? And then test what this product could potentially do. You also need to test for the system effects and those are the ones that are most difficult to track because you are -- you have any number of things that you need to pursue and also track over time.

The important thing is that once you begin to deploy these technologies, then, you begin to develop a track record and you can examine the track record for how it performs against the claims.

HARRIS-PERRY: I want to know, Tom, how far back in the food chain should I know about it this? So, if my cow on which is going to become my steak ate genetically modified feed, is that important to me or only if my actual piece of corn on the cob is genetically modified?

COLICCHIO: No. Actually, you have to go back to the soil. And what is happening when we are tons and tons of pesticides on to these plants to get rid of weeds. And what is actually happening in the soil is pretty much killing everything that's in the soil. So, we are looking at a real unhealthy sort of, you know, ecosystem when we are using all these chemicals for the food. So, I think that's how far.

And the other thing, you know, part of the FDA sort of ruling was that, not only sort it doesn't need to be the same genetically, but also, it needs to look and appear the same. And essentially you picked up an apple, it is now there's a Newark particular apple that doesn't brown. So now, we have something that doesn't look the same anymore.

NAAM: I think that will be branded in that way. You want that --

HARRIS-PERRY: Right. So, stay with us. Because I want to actually come

to on exactly this question on are we just being like science fearful, which is part of what I read in the text last night. Our fear of the new which would be actually be holding us back as a civilization or the real questions to be answered when we come back from break.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: When we talk about genetically modified or engineered food, a few companies around the world have cornered the market. But the company with the largest market share genetically engineered crops in the world is none other than Monsanto.

While their earning portfolio may be good, their public image has taken a few hits to say the least. In February, the Supreme Court heard arguments in Bowman versus Monsanto at the heart of the case are patent rights. And whether Monsanto has a right to limit reproduction of the seeds after the first generation.

According to the center for food safety as of January, Monsanto has quote "filed 144 lawsuits involving 410 farmers and 56 small farm businesses in at least 27 different states."

So, here it feels to me is at the crux of it. If this is about feeding the world, the profit-driven aspect of this and particularly the big agribusiness that is Monsanto and the kinds of profits that they earn from it starts making me nervous right now that this is not just some sort of like feed the world project.

NAAM: It`s fun to poke at Monsanto. They`re a very, very easy target. But your life is full of things that were developed for a profit motive. Your iphone, your eyeglasses, everything that you do was made by someone who wanted to make a profit. The real question is, what`s the impact on these things on people`s health and there the science is clear that there`s no evidence of health? And on the environment, the science is also fairly clear that these GMOs have reduced negative impact --

NESTLE: Oh, I don`t think the science is so clear.

NAAM: Tom talked about pesticides. What the national academy of sciences found was that the planting of roundup ready soy reduced the total pesticide toxicity to fields because roundup replaced much more toxic pesticides that we used to use.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, you don`t think the science is clear. Because I got to tell you. When you tell me there`s no human health risks, at least in terms of what we know from the science, but there is a ton of findings around animals, thousands of sheep and buffalo and goats in India died after grazing on the BT cotton plants. We know the mice eating GM seem to have smaller and fewer babies. There are animal studies. And the animal studies certainly aren`t human studies. But they should give us much more pause.

NAAM: There is animal studies from one laboratory in France where the head there is sort of a fringy scientist, if you will. If you look at the hundreds of studies that have been done, those have found by and large, the overwhelming majority, 99.9 percent that there`s no harm to humans. And even the other guests here, Marion agrees with this. You too report that Zarillini study, the national academy of sciences, the American medical association, even France, the French are anti-GMO. But the French Supreme

Court threw out France's ban on GMOs because it said the government could produce no credible evidence of harm to humans or the environment.

NESTLE: Yes. But this isn't about safety necessarily. Even if GMOs are safe, they're not necessarily acceptable for a whole range of other reasons. And it's those reasons that the right to know is the most obvious one that make labeling so important. If they had labeled this from the first place, I don't think we would be having this conversation now. But the industry did everything it could to make sure that nobody knew that this was happening and that nobody could identify.

I mean, you look at all of these fruits that you have out here, you have no way of knowing that any of these is GMO or not. The tomato is the most likely suspect. I suspect it's not a GMO variety. But it's impossible to tell.

HARRIS-PERRY: So let me ask about this idea that the thing that we are upset about is the lack of knowledge, right? The lack of the right to know. Because even if we are talking about the packaged foods, right. If I start reading this, it is full of crap. And crap that is sort of maybe not good for us if we eat a lot of it. But we have decided it's fundamentally safe for human health.

But I know, I can look and say I'm making a choice to eat (INAUDIBLE). But, how do -- I mean, is this really just about the right to know or is this about doing things to our food supply that can have meaningful environmental effects that are not positive, but are potentially negative?

SALVADOR: Let me speak to that. I think you started this line of discussion very productively. So the very premise that one of the reasons why we need to depend on external inputs which makes our food system actually a very expensive food system is that we have an urgency to deal with the issues of the poor and hunger in the world. And we all agree with that. No question with that. And the problem with this, though, is that the food system and the agricultural system of the rich have zero relationship with the problems of the poor and why they are hungry. If you really wanted to deal with the problems of the hungry and the poor, you would deal with their poverty. You would deal with why they're poor to begin with. The spigot at the end of the food system of the rich does not aim at the poor because it's not a philanthropy. You need to be able to pay for what the system produces. And it's very expensive.

Actually, the problem with the modern food system is that we over produce and create all kinds of collateral damage because of that. Not only do we overproduce, we produce too much of the wrong stuff. According to USDA guidelines, we need to eat more of in stuff and --

HARRIS-PERRY: Because we are eating more of this stuff.

SALVADOR: Right. We are producing a lot of junk food or at least the ingredients for the junk food and propelling with these technologies. And so, that really makes the point.

HARRIS-PERRY: And we eat the junk food because it's profitable. I mean, the reason you produce so much of it is because it's relatively inexpensive.

COLICCHIO: It's highly subsidized. We are paying for that.

Now, I just think it is very disingenuous argument that GMOs are kind of

feed the world. I mean, number one, they have been around for 20 years and in 20 years, we seen hunger increased.

NAAM: That`s not true. The rate of hunger in the planet has actually gone down.

COLICCHIO: It`s gone way up.

NAAM: In this it may have a little bit. But, across the world, hunger is half the frequency that it used to be.

COLICCHIO: Also, if you look at a bacteria devastated the rice crop in Asia, in the Americas, in Australia, mid-Africa, there was a geneticist working for u-Davis that isolated a rice, that were just in to it found a genetic marker for it, put it into other rice crops and today it sits on a shelf at UC Davis because there`s no way to profit from it.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes.

COLICCHIO: And so, If the issue was saving the world, we`re not doing that because there`s no profit in it. So, you know, what we did in this country is put public health in front of profit.

(CROSSTALK)

COLICCHIO: In Europe, it was the other way around. And I think that that even though it`s confusing to say that there`s no health issues around it, we just don`t know.

HARRIS-PERRY: All right, so pause right here. We will take a quick break and come right back on this topic.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: Man, fun things could happen during in the commercial break, I get in my ear from my producer that Monsanto is apparently watching and sent us a statement. As soon as that`s ready, I will read it for you.

But, let me start by asking this question. Tell me the golden rice story and how should we be thinking about golden rice, what it is and what it does.

NAAM: Right. So, Tom was talking about how we evolved in GMOs out of a profit, that`s not actually true. It has been true mostly so far. But there are GMOs in development that can help feed the world.

So, right now, one of the big problems in the developing world is vitamin a deficiency. It is about 250 million kids don`t have enough vitamin A. Every year, about half a million go blind because they don`t have enough vitamin A in their diets and about half of those die.

So, a long time ago when biotech was just getting started, some scientists got together and said what if we could actually put vitamin A in a food that everybody eats and that`s from just rice. So, that rice takes on a yellow look. Rice normally produces vitamin A in the leaf, now it`s in the seed as well. It`s in testing and hopefully in the next couple of years it will be approved. And the reason that it has not been approved so far is because the regulatory process is incredibly complicated.

So, why would this be anything other than good? The world eats rice, we

put vitamin A in rice, it addresses a fundamental nutritional deficiency?

NESTLE: It's a poster child for public relations for the GMO industry. I was fascinated -- first of all, it is not vitamin A, it's beta carotene. It has to be converted in the body to vitamin A. And for that you need a diet that's adequate in protein and adequate in all other nutrients. Otherwise, kids can't do the conversion. Beta carotene is in every single one of these fruits and vegetables that's on this table. It is enormously common in the food supply. The reason that people aren't eating it is because of cultural reasons, they don't think the kids should be eating vegetables or some reason like that or it is because the kids are sick and have worms and can't do the conversion.

HARRIS-PERRY: Is it potentially also because of global climate. So, I guess, I mean, part of the problem that we have in terms of feeding the world is also just about the environmental realities that mean that these sorts of things grow in some places and not others.

NESTLE: Well, they grow in tropical regions. These are the regions that have the highest level of vitamin A deficiency. The reason for that is social. It is because of the socioeconomic and other conditions in society that make it difficult for poor people to get the kinds of foods they need and to be healthy enough to be able to use them properly. That doesn't change with golden rice.

HARRIS-PERRY: All right, pause me for a moment. I do want to read the Monsanto statement. It literally came in while we were live on air.

And their quote is quote "our focus, our primary focus is on enabling both small holder and large scale farmers to produce more from their land while conserving more of our world's natural resources such as water and energy. We apply modern day agriculture sciences such as plant breeding biotechnology and other agronomic practices to develop and support other farmers around the world.

You can see the full statement on our Web site at mhp.com.

Tom, any reactions to that?

COLICCHIO: Ninety-one percent of people in this country want their food labeled. It's a basic right that we should all have to know what we're eating. And so, that's a great statement. And I applaud most of that. I just want to know what I'm eating.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes. And I got to say, that feels like the piece where I'm like OK, well then, if there's nothing to hide, why are we hiding something? If that -- just from a scientific perspective, is that an accurate way of talking about what a genetically modified crop is?

SALVADOR: Yes. As far as the technology is concerned. Now, very important thing about this statement that we just saw there. Monsanto is the world's number one ag biotech company. So, if you want to examine the claims of that industry, obviously, you start with number one.

And so, we have actually taken a close look at their claims, such as for instance boosting productivity, boosting yield such as helping with environmental impact by making plants more efficient in terms of nitrogen utilization, most recently helping to help plants deal with drought. In every case, our examinations have showed that the claims don't bear up to

scrutiny.

So, the key thing to know about the yield curve that the agronomic world has been pushing the last few years is that it has not been affected one bit by any of the traits that we are talking about here. Those traits were not about productivity.

The very best that we can say is in some instances with insect resistance in years, where you have severe incident infestation, those genes help to stabilize (INAUDIBLE). But the yield has not been increase. And the protection against drought really is contextual. The evidence is that it mild help in cases of mild drought.

And so, obviously, it doesn't really deal with the urgency of the issue of drought which is when it's extreme.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes. We are going to take a quick break because I know that that flies in the face of some of what you may claimed about in the book. And so, I will let you respond to that and I also want to think a little bit more about this question. If you are trying to feed the world, what is it that we need no fix?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: So, there is real in the world. Eight hundred and seventy million people in this world do not have enough to eat. Ninety-eight percent of hungry live in what we have been called developing nations and 3.2 billion people, excuse me, \$3.2 billion is needed per year to reach all 66 million hungry school-aged kids.

So, hunger is a real issue. What you suggested is that these kinds of genetic engineering processes don't address that. Your text makes the claim that they do.

NAAM: They do somewhat. So, we seen actually GMOs have bigger impact in the developing world. Because one of the things they do is they make it so you don't have to spray the pesticide in the case of the corn.

And in the future, we see a big challenge and big opportunities. So, the challenge is, not just hunger today but over the next 35 years, we are going to have almost double the amount of food that we grow to keep up with demand. So, how are we going to do that? Lots of ways.

GMOs are not going to fix that all by themselves. But, there are some promising ideas there. One is, if you look at a field of corn, versus the field of rice or wheat, the corn grows about 70 percent more food per acre. So, one idea on the table that's being worked on, the Bill Gates and Melinda Gates foundation is funding, is taking the genes from corn that let them use sunlight marginally and grow much more food per acre, including those in rice and wheat. And that would be given out freely to anyone in the world to plant on their land and replant.

HARRIS-PERRY: But also, in New Orleans, which is a food city. I mean, we are a city more than anything we eat and we believe in what our food. People are hungry not because the wheat didn't grow high enough. People are hungry because they can't, in fact, not afford. These foods do not exist in their neighborhoods. They cannot buy them in local grocery stores because they simply don't have a local grocery store. And if they did, the prices would be very high.

COLICCHIO: They will never address food distribution.

NESTLE: Because these are social issues.

NAAM: You better solve the social issues. It`s one tool in the toolbox.
We would be a fool not to use that tool.

SALVADOR: Well, what I would add to this, is that in the world, we already have enough food to feed everyone. And that has actually been the case during the entire industrial agricultural period.

So, if we are arguing in order to solve the problem you`ve raised, we need to produce more, we`re there already. So, either extraordinarily ineffective in terms of doing this or our theory is wrong. 40 years of evidence that says our theory is wrong. We actually do have to need to deal with the purchasing power of the poor. And what comes along with all these technologies is a system that agriculture which does not have long-term viability.

And so for instance, one of the things that I should mention is that while we can always talk about the dreams that we have for the future, there is a track record for this technology. And the track record of the technology right now is that actually has enabled methods of agriculture that have severe collateral damage as I mentioned before, primarily the environmental damage. So this is not the way to go. The way to go is to find ways to produce the food we need and make it affordable and simultaneously work on the purchasing power.

HARRIS-PERRY: And Marion, you know, you said these are social issues. But they are also therefore political ones.

NESTLE: Absolutely.

HARRIS-PERRY: And so, part of the politics here is it`s not just that there`s Monsanto and whatever decisions they`re making that are good, bad or neutral. But, they are very clearly working our government. They are working our policy makers. The Democrats, the Republicans, George H. W. Bush, all the way to President Obama have been deeply impacted by the kind of policies that are promoted by this big company.

NESTLE: Yes. I got to see that in action 20 years ago when the FDA was first approving genetically modified foods and Monsanto sent dozens of people down pretending to be independent people to testify in favor of the technology.

And it was interesting, the FDA insisted that people say who had paid their transportation or paid their way down and people had to get up one after the other and said Monsanto had paid their way down. But otherwise, they didn`t want to disclose that.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, I love that part of the story because that`s labeling, right? I mean, basically what would require in that moment was OK, Mr. Person or Mrs. Person here, you have to label yourself who actually sent you. And they said Monsanto.

And so, that`s what we want as consumers is that kind of transparency in our labeling.

NESTLE: Yes. And the argument that the FDA doesn`t label foods with

processes is also specious because we say whether it's made from concentrate, for example. You know, we have the -- whether it was previously frozen. Why not GMO. There are plenty of places that label it. I have a candy bar from Great Britain that says it may be made with genetically modified soy, corn or sugar. And you know, the world hasn't come to an end.

NAAM: So, one thing I agree with, with all of these fine folks is we are going to get to labeling. It's clear that enough consumers want it that we'll get there. So, my advice to the biotech industry and to farm industry is get to labeling yourselves because there's a difference between a label that says warning, which is invalid, because there is no evidence of harm and a label that listed the ingredients. So, I support voluntary labeling that the industry should pursue by itself.

COLICCHIO: No one is asking for a warning label. You know that. And we are just asking sort of the idea that there is GMO material in this food. That's it. It's simple as that. No one is looking for a skull and crossbones.

I find it interesting that 85 percent of the \$20 billion of the crops that we subsidize is all corn. We saw it come out of the crops. And so, you know, one percent goes to fruits and vegetables. So, we know why these come out of the crop cheap, and we know that processed food are cheap, so it's really no wonder why the crops that are -- that are affected by GMOs all come out of the crops --

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes, right. Basically, this has a lobbyist and this doesn't.

NESTLE: Absolutely.

HARRIS-PERRY: Thank you to my entire panel, Tom, Ramez, Ricardo and Marion. I love the idea of food politics. And we are going to stay on this undoubtedly over and over again on this program.

But later on the program today, the investigation into the push among evangelicals to adopt.

And up next, sister citizen. It's my book. Here it is. And by the way, it's out in paperback now. Go get it.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: Check out the World War II, congenes of psychologists became very interested in field dependence. In one study, subjects were placed in a crooked chair in a crooked room and that they were asked to find the true up and down. Now, some people were able to get themselves straight even if everything in their visual field was off kilter. But many people could be tilted by as much as 35 degrees but still feel as though they were straight up and down because they were accommodating all of the crooked images around them.

When I first read these studies, I thought, whoa, that is a lot like being a black woman in America. Sisters are trying to do the work of being American citizens but must navigate the persistent negative race and gender stereotypes that create a crooked room toward to distorted images of ourselves. Our politics is an exercise of trying to stand straight in a crooked room.

My recent book, "Sister Citizen, shamed the stereotypes of black women in America," addresses the personal and political consequences of black women's crooked room. Tracing the history of shaming and derogatory images like jezebel, a stereotype rooted in the hot and tot Venus that asserts African-American women are hyper sexual breeders who refuse to control their own reproduction. Mani, an image of black women as cervical (ph) domestics, more interested in the white family for whom they work and in their own.

A stereotype so powerful that hat at this Haddie (ph) McDaniel became the first black woman to win an Oscar when she played the role nanny role in gone with the wind and of course, the angry black woman, a stereotype enshrined portraying women as irrational neck rolling and hateful.

"Sister Citizen" asks us to look through the lens of black women's complicated and sometimes painful experiences in this country. I tell stories as distant of a life to Gallia free black woman who was arrested and publicly beaten in 1853 Virginia for supposedly stealing a white man's chickens even though there wasn't much meaningful evidence against her. And I also analyzed more contemporary figures like former USDA employee Shirley Cherard (ph) and first lady Michelle Obama. Because these women help us to understand how modern black women find their true north in a room still made crooked by shaming stereotypes.

So, the book is now available in paperback. And I would love to hear from you out in Nerdland about what you think about it. I'm going to be hosting an online mhp show book club about it in coming weeks. So go read it now. We can talk about it soon.

And when we come back, I want to expand the "Sister Citizen" framework beyond the experiences of black women. What happens to our immigration debate when we put women at the center. What are the specific challenges facing the women. Who wants to be our new "Sister Citizens."

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: When I wrote "Sister Citizen," I wanted to examine the ways in which the universal desire to be recognized as a citizen could be understood in the lens of African-American women's struggle to carve out a political identity.

But, as we hopefully move towards passage of our first major reform of the nation's immigration system in three decades, I want to broaden that lens to include the women who are the inheritors of that struggle.

At the intersection of immigration reform and women's rights are our sisters who are trying to become citizens. Immigrant women. Women make up more than half of America's undocumented population. Yet, immigration reform renders them and the concerns that are specific to their lives are largely invisible.

Immigration policy that privileges economic development and the work of undocumented men over families helped in the labor of immigrant women relegates women seeking citizenship to second class status. As Michelle Chen wrote this week in "Dissent" magazine, at a time when more American women are asking why they can't have it all, immigrant women endure a much crueler work life balance, mostly often without papers and largely Latina, they're exposed to chronic poverty, the threat of deportation and sexual

trauma. The struggle is inscribed on their bodies and reproductive destinies. Policy that pushes the concerns of immigrant women to the periphery would be better served by locating them where they belong at the center.

Women are most likely to be the initiators of the citizenship process for their families and their stake in this debate entitles them to a voice in policy decisions that affect their lives. These immigrant women are to be ushered fully into the American citizenship story. It will require an approach to immigration policy that recognizes and responds to their place on that path.

With me today, Jane Junn, professor of political science at the University of Southern California and author of the upcoming book, "the Politics of Belonging, race, immigration and public opinion." Jelani Cobb, associate professor at the University of Connecticut, Andrea Plaid, associate editor at racialicious.com and campaign manager for "drop the I-word" and Raquel Cepeda, author of "Birds of Paradise."

So, it is lovely to have you all here.

And Jane, I want to start with you because I spent the morning reading "the Politics of Belonging" which is your new manuscript. And part of what you talk about is this idea that immigration has always have to be understood to the racial prism of American belonging. Talk to me about that.

JANE JUNN, POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA:

I mean, it's always been the case that people who have come to the United States have been welcomed conditionally on the basis of race and ethnicity. And in particular, throughout, not only 18th and 19th century, but the 20th century as well. We've constructed our immigration policy around race.

In 1965 when we changed that to be occupational preferences and family reunification still has a relationship to race and ethnicity and in particular for Asian Americans with the change in only the 1950s taking away the exclusion, the full exclusion of Asians from naturalization and entry into the United States.

HARRIS-PERRY: Right. So, occupational preference sound like a racially neutral basis, right, but it is in fact not. Tell us why, again.

JUNN: Well, in part is people now think that Asian immigrants are all well-educated. Part of the reason they are well-educated is because that's a requirement to come to the United States. China was on the northern border and not Canada. You would see stereotypes similar to the 19th century when Asians were considered to be kumis (ph).

HARRIS-PERRY: Interesting.

So, on exactly that, that idea that there's not sort of a single thing, either you are American or you are not, I think we talk about citizenship in this kind of binary way.

Raquel, I wanted to sort of ask a little bit about that. Like this very notion of being an American citizen, how that is framed differently for Latino versus Latinas, how we just sort of don't tell the story of women. What are the specific challenges facing Latinas as we start to think about this notion of citizenship?

RAQUEL CEPEDA, AUTHOR, BIRD OF PARADISE: Well, the problem with Latinas in

particular is that one story narrative as well. So, we are kind of going through what our black American sisters went through for generations and generations where, you know, you just fit into one kind of place and that is that of being, you know, illegal, having anchor babies. It`s all these like really hyper stereotype kind of issues that we have to deal with coming in here. A lot of us come to this country well-educated and sometimes have to take jobs. Like I`ve met, you know, women -- I met women cab drivers who have doctorates in their homelands and all across the America they`re driving cabs to take care of their children, sometimes with their kids in tow. So, you know, I mean, we have to change that.

HARRIS-PERRY: This language of anchor babies is interesting, Andrea. You know, as I`ve been thinking of the Sister Citizen text which is really just about black women, right? But that language of the notion of who is the Mami has shifted, right? It was in the 19s and 20`s early 20th century about black women domestic, now it is primarily about Latina domestics, right? When we think about who doesn`t control their fertility, it was the welfare queen and still is. Now also the anchor baby language. What can we learn from each other`s struggles moving forward in this debate?

ANDREA PLAID, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, RACIALICIOUS.COM: I think we need to learn is the idea that we struggle together. And that we have similar struggles. Not the same struggle. Let`s not use terms of, well our blues is like mine. Because sometimes our blues aren`t like each other`s. But at the same time, we need to recognize that as for example African-Americans have migrated internally. We`re talking about the great migration. Now, we have our undocumented sisters who are migrating into this country and they have their struggles too. And we have to be able to say that their struggle is part of our struggle. And that we need to be able to be in solidarity with them as they do what they need to do to become citizens.

HARRIS-PERRY: And your solidarity lately has been about this drop the I word campaign. You were just at "The New York Times." So, the A.P. just accepted that there are no longer going to use illegal as a way to describe undocumented workers and immigrants in this country. You have been fighting around making "The New York Times" do the same thing.

PLAID: Absolutely. Because what happened is "The New York Times," we have spoken with "The New York Times" on drop the I-word on our partners such as present the national association of Hispanic journalists to persuade them to drop the I word. And we had an action, we delivered a --.

HARRIS-PERRY: I word is illegal, not immigrants.

PLAID: Even though it could be a double I word of illegal immigrants especially the way that "the New York Times" likes to use it. And so, what we did is we sent a petition of 70,000 strong to say to "The New York Times" to drop the id completely. And that was on Tuesday. This past Tuesday.

And what happened was they said we`re not going to drop it. We are going to use it in conjunction with other words that are more precise. And be reasonable for them to do this because we don`t want to take sides. Unfortunately, when you use the I word, you are taking a side. You are taking the wrong side. And that`s what we were trying to let "The New York Times" know, is that you are taking the wrong side

HARRIS-PERRY: So Jelani, I know that I always feels a little bit like a

segment like this becomes of this racial grievance segment, right? You`re saying mean things about us, you are calling us Mamie, You are calling us Jezebel, you are assuming that we`re not educated. But, it`s not just an emotional grievance. It has political consequences.

JELANI COBB, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT: Absolutely. And the one thing we have to understand about immigration policy, immigration law is that it has inordinately be concerned with the preservation of whiteness in this country.

Like that is the beginning point. You talk about the Chinese exclusion act in 1882. We are talking about the Japanese exclusion act and when we talk about really what we are dealing now which is the legacy of the 1924 immigration restriction act. And so, that act set the quota, that was what first said, we will be accepting people based upon national origins and then we will backlog it 30 years to the 1890 census meaning that your people were not already here, you couldn`t come here.

And so, what happened in 1965 was that this was changed, it was reformed. But there still is a whiff of that. And in terms of its impact, there`s completely this relationship analogous, the history of black people in this country, if nothing else then, the status of an undocumented person leaves millions of women vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

HARRIS-PERRY: And that`s exactly where I want to dig in as soon as we get back it this question of then, what is the (INAUDIBLE) look like differently for women of color as we continue to this more. Remember, it`s a two-hour show. We`re back at the top of the hour.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: Welcome back. I`m Melissa Harris-Perry.

When seeking to understand the ways in which immigration policies reinforces gender disparities for women, we need only remember the story of (INAUDIBLE).

In 2008, Viega (ph), an undocumented immigrant from Mexico was nine months pregnant when she was pulled over and ticketed for careless driving by a police officer in the Nashville suburb of Davidson County.

When she couldn`t produce a driver`s license, the officer bypassed the standard procedure in Tennessee for unlicensed drivers, which is to issue a citation. Instead, he followed an immigration agreement between the federal government and Davidson County that gives immigration enforcement powers to county officers.

Villegas was arrested and put in county jail for six days. During her time in custody, she gave birth. With the sheriff`s officer standing guard in her hospital room where she was shackled to the bed throughout her labor.

I`m back with University of Southern California`s Jane Junn; Jelani Cobb of the University of Connecticut, Andrea Plaid of Racialious.com; and Raquel Cepeda, author of "Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina".

So, this, to me, felt like such an example of what you were just talking about Jelani in terms of potential sexual exploitation. In this context, it`s about her giving birth. But it`s also about the fact the if she`s -- for Latinas who are working in agriculture, the rates of the likelihood of

sexual assault and then not being able to go forward with it and tell anyone because they're more worried about deportation than about the person who's been sexually assaulting them being arrested.

JELANI COBB, AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES, UCONN: This is what happens when you create two separate categories of labor. We understand this because it's precisely what happened with African-Americans. You create a group of people who can be hyper-exploited and sexual exploitation is almost impossible to separate from this. It does remind me just coincidentally of a narrative of black women who would give birth because they were not allowed to be in segregated hospitals and a different type of segregation.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes, Jane -- sorry.

RAQUEL CEPEDA, AUTHOR, "BIRD OF PARADISE": It's not only women who work in agriculture. I've seen undocumented women working at restaurants being groped. I've seen it. It's pretty, pretty disgusting. But you have 5 million children living with undocumented parents.

They're in danger. Their sisters and brothers are danger. Their families are in danger. And people know this, and they just exploit them. That's why we have a high rate also of Latinos in sexual slavery, for example, and prostitution rings.

HARRIS-PERRY: I think part of what you just said there is so important to part of what I was reading in the text, Jane, which is this idea that once I know that this is the kind of vulnerability that I'm potentially open to. So, if I'm Latina and I know there's a stereotype of me as being sexually available and that I don't control my sexuality, I have all these babies, and that I'm likely undocumented. But even if I'm an American citizen, I might not go forward and talk about my domestic violence or report the sexual violence in part because I recognize how the stereotypes will say what the interaction with authority is going to be like.

JANE JUNNN, POLITICAL SCIENCE PROF., USC: Right. I mean, it's very consistent with a lot of (INAUDIBLE) you make in the book about negative stereotypes contingencies and that is even if you don't feel that you fit that stereotype and you know that you don't fit the stereotype, if you have the sense that other people do, you're always worried that putting it forward, making it seem as if you might be there in that particular situation will end up reflecting negatively on you.

So, people will stay silent. People pull back. That is part of what stops in particular women of color from being the citizens that they can be.

HARRIS-PERRY: I wonder in part also about how when you're a community of people who is racially identifiable, even if -- even if we are racially identifying inaccurately, which is in part of what I want to talk to you about it, the behavior of any one person in the community, particularly if it is a negative behavior and it is highly publicized, then has the shaming impact and a silencing impact on the entire category of people, so that you end up not pressing for your rights in part because you're just trying to manage the shame that is associated with it.

ANDREA PLAID, RACIALICIOUS.COM: Secondary --

CEPEDA: That's OK.

PLAID: It's called what we call secondary embarrassment where one person

does something wrong and then the entire group is thinking. For example, the most recent example of what happened in Boston, with what happened with the young men who bombed the Boston marathon. Also, there is this thing of please let it not be us.

And I think that very much goes into the idea of that secondary embarrassment of they know the stereotypes about us and please don't let that person behave badly so it reflects badly on all of us and we have to suffer the repercussions.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, this becomes a way basketball-wise is somehow about shaming the entire category for exam of the black women.

CEPEDA: Loving hip hop for Latinas, because I know I cringe. But I wouldn't cringe because there are women that exist. If there was more biological and just economical, all kinds of diversity that show Latin women and black American women, Asian women, you know, as complex as we are, but it goes right back down to that one note.

And even, you know, terrorists are getting wind of this of how ridiculous they are. Let's recruit people who typically look white, who become white when they move here. Like, for example, Russian immigrants, they become white eventually. Their kids or grandkids, become white and therefore become privileged. When, you know, Latino Americans, other immigrants of color kind of become black, if you will.

HARRIS-PERRY: It's an interesting point. I mean, it's one that certainly has been associated with this angst about sort of Chechen Americans in the context of a post-Boston moment. But it didn't get read as Chechen or even as Russian, right, or certainly not as Caucasian, not people from the Caucasus, right? It gets read as Islamic, as Muslim.

COBB: Right. I think the fascinating thing about this is that when we saw that riveting moment where the uncle came out and gave that first talk about what he thought of his nephew's behavior, he said they brought shame upon Chechens, he didn't say they brought shame upon Muslim, he said they brought shame upon Chechens. We have no basis, we don't understand, most of us don't know where Chechnya is.

(CROSSTALK)

HARRIS-PERRY: Exactly.

CEPEDA: The ambassador coming out and saying, no, it's not Czechoslovakia.

COBB: The fascinating thing, however, as being -- having spent some time in Russia, is that people of Chechen descent are not considered white there. Many of the epithets that are used to describe Chechens are used to describe Africans. So, they move here and they're placed in a different context in terms of race and identities as the same.

HARRIS-PERRY: Jane, you talk about this process a little bit when you are citing Christina Beltran and you say that she writes Latina -- Latino is a verb, right? It's a way of becoming. There isn't an identity that is Latino. It's a thing that we create among people.

JUNN: Right. You don't become Latino or Latino until you come to the United States. You don't become Asian American until you arrive here. So, it is a process of racialization. The people then internalize and

understand those stereotypes that are attached to racial classification and influence the kinds of behaviors and attitudes people hold.

And the recognition that everybody who is not white is underneath in terms of political status, citizenship, belonging -- these are all conditional parts of citizenship that alter the way that we think about ourselves as Americans.

HARRIS-PERRY: How is this especially gendered? I mean, I guess part of -- as I thought about this for sort of race in terms of passing on blackness, right, what happens in the American context around slavery is that you take on the race of your mother in the context of slavery. The first gift that an enslaved black woman gives to her child is the status of slavery.

We actually made reproduction this process of enslavement. So, it does then feel to me like race for women, particularly for women who made reproducing, it ends up being a more difficult thing. And so, we hear anchor baby on the one hand. For Latinas, if immigration is racialized, how is it also gendered?

JUNN: Well, I mean, there are lots of examples of immigration law for example (INAUDIBLE) that I think it's 1875 which specifically is designed to stop Chinese women from coming to the United States, because of the idea that they would come and then repopulate the United States with more little Chinese babies. As a result, you also think about the moves against the 14th Amendment and the citizenship clause to eliminate birth rate citizenship and change that from the right of soil and to right of the blood.

And these are many ways, they may not be specifically coded or written as gendered laws. But in many ways, they are the opposition to the birthright citizenship is the basis of that. Is in the idea that women are going to come over here and drop their babies.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes.

CEPEDA: And you also see that with Latina American teenagers, the children of these immigrants, who have the highest rate of suicide ideation attempt in the country -- three times more likely than their white American counterparts and twice as likely as black American counterparts.

And I'm working on a documentary with a group of young teenagers from a suicide prevention program in the Bronx. They tell me that I don't feel aside from the pressures of being domesticated and wanting to go to school, I don't feel like I fit into white society or black American society, I'm in limbo. I'm living in limbo.

And that creates a community that's very shaky.

HARRIS-PERRY: Right. As most course in the emotional space. And so, then, there you are in that crooked room at the same time you're trying to do the work of American politics.

Thank you to Jane Junn and to Andrea Plaid. Jelani is going to hang out for more and Raquel is going to stay with me because she and I are going to talk about her beautiful new memoir, "Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latino".

But before we go to break, I want to send well wishes to my mentor and

adviser, Dr. Maya Angelou. She's a true sister citizen and a culture icon, the author of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." Dr. Angelou is recovering at home in North Carolina after being briefly hospitalized.

Dr. A, we here in Nerdland wish you a speedy recovery. And I know that you're facing this challenge with the same courage and spirit that you inspire in all of us.

We'll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: We've been talking about the politics of recognition immigrant women face in their quest for citizenship. For Latina immigrants and Latina Americans, construction of identity is crucial in creating a sense of belonging to a larger community. Creating identity is complex because being Latina is not truly racial or cultural or experiential. It's really a combination of all of these.

Back with me is Raquel Cepeda, author of the new book, "Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina", who literally did the work to find her identity.

CEPEDA: Thank you so much to you.

HARRIS-PERRY: Thank you for the book.

Talk to me a little bit, we were talking during the break about Dr. Maya Angelou, and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings".

How is it that a personal memoir helps us understand a bigger process?

CEPEDA: Because we deal with universal themes, like family dysfunction, sometimes unfortunately abuse, what it's like to be a woman, feminism, relationships with men, with our children. I think all of these universal themes allowed me to talk to a greater -- to a bigger, larger audience.

HARRIS-PERRY: Family dynamics in the book are breathtaking. I've known some of your work. But I didn't know your personal story until I read the text. I want to read one piece in particular where you have this interaction with your mother when you're very young.

And you say to her, "Mommy, I have to go. I'm sorry, I say. I want to have a better life." She says to you, "What do you know what a better life is?"

And you say to her, "I know what it's not, mommy. You've shown me that much." She says to you, "Go to hell. I hope you die, and go to hell with your father."

It was April 1981 and I'm almost eight. She says this to you when you're 8.

CEPEDA: Yes.

HARRIS-PERRY: How impactful is that in shaping who you are?

CEPEDA: Well, I never really got a chance to know her well. I used to see her as a sister figure. I grew up thinking that my aunt -- maybe hoping that my aunt was my birth mother. So, my mother's words never had a lot of weight because I kind of like all children do, judge her by her actions and not by her words, which didn't really have many words in between us. Not

when I was living with her.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, that sense of distance and actually ends up being a protective barrier.

CEPEDA: Yes, it's never really hurt me. I mean, sometimes people read it, like I remember you said you knew my work but not about my life. Even when my husband when he read was like shocked beyond belief. And we were best friends before we were married.

And he's like, oh, my God, I didn't know you went through this. And I'm like, well, to me it's just a thing. It's not a really struggle memoir. It's more about the search of identity.

HARRIS-PERRY: It's interesting that you say that, because it doesn't -- I mean, on the one hand, there are shocking moments but it doesn't feel like I'm flogging through this struggle. Instead, it does feel like I'm peeling back the layers of identity.

Tell me about -- for folks who haven't read it yet, tell me about the decision and the way that you become Latina.

CEPEDA: Well, it was going to not be memoirs. It was supposed to be like about reportage and looking at Latino identity. And then I say, you know, sometimes when you add your own personal story, kind of like I said before, appeals to more people.

And I want to show that we are just as American as everybody else. We had the same struggles and dynamics in our families. So the first part of the book was like a memoir and actually bird comes from, I know why the caged birds sing. It's a nod to Dr. Maya Angelou.

And the second part, "How I Became Latina" is a chronicle about finding out how exactly literally I became Latina, how did I become Latina before I was Dominican-American. What are my ancestors? What happened for me to become Latina? Who intermingled?

And what I found out was kind of remarkable.

HARRIS-PERRY: And a lot of how you find out who intermingled was a DNA, I mean, part of it was the tracing of the family story. But the other big part of it is the DNA. Tell me about that part.

CEPEDA: That was just -- it was incredible. I mean, I saw Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. do his work. And I just thought, it was really interesting. I'm like, you know, I feel like it would be interesting to do this with the Latino community, because as Greenspan said from family tree DNA, when you're dealing with Latinas, it's like a genetic crapshoot, which is do not -- you can't guesstimate what's going to happen.

Because of Dominican Republic where my parents come from, is the seat of the new world of all of the Americas, it was the first place that had a successful European colony, the first place that had slaves brought in, African slaves and the indigenous American slavery movement and all of these other people, New Orleans before it was New Orleans.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes.

CEPEDA: You just don't know. You just don't know who mixes in. What I did was took a DNA test. I started with myself. Then I had my dad take a

DNA test and from then on, starting meeting family members I didn't know existed and had them help me create the branches on a tree.

HARRIS-PERRY: Well, I'm so appreciative of the book because it's the science of the DNA. It's the personal narrative of the finding of the self. It's a little bit of hip hop thrown in there.

CEPEDA: Of course.

HARRIS-PERRY: It's all those different things. It really is a lovely book.

Thank you for joining us today.

CEPEDA: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

HARRIS-PERRY: And coming up next, a four-year long investigation into adoption. The impact of a conservative Christian agenda.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: When you think about adoption, we often have a picture in our head of a childless couple who want so much to start a family but can't, or of a parentless child in need of a home.

But recently, with the publicity of A-list celebrities adding to their broods, through transnational adoption, adopting across and abroad has become increasingly popular and aligned with humanitarian causes. But in fact, the history of transnational adoption has been rife with abuse.

Just five years ago, Guatemala put a temporary moratorium on adoptions, \$100 million industry, after years of reported abuses like child thefts and coercion of birth mothers. Since then, transnational adoptions have moved to other parts of the world with very similar outcomes. And as international adoption in recent years has evolved into an evangelical movement, charges of abuse have unfortunately, only grown.

Preaching the gospel of adoption, American evangelicals have an outside-sized role in overseas adoption, reportedly of some 200 accredited adoption agencies listed with the state department, 50 agencies including some of largest are explicitly Christian and evangelical.

Author and journalist Kathryn Joyce lays out the global reach of these agencies in her new book, "The Child Catchers: Rescue, Trafficking and the New Gospel of Adoption". She joins me now.

Thank you for being here.

KATHRYN JOYCE, AUTHOR, "THE CHILD CATCHERS": Thank you so much, Melissa.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, talk to me. What is orphan theology?

JOYCE: Well, in the last few years what you started to see at a lot of evangelical churches was an emphasis on their idea that Christians really had to get involved in orphan care and adoption, and they were saying that this is a way that adoption is mirroring the Christian salvation experience. So, just as God adopts Christians, Christian parents need to go and adopt children.

HARRIS-PERRY: It's also the other side of the abortion debate, right? It's not that we're against abortion, we're for adoption. We're going to

provide an alternative for women who feel like they can't carry a pregnancy all the way to term?

JOYCE: Absolutely. I think adoption has always been very involved in the abortion debate. But now, this has become a way for Christians to be what they call more whole life, to have a more holistic pro-life or anti-abortion message, to say we don't just care about children inside the womb, but we care after they're born as well.

HARRIS-PERRY: Of course, the challenge is that the anti-abortion policies are domestic and the adoption is largely happening globally, transnationally.

Why is that?

JOYCE: Well, after Roe v. Wade and the changes in society in the 1970s, domestic adoption in the U.S. dropped dramatically. I think it went from around 20 percent of unmarried white women, Christian children for adoption, to now more around 1 percent. So for years, there have been many more willing prospective adoptive parents than there are domestic infants available for adoptions, so people started looking overseas.

And now, they've been helped along by the idea that overseas, there are hundreds of millions of orphans in need of adoption.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, the book was tough for me, because I entered into reading about adoption, thinking about my friends, thinking about colleagues who either are themselves adopted or have adopted and did so out of such a great largess of heart.

JOYCE: Absolutely.

HARRIS-PERRY: Then I'm reading that within these individual people who may be making loving choices is a system that is as far as I can tell in many countries taking children from -- perhaps not what we think of families, but certainly from communities that could have been providing care for those children.

JOYCE: Absolutely. In my reporting and talking to sources, I came across families in countries like Ethiopia who had relinquished children for adoption, several siblings, thinking that they were providing a great educational opportunity for their children. I think a thing that we really need to understand is that United States, our definition of adoption is not universal. In other countries, there are traditions of adoption, a lot of times, it looks more like guardianship or a sponsorship where you send your child to a wealthier relative to give them better opportunities in life.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, in other words, people might think to themselves, oh, I'm allowing you to adopt, by which they think they mean, I'm giving an opportunity to go to boarding school in the U.S. They don't realize they're losing parental rights.

JOYCE: Right. Some of them think their children will return in just a couple of years. Some think that this is a way for the whole family to advance a little bit and become a little bit more stable. You are investing in this one child to go and get a better education and then they will return.

So it's just not the same idea that we have of a complete transference of

parental rights.

HARRIS-PERRY: One of the key stories you tell about abuses is immediately after the Haitian earthquake, and the idea that many people, again, of goodwill, unfortunately, though, took this as opportunity to basically go scoop children out, children who had living parents or grandparents or aunts and uncles. Tell me the Haiti story.

JOYCE: Well, right after Haiti, there was just an incredible emphasis on adoption. I feel like this is a way a lot of American media approached the story was not necessarily looking at the entirety of the tragedy. But looking at it through the lens of Americans who were connected to Haiti because they were in some -- in some part of the process of adopting from Haiti. So, a lot of the media attention focused on how do we get the children who are matched with American parents out? And a lot of the attention went there.

With that, there started being some probably incredibly well-intentioned but vigilante missionaries who went down there. I think a lot of people remember the story of Laura Silsby (ph) and the missionaries from Idaho who went and were caught at the border of the Dominican Republic trying to transport 33 children across the border.

So this is the way, I mean, that was a sloppy example, but this is the way that frequently very good intentions can fall into serious problems.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes, it's also the example, the fact that it wasn't as though America said, oh, Haitian people, adults and children, please come. It was like, let's just save the kids.

JOYCE: Right.

HARRIS-PERRY: Stay with us. We're going to add a few more voices here to the table and I want to continue on this conversation.

JOYCE: Thank you.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: We've been discussing the evangelical mission for transnational adoption, which has become a movement among some devout Christian families -- a movement of hundreds of individual families, parents and children in this country each with their own individual and particular stories.

So, joining at my table are two people who have been involved in the transnational adoption process.

Karen Moline is a mother who adopted her son from Vietnam in 2001 and is a board member for the Parents for Ethical Adoption reform.

And Tarikuwa Lemma was adopted at age 13 from the Ethiopia, who struggle with two failed adoptions in the United States.

Also with us, University of Connecticut historian Jelani Cobb.

So, I want to start with you, Tarikuwa, when I say failed adoption, what does that mean? What is your story?

TARIKUWA LEMMA, ADOPTED FROM ETHIOPIA AT AGE 11: When I was 13, my two

younger sisters and I came to America to corrupted adoption we've seen. They told us that we were going to America for educational exchange program and once we got to America, we found out that we were adopted. We didn't know what that meant.

So our family told us -- that American family told us that they are our forever family and I reacted with a lot of grief and anger because I didn't want a new family. I have family in Ethiopia.

HARRIS-PERRY: How do they respond to your reasonable grief and anger?

LEMMA: I think they didn't really react that well because they wanted to adopt a child who was an orphan and that adoption agency told them false information. And it was kind of my word against the adoption agency, and plus, they just spent all this money. And that they're like we can't take you back because like you're our kid by law.

So, my sister and I just lived there for a while and later on, I found out that they changed our names too. That's one of the reasons why the adoption fell I think. I was angry and I grieve over my name changed because I didn't want a new name. We already have Ethiopian given name. And then they stopped us from speaking our native languages.

HARRIS-PERRY: And you at this point were 13. You weren't an infant who someone changed their name. You were a young woman.

LEMMA: Yes.

HARRIS-PERRY: Your story, Kathryn, is the kind of story you tell in the book that is so hard for me to even comprehend how such a thing happens. How the set of public policies or individual decisions allow a child who has a family, a community, even a name to be ripped out of that, around a sort of missionary notion of it being better in the United States.

JOYCE: Absolutely. I think what happens in a lot of cases, as in Tarikuwa's, is that there is so much emphasis and there is so much enthusiasm for adoption in the United States and especially in the Christian adoption movement, a lot of people are very deeply moved by the idea that there are hundreds of millions of orphans in need.

And so, if agencies are going out there and saying, sometimes they're taking videos of children and presenting these children sometimes in your case, they were giving false fact stories, saying, you know, these children are destitute, these children are about to be completely orphaned, they might end up in a terrible circumstance and prostitution or something like that, this sort of misinformation can start at the very local level. Then it comes across the ocean and parents here, prospective parents here are seeing that and are deeply moved.

And they move forward with an adoption and there have been lies and misinformation kind of seeded in from the very beginning.

HARRIS-PERRY: And, Karen, then what is a parent, someone who does feel moved, maybe even has a sense of purpose as is part of the language often around the evangelical part of the movement, how do you find an ethical way to be engaged in adoption?

KAREN MOLINE, ADOPTED SON FROM VIETNAM: Well, I think what you have to do first is examine your motives of going internationally, because, you know,

what I say often if you're dealing with a corrupt country that has corrupt practices in every aspect of its business, why would you assume that the adoption business is exempt from the same sort of practices that taint other industries?

And when you have a very emotional process, which is the need and the want to be a parent, coupled with a business model that doesn't work, you have this clash of not knowing what to do. I think because the stories that like we've just heard are not -- are not isolated examples. If anything, I've learned over my years since I adopted in 2001, corrupt stories are more commonplace than the non-corrupt ones.

But it's very, very difficult for honest, ethical, well-meaning people to believe the depth of depravity that take place in this business bringing these children to this country.

And so, the root of it, as it says in the Bible, of all evil is money. There are staggering sums of money paid to these countries, and it's not that the money shouldn't -- some form of sum shouldn't be paid for child care, for bureaucratic processing. But there is absolutely no transparency where the funds are going.

And if you're paying tens of thousands of dollars to a country, you should see something for your money. You should see orphanages that have decent care and schooling and nannies. You should see just people taking care of these children and you don't. You have starving babies and starving children.

So getting back to your question, I personally would not recommend adopting internationally now because you have no control over the process. I would recommend foster to adopt in this country. The problem is there aren't babies. There are very few young children as Kathryn said.

There aren't (INAUDIBLE) like they were -- most children in the foster care system in this country are older children, you know, 4 and older. I'm not sure what the actual statistic of the average age is.

So, you know, when you also have a religious fervor driving your intentions and some of the worst abuses unfortunately, have come from faith-based agencies, I think in part because the parishioners do not -- are not morally capable of believing that somebody who was a Godly person, a prayerful good person is not just lying, but is stealing children, is harming innocent victims like the one sitting right here. They cannot believe it so they won't believe it.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes, stay right here. I want to talk a bit more from you and also talk a bit more about some of the ways, which is that it does happen in our own country, across a different kind of international line. That's the international line of the U.S. state and other questions.

So when we come back. I'm sorry. It's a lot, but I do want to hear, I want to hear --

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: In 1978, after decades of gross overreach by some state child services agencies who were ripping Native American children from their parents and putting them up for adoption, the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed. The law provided custodial preference to Native American

parents ending in what an example of Minnesota was the forced adoption of one quarter of Native American babies less than a-year-old.

Last week, oral arguments were heard at the U.S. Supreme Court for the case adoptive couple versus baby girl. At issue, a little girl conceived by an American Indian man and a non-Indian woman. And this little girl was adopted by a South Carolina couple who raised her as their own for more than a year.

With the girl's biological father, member of the Cherokee Nation, invoked the Indian Child Welfare Act to reclaim his daughter. And the South Carolina Supreme Court sided with him. The girl has been living with her biological father, Dustin Brown (ph), since early 2012. And her long-term fate now rests with the U.S. Supreme Court.

Joining us now is Jacqueline Pata, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians and a member of the Raven/Sockeye Clan of the Tlingit Tribe.

Nice to see you again, Jackie.

JACQUELINE PATA, NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS: Thank you.

HARRIS-PERRY: So I want to put this in the context of this adoption piece. I don't really want you to adjudicate this particular case, the baby girl case. Explain to me why the Indian Child Welfare Act even exists.

PATA: Well, you know, in the years up to 1978 when Congress passed this law of the Indian Child Welfare Act, there were like a third of our children were in foster care and outside of our communities, 90 percent of them were in homes outside of our communities and we had the highest adoption rates in the country. Eight percent nationally, some states were double, more than double those rates. And the tribal leaders were very concerned about the loss of our children to our communities.

And we also had studies that said our children outside of their communities were not, didn't stick to their culture, they weren't successful, we had more suicides. We knew that the trauma of our children leaving our communities was both on the families and on the children coming up.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, you know, it feels to me, Jackie, like part of what I hear you saying and part what I want to include this is we're talking about the transnational adoption. But to the extent that indigenous tribes in the U.S. are also their own nations, this is a kind of transnational baby-snatching that was happening right here within U.S. borders.

PATA: Yes. And we had a lot of policies that have actually removed children from our families. We had the boarding school era. We had those other kinds of eras. But it's shocking still today. How many native students, how many native children are in the foster care system and placed outside of our tribal community.

So the Indian Child Welfare Act was one that says let's shore up, make sure that the family gets the children first, the extended family gets the children, the tribe gets the children or another Indian family gets the children before you look at others outside entities.

HARRIS-PERRY: It feels to me like the thing that is similar with your story as we were talking in the break, it's this idea that, well, it's just

better to be in America. You should feel grateful that you were -- which is the same language used for indigenous children. Just be happy that you have a family.

LEMMA: Yes. They were saying they saved us from a horrible life in Africa, and how we should just be grateful. And that's -- like a lot of people have attitude about that.

But I'm -- I was living in the middle class family in Ethiopian standards. I had extended family. I had a community that could have taken care of me. My father was told by the adoption agency, it's only for educational exchange.

So he wanted us to get the American education and come back. He didn't want us to get a new family.

HARRIS-PERRY: Right, because you had one.

LEMMA: Yes.

HARRIS-PERRY: Jelani, I mean, you're here at the table because when I recall the history and even the present reality of Indian -- American Indian tribes and then I hear the story of taking 13-year-old children from the continent of Africa, changing their name, separating them from family -- I mean, slavery is the only word that comes to mind.

COBB: Yes. I mean, there are probably people with problems with this. That's just what it is. I don't -- it's very difficult to hear your story and remain composed. The analogy that comes directly to mind, the sort of cultural arrogance is the worst form of Americanism. The belief that everyone would be better if they were like us and will bestow upon us the gifts of our society even gets your will is the same logic at the bottom of the slave trade.

HARRIS-PERRY: And, Jackie, the other piece of logic that was part of the slave trade and part of the adoption story is part of the missionary aspect -- this idea that you're not only saving this child from the subpar culture but saving them through connections to the gospel.

PATA: Correct. In Indian country, the missionary effort, they divided Indian country, and they said, OK, certain areas will be certain religions and we have a great deal of influence of religious various religions in our communities.

But we have a great cultural revival which is part of the healing process of bringing our families back together from the boarding schools, the Christian boarding schools, and now, trying to be able to shore up those children for the next generations and keeping this act in place is a tool that's going to help us keep our children at home.

HARRIS-PERRY: So, Karen, what are the other policies that we need? Part of what the Indian Child Welfare Act is about the fact that we needed policy to address this. And we see internationally other countries stepping in and saying, you know what, America, you simply cannot adopt our children. What are the domestic policies we need?

MOLINE: Well, the domestic policies are much more severe regulations of adoption agencies. Part of the problem with international adoption is that the State Department issues the visa for the children to come to this

country, so that's federal. But adoption agencies are state regulated. States do not have the money to look after domestic adoption, which is foster care and other child care services.

So, international adoption agency problems are at the bottom of their list. To be fair to them, they just don't have the budgets to oversee this. Adoption agencies know it.

And adoptive parents have problems with ethics of their agencies have very little recourse aside from suing, which is a very long process. The Hague standards which were supposed to combat or lessen corruption and trafficking are in my opinion a complete joke and travesty because most of the Hague regulations were written by adoption agencies.

So, if you file a complaint of a Hague-regulated agency, the agency gets a copy of the complaint. So, you know, from day one, you're sort of screwed in the middle of the process. You don't know where your money is going. You don't know who the employees are internationally. You have very little recourse. People don't believe you. You're harassed and threatened as we have as brave adoptive parents who dared to speak out. Agencies are threatened and harassed and some even been sued by adoption agencies. So, it starts at the state level with better regulation of adoption agencies and there must be transparency where the sums of money are going.

HARRIS-PERRY: Where the money going. Kathryn, I felt like part of this as I was reading this, this is the other thing that kept feeling like slavery to me. Somebody is making a lot of money off of this process.

JOYCE: Right, right. International adoptions are hugely expensive. On average, they're about \$30,000. Sometimes it ranges up to even \$60,000. It's not as though that money is going in one lump sum to any one person or any one agency. It's broken down into a lot of different parts.

But, you know, agencies depend on these fees in order to stay in business. When countries tighten their regulations, you see agencies going out of business. That happened just in --

HARRIS-PERRY: They jump countries.

JOYCE: They jump countries and if they can't find a country that has enough adoptable children, then they end up going bankrupt. Their business model is based on having enough children.

But also what we saw in some countries like Ethiopia in the early days of adoption there, when agencies did not have all the orphanages their orphanages set up yet, some of them were working directly with what are essentially child finder, a fixed fee to people who could go out to the rural who don't have understanding of adoption, and bring them in under whatever sort of circumstances.

HARRIS-PERRY: Jackie, I want to e with you on this one, just because, you know, I got in a trouble for a "Lean Forward" commercial where I suggested that it was a community responsibility to children. Part of what people said to me is, oh, this is about the state wanting to snatch your kids.

And as soon as I thought, and I thought that there is one group who has a right to field actual threat and concern about that, and that is in the context of this country Native Americans. So, again, just -- if you could tell us just one more time. In the context of this, again, not to

adjudicate this particular case, but is the Indian Child Welfare Act itself potential going to go away, depending on how the Supreme Court decides this custody decision?

PATA: You know, I'm afraid there will continue to be challenges on the Indian Child Welfare Act, just because there are adoption agencies that are looking for, you know, children. But the most important thing in this particular case is if the law was followed, we wouldn't have had this case. The law was very clear, the attorneys knew what the responsibility was.

And we see this -- this is not just one case, we see it across the country, where the states or the lawyers don't follow the law and go first to the family and make sure that there's a family -- to see if there's a family member who would like the children.

HARRIS-PERRY: Yes. So, this is the story.

Thank you so much, Jackie Pata, in Washington, D.C. Also, thank you, Kathryn, for the book, which I think really shed important light. Thank you to Karen and Tarikuwa. And also to Jelani for spending some time with us today.

Up next, last night was prom night, twice. It was a good night for nerds, when we come back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HARRIS-PERRY: It's prom season. Last night, there were two proms that we at MHP Show have been anxiously anticipating.

The first was Washington, D.C., and officially the event was the White House Correspondents' Dinner. It's not technically a prom. It's a dinner where the big dogs of the federal government spend the evening rubbing elbows with Hollywood celebrities and the New York and D.C. political media.

In recent years, it has become known as nerd prom, presumably because only political nerds to be excited about being in the room with the secretary of labor and folks like MSNBC's S.E. Cupp and Thomas Roberts, kind of a nerd swoon.

But a great piece from "The Atlantic" claims that nerd prom actually isn't very nerdy. In fact, they're highly unscientific assessment of this year's attendees put the celebrity to nerd ratio at about 19:1. If only the MHP Show team had attended, I'm sure we could have upped the nerd factor.

But while I may have missed the prom, I did make an appearance at the MSNBC after-party. Well, not me exactly, I was here. But there was a cool Ben and Jerry's flavor developed just the occasion. That's right. While my colleague Rachel Maddow was tending bar, nerd prom revelers got to enjoy Melissa Harris-Berry extravaganza, described as being as fresh and trendy as MHP. We kind of love that.

But nothing made us happier than the other prom last night. This one in rural Georgia. Wilcox County High School hosted its first ever integrated prom. And as we told you a few weeks ago, Wilcox County High School proms are private parties, not school sponsored events. And since the 1970s, the parents have been hosting two proms, one for black students and the other one for white students.

All that changed last night, thanks for four students, two black and two white, and all their dedicated friends and classmates who set up a Facebook page, garnered national attention, raised money and threw a party that was open to all students, regardless of race.

Nerd prom and integrated prom, I may not have been in attendance, but as far as I'm concerned, it just doesn't get any better than integrated nerds.

That's our show for today. Thanks to you at home for watching. I'm going to see you next Saturday, 10:00 a.m. Eastern.

"WEEKENDS WITH ALEX WITT" today live from Washington, D.C.

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