Duane: I have a fig tree that is called the mighty Georgian Pine and now the only reason that I have this tree is because my daughters were born in California and one of them seemed to have developed an allergy to a Christmas tree one year. So we went and got this ancient, this antique, tree called the mighty Georgian pine, as I said, and it takes hours to assemble.

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Ebony: A publication series titled The Whiplash Decade. This decade was really odd and there was a hinge in the middle of it. What I think has happened ... I so agree with Fish here. I think that the great American middle is like the quest in Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings. We're at the edge of a knife. They could either way.

At the beginning of this decade I was graduating from college. 10 years is a long time. I guess it depends on the time in your life, right? It could be 10 years and like, "Ugh, not a whole lot changed," right? But for me this decade has been huge. I'm so grateful to be where I am.

Julie: I'm so grateful to be in the position that I'm in, to be able to say anything, to have a microphone in front of my face right now on this campus is not what I ever thought was going to happen for me this year or this decade.

Julie: Welcome to the Office Hours holiday office party a special edition of Penn Today's podcast series as we close the calendar year and the full year of the Office Hours podcast. To catch up on all the one-on-one sessions we've hosted with Penn's brilliant minds this year check us out on Apple Music, Spotify, and Google Podcasts.

Brandon: Today Office Hours embraces the spirit of the season and hosts its own office party by welcoming back three returning guests Mr. Fish, a satirist, cartoonist, and visiting lecturer at the Annenberg School for Communication, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Education, and Julie Ticona Assistant Professor at Annenberg.

Brandon: Together we muse about the holidays yet to come, the year that's been, and what we can anticipate in the new decade. And yes, like any holiday gathering, a little bit of politics. From our Penn family to yours we wish you a safe ad happy holiday.

Brandon: All right, welcome to the holiday office party.

Brandon: Wooh!

Julie: Cue excitement.
Brandon: I love it. How about everybody go around and introduce themselves again for anybody who's a repeat listener since you've all been here before.

Julie: Sure. Should I go first? Okay, great. I'm Julie Ticona. I am an assistant professor at the Annenberg School for Communication.

Duane: Hi. My name is Duane Booth. My pen name is Mr. Fish, so many people know me as Professor Fish. Sometimes they call me Dr. Fish, which I like, which I did not earn. I'm a visiting lecturer at the Annenberg School of Communications.

Ebony: Hello. I am Ebony Elizabeth Thomas. I am an associate professor at the Graduate School of Education. And it's really cool to be here.

Brandon: We're recording this in the middle of finals week. How's everybody surviving? I know that you said that your brain is usually scrambled eggs by now, Ebony?

Ebony: Well, here's the funny thing. I have been on leave this term and I am still at the scrambled egg phase of brain right now. It is just incredible. I don't know how that happened. I am not teaching any fall courses.

Julie: It's just the time of year.

Ebony: I don't think it's the time of year.

Julie: I don't think it's the teaching thing, yeah.

Ebony: The most wonderful time of the year.

Brandon: How about everybody else?


Brandon: Surviving?

Julie: Yeah. My final papers have not yet come in. They're actually due, anybody who's listening, due 5:00 PM today. Yeah, so I think maybe tomorrow I'll be in a different state and on Monday certainly as all those late papers come rolling in. But yeah, so far so good.

Duane: Yeah, I guess I'm doing okay. I'm sure that my colleagues can attest to the fact that you get to the end of the year, end of the semester, and you start to have that feeling of just like, "Wow, I've done a really great job."

Duane: And then, you see some papers that come in and say, "You know what? I didn't do the greatest job I possibly could have. I'm a genius. Why aren't my kids learning from me?"
Brandon: Yes, Dr. Fish. I guess let's breathe and start festive. Tell me a little bit about your favorite thing about the holidays or if you can't stand the holidays tell me why.

Duane: Wow.

Julie: My favorite thing about the holidays is easy. I love latkes. Potato pancakes are my favorite thing about my holiday season where ...

Brandon: Aren't they just hash browns? I'm so confused by this.

Julie: Brandon. Kind of, but no, of course not. I don't like making them. They're extremely labor intensive and they stink up your entire house and so we will not be making them in my house this year. Because we finally painted a few rooms of our house and I have this horrible vision of the paint absorbing all the fried onion and potato smell and never letting it go for the rest of our time in this house.

Duane: Forever a scratch and sniff.

Julie: Exactly. Scratch it. Actually, if it requires scratching I feel like that would be fine actually. It would just be kind of the lingering smell that would be bad.

Julie: But they are so delicious. When I was a kid my entire family could get involved and I have very vivid memories of now deceased family members just like grating their finger nails and parts of their fingers into the latkes and everybody's got to-

Brandon: What an image.

Julie: You've got to press the water out. It's a hardship, but they're so delicious at the end probably fingers included I would say.

Brandon: [inaudible 00:06:19].

Duane: I remember that famous painting by Normal Rockwell in the Saturday Evening Post where people are losing their fingers to the creation of this dish.

Julie: Yeah, that's right. That's about right, yeah.

Brandon: Any other takers?

Duane: Everybody's looking at me, I guess. Yeah, I don't know. I mean just like any other part of life and other part of the year there's blessings and also certain aggravations with the holidays that we all can attest to. So depending on when you ask a person, they will either be celebratory or they'll be just hanging their heads.
Duane: I'm too distracted to either one of those things at this point because it is the end of the semester and I am still not at all in holiday mode. I haven't gotten a single gift for anyone.

Brandon: Do you indulge in the commercial end of it?

Duane: No. It's funny you say that because my kids are now ... I've got twin daughters and they're both just 16 now. I've been trying to push this for the last three years at least where I try to tell them that commercialism and the commodification of everything is evil and that we should not do anything and sleep in on Christmas day.

Julie: How's that going over for you with 16 year olds?

Duane: It doesn't go over, not at all. Not at all. They just laugh and laugh and laugh. So yeah, so that's where I am. I've got to do something for 16 year old girls that have jobs though and so they're paying for everything. The oddest thing that they both just asked for for Christmas is to just paint their rooms.

Brandon: Wow.

Duane: I know.

Julie: That's permission. They want authority is what they want.

Duane: Yeah, but you know what?

Julie: That's what teenage girls want.

Duane: Here's the second part of that. Do you know what they want to paint their rooms? White. Yeah, it's all very confusing.

Brandon: I don't know if you can put a bow on authority. That's the problem with that gift.

Julie: You could. I would like to see that present wrapped.

Duane: Yeah.

Ebony: But I mean we're sort of at the end of that minimalist trend so maybe white is in for rooms. I watched a lot of HGTV while I was out and everything was white and gray, and as a generation Xer I don't quite understand.

Duane: Maybe it reflects ... This is when we bring in politics. Maybe it reflects our comprehension of politics in the culture now. It's either black or it's white or it's a very sort of unsettling gray. I just brought this. This is not part of the festival.

Ebony: Well, it is a great time of year weather wise, I guess.
Brandon: Is it?

Ebony: Today it's nice and Sunny in Philadelphia where it's always sunny.

Brandon: Of course.

Ebony: My favorite holiday tradition is actually apple cider because I am a Michigander. And every time I say Michigander in Philadelphia people laugh and say, "Well, why not Michiganian?" "Because," I said, "Michiganian is for people who don't live there. We are Michiganders and we are proud of it."

Ebony: And so, I make ... Well, I don't make my own apple cider. I wish. "Penn Professor makes her own apple cider."

Brandon: Yeah, moonlighting.

Ebony: But I maul my own cider and I love the scent of the spice. For me that's the holidays.

Brandon: The scent of the spice. Do you guys get a tree?

Ebony: I have a tree.

Julie: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Duane: I have a fake tree that is called the mighty Georgian pine. And now, the only reason that I have this tree is because my daughters were born in California and one of them seemed to have developed an allergy to a Christmas tree one year. So we went and got this ancient, this antique, tree called the mighty Georgian pine, as I said, and it takes hours to assembly.

Duane: I'm just convinced that surrendering, not having the actual tree, to avoid somebody sort of sniffing ... I think she's over it at this point. But whatever chemicals are on that, this is like an asbestos tree. I think this thing was assembled in like 1939 or something. So we'll see. We'll see how this all plays out.

Julie: In my house there's the great war of the menorah versus tree. There's a lot of like whose decorations are cooler and bigger or more central or which could be multivocal, right?

Julie: Can we have like Christmas lights? White Christmas lights are very all purpose, but there are other very specific things. It makes me realize how specific all these decorations get.

Julie: Although we do have these Santa hat yarmulke that a friend gave us a few years ago for blended families like mine. They're adorable and we wear them all eight nights. And actually, this year Hanukkah and Christmas are right next to each other. They're actually ... Hanukkah's over Christmas, so we'll be making good use of those this year.
Brandon: Yeah, fantastic timing. What do you all have planned for your time off?

Julie: Time off? I'm sorry. What? What was that word?

Ebony: What is this time off of which you speak?

Duane: Right, spring semester just comes slamming in pretty quick, doesn't it?

Brandon: Oh no, no time off? You don't take a break after all those finals are graded and issued.

Ebony: I am going back to my beloved Michigan. I'm going from chilly to freezing cold. But then, when you're in Michigan you're just happy that you're not in Chicago, Wisconsin, or Minnesota, or the Dakotas because you're always looking west to see what's colder every morning. Winter here is just a dream-

Julie: It is.

Ebony: ...except for when there are nor'easters. At first, I said, "What is this winter of which you speak?" And then I encountered my first nor'easter. We do not have those in Michigan.

Ebony: We don't even get the lake effect snow in metro Detroit, so I didn't know what I was encountering. It was like, "Well, there are two and a half feet of snow outside my door. I can't open the door. What is this?" I don't know if others had experiences with snow or winter weather or associate that with this time of year.

Duane: I'm actually from this area, but my wife and I moved to California and lived there for 13 years and that's where the girls were born. I got used to not knowing it was winter until I say in the Taco Bell drive through somebody sprayed fake snow around the pane of glass.

Duane: And the girls still ... They've been living ... We moved back here when they were five turning six. But they still insist that they've been misplaced from California. They were born at Cedar Sinai. They're Beverly Hills kids.

Julie: Oh wow.

Duane: They're blonde. They don't look anything like me. So yeah, the winter continues to try to kill them and I tell them just to relax.

Julie: I'm from southern Canada way upstate New York.

Ebony: You win.

Julie: Not actual Canada, but basically.

Ebony: No, but still you win.
Julie: We get the lake effect snow, is what I grew up with, and it's just absurd. It's absolutely absurd. No human ... Human beings are not supposed to live there. They're just not.

Julie: But the human beings that do decide to live there have adapted this insane attitude about the snow that it like defines our worth and our ability to not have delays or closures of school is a big part of who we are up there.

Julie: And so, when I moved from upstate New York to Charlottesville, Virginia where I finished my grad schooling and there was like a warning of an inch that was coming and everything shutdown, I was very dismissive and I thought, "Who are these wimps, right? What's happening here?" And then, I realized that they have like one snow plow. It's not their fault. There's no resources.

Julie: And then, I kind of realized all the infrastructure that actually backs up the ability of my town and everybody I it to just kind of keep trucking during the winter. It has nothing to do with the people, although it's all run by people, but it has to do with the city and all these machines and the

Brandon: Salt, yeah.

Julie: ... salt that they throw on it-

Brandon: They have massive amounts of salt.

Julie: ... and they people that drive the plows and all that, obviously. But there's just much different resources devoted to weather in different places. I'd never appreciated that.

Duane: My first rainy ... When I moved to California.

Julie: Oh god, yeah.

Duane: My first serious rainfall. I was just driving to work and there were cars upside down on fire because commuters they just don't know.

Ebony: That's not funny. That's not funny.

Duane: Water is falling from the sky and they just don't know what to do. It was just rain. It was shocking to me.

Brandon: So, everybody putting on their professor hat for a minute, I'm interested in having a reflective moment thinking about the year that has been. Because even though it is the holidays, the holidays also includes a new year and a new decade as it turns out.

Ebony: Oh yeah.

Duane: Oh my.
Brandon: So just thinking back on your year, what is a professional accomplishment at Penn that really stands out at you from the year that has been 2019. Oh my gosh, let's go.

Ebony: My first book was published in May.

Julie: Yahh!

Brandon: Congratulations.

Julie: Huge.

Ebony: PSA.

Julie: What's it called?

Ebony: It is called The Dark Fantastic Race and The Imagination From Harry Potter to Hunger Games and New York University Press published it. Thank you very much NYU Press because that was book for tenure and I made tenure. I am thrilled that it's out in the world and responses to it have been great.

Ebony: Sales have been great. Responses have been great. And Penn has really accounted for people who have read and purchased and discoursed with me about the book. So I am so grateful. Thank you.

Brandon: What is the scholarly feedback you've gotten on that book since?

Ebony: Good to mixed. One of my most critical reviews was absolutely correct. It was in a magazine that I deeply respect, Strange Horizons. A young up and coming fan scholar from the global south actually took me to task for my restoring theory because I used Hamilton as an example.

Ebony: First a confession. I'm a huge fan of musicals and I am secondarily a huge fan of Lin-Manuel Moranda. So I may or may not have been a few moments late to this conversation because a certain trailer was just dropped today for the In the Heights film. And I just I mean I laughed, I cried, and I replayed it perhaps-

Duane: And this is just the trailer.

Ebony: ... a time or 2 or 20.

Ebony: But this colleague critiqued the Dark Fantastic for saying, "Well, Hamilton is this huge moment of cultural change," because it really wasn't so much. Because it came out right before the election of Trump and so the colleague made rightly the observation that we have a long way to go as a society and as a world.
Ebony: I actually tweeted and said, "That is absolutely correct, but in my defense I filed the book a week before the election." Yeah, in my defense I had no idea that we weren't going to be welcoming our first female president and going from the first black president to the first woman president. I don't have a time machine or a crystal ball so I did think it was a sign of change. That was perhaps the most harsh critic, but she did recommend the book with reservations. End of pitch.

Duane: Nice.

Julie: Yeah.

Brandon: How about everybody else?

Duane: I guess this last year a documentary that I'm the center of, but it's about satire and sort of the loss of political commentary through the arts community and how I sort of represent that, was released called the Mr. Fish Cartooning From the Deep End.

Duane: It did very well at the festivals. And as a result I screened it here and I've gotten a lot of invitations to other universities and so forth just to talk about this.

Duane: So it's amazing what can happen as sort of a riff raff political cartoonist as I've been for many decades to all of a sudden be able to attach professorship to that and present myself as a scholar of some sort. All of a sudden my voice has certain merit to it, even though I've been saying, complaining, and screaming about the same things for a very long time. So it's been a good year for that and it continues to service that conversation. It's a really important conversation.

Brandon: Is there any distribution for it? Can people stream it somewhere?

Duane: Yeah, you can get it on iTunes, you can get it on Amazon Prime. And last time I looked on Rotten Tomatoes, just you know, it was at 100%-

Ebony: What?

Julie: Oh wow.

Duane: ... which is one better than Wizard of Oz if you're trying to gauge.

Julie: Yes.

Duane: One of the of things too, I'll just say really quick because it's a really funny thing. The foreign distribution company that handles it got it on Air Canada so you can watch it.

Julie: That's amazing. That's so cool.
Duane: And some of the images and stuff, if you know any of my Mr. Fish work, some of the stuff can be pretty loud and inappropriate and it's not edited. So I was getting notes from people who fly the airline and say, "I loved your movie, but the people behind me hate you." Because they can't hear it. They're just looking at what is flashing on the screen and they're just like, "Whoever this guy is, he should be in jail." Yeah, so it's ...

Brandon: Well, that's fantastic.

Duane: Yeah, it's been fun.

Brandon: I'm flying Air Canada soon so I can just watch it there.

Duane: That's the best way to watch it, yes.

Julie: Oh my gosh, I should've gone first. This has been so great. These are such amazing accomplishments. I will take a completely different tack.

Julie: I think the thing ... I was just in this kind of reflective moment with my courses and trying to sum up for my students on the last day, right? How do you talk about what you've accomplished over the semester and to kind of wrap everything up with a nice little bow or however you kind of want to send them out into the world.

Julie: All of my classes this semester have to do with digital inequalities in the world and that can be really hard to talk about for 13 weeks. It's kind of depressing. I tried to program in some moments of optimism or who are these people that are working to change these things? But still it's kind of a downer especially heading into the election, as we've been talking about.

Julie: But at the end of the semester I started looking up ... I started the class kid of talking about some really important issues that I feel exemplify digital inequalities today and why I care to spend all my time researching these things.

Julie: One of them was a Palestinian born international student who had his visa revoked at the airport and he was an incoming student Harvard University. Had his visa revoked at the airport because a search of his laptop at the boarder revealed that some of his friends, not even him, his friends had posted some anti-American sentiments on Facebook and so he was sent home.

Julie: He was then, because of this huge public outcry, was allowed to come back. His visa was reinstated. He is in class now. And that's all wonderful. But in November a federal court in Boston actually ruled that this kind of a search is now illegal.

Duane: Wow.
Julie: So customs and boarder protection and ICE can no longer, according to this court, search with a general suspicion somebody’s digital devices. They can still search people because of an individual suspicion.

Julie: If you have red flags on your passport or whatever it is, they can still search your ... ask for your social media passport and ask you to log in and show them those things, show them your text messages, which is still kind of troubling. But they cannot do it because of the country that you come from, which is huge, right?

Duane: Yeah.

Julie: That's a huge win. And there have been a couple of other victories, legal victories but also legislative ones, this semester that really just gave me a lot of hope.

Julie: Not the least of which is the Philadelphia Alliance for Domestic Workers. A domestic worker's alliance fought for, wrote, and passed a domestic workers bill of rights in Philadelphia. Which is going to not only assure that domestic workers in this city have the same protections as other employees, which they should have had this whole time, but also hold the labor platforms accountable for employers, potential employers, having that information also. And not having the excuse of saying like, "Oh, I actually didn't actually know that I had to pay you minimum wage," which you do.

Julie: So no matter how you look for a care worker in Philadelphia now, whether it's through a care platform like Care.com or in other ways or an agency or just on your own, you will have the information that you need to in order to treat those workers with respect and with dignity that they deserve.

Julie: So those are both huge wins in my book and directly relevant to the things that I care about in my research. And so, I talked about that on the last day and said like, "Needles can be moved, right?"

Brandon: Yeah.

Julie: This stuff seems hopeless and these companies seem huge and it can be really hard to see a light at the end of these tunnels, but there are many lights." And I think it's important to keep communicating that to students and also to ourselves, I guess, as critical scholars, right?

Brandon: Yeah.

Julie: To keep those things in mind.

Brandon: So you're all educators here. I'm wondering when You think about things that we learned in 2019, what do you see as the undercurrent of that? What are some takeaways we can get out of 2019 as a year as a collective?
Duane: As a culture or as a school?

Brandon: As a culture. As a society.

Duane: Oh.

Brandon: You're feeling hopeful.

Julie: I know, yeah. It's just, yeah, it's a lot to ask. It's a big question I guess.

Duane: Well, it is a big question. I mean there's lots of ways to answer that question. But I think of the things that is most frustrating about the question is, yes, I think that there's some reason for some points of light to be recognized. But just the political climate right now, I think my greatest frustration ... I teach satire. I teach the history of satire and I teach the history of political cartooning, essentially.

Duane: Now, if we're talking about political cartooning and being able to have intelligent and deep conversations, which real satire inspires towards, aspires to, I feel like one of the sadder takeaways from 2019 is the feeling that the people are not involved in the democracy.

Brandon: So may I take this opportunity to whip out this fantastic cartoon, which is related to this?

Duane: It is fresh. It is very fresh. Just days old.

Brandon: And I will post this in the article page too. But it reads, of course, "Brad, wondering when somebody is going to invent a democracy app that will make, I'm sorry for the language, but giving a ... about the country easy and convenient. If you all would like, take a look.

Duane: Yeah, so it's just that feeling and this is something that I talk to my students about a lot.

Brandon: But this is like directly related to I'm sure why you do, yeah.

Duane: Yeah, yeah. No, absolutely. It's that feeling of ... I'm deeply frustrated by the fact that people don't know how to politically engage except at the ballot box. And more and more I think powers encouraging that kind of thinking because all the manipulation goes on in between elections.

Duane: It's really important that people learn how to be brave and eloquent about their discomfort and their rage in other places outside the ballot box. Yes, vote. Very important. But democracy has to happen every single day on some level.

Brandon: Has 2019 moved along that conversation or that awareness?
Duane: It's made it much more ... It's heightened the need for that kind of conversation because you can feel the frustration. Just over the last many weeks of hearings, I feel like I'm watching ESPN. I might was well be watching ESPN where both teams have established that nobody's going to move in any direction and it's a rah rah situation where everybody's just supporting their team.

Duane: There's no real conversation happening. Truth and understanding is just being manipulated towards a goal of victory and nothing else. That's what I find most disheartening because I don't feel like we can have a political conversation because of the short form staccato.

Duane: Well, you must deal with this constantly with your ... By residing in the virtual world of these platforms, they don't really allow for deep conversation. It's more about reacting to political truths and not being able to have a deep conversation. I think we're all systemically being made more ignorant and I find that really upsetting.

Brandon: Ebony, if I may actually pull you into this, I know you recently quit Twitter, so I'm curious to know-

Ebony: I will be quitting Twitter on-

Brandon: You will be quitting Twitter?

Ebony: ... on December 31st. Yes, I quit Titter and it was because you only have to dox me or harass me or call Penn three times before I decide it's just not worth it.

Ebony: I want to direct listeners to a wonderful medium Gen, G-E-N ... my Detroit accent is coming into play here ... publication series titled the Whiplash Decade. This decade was really odd and there was a hinge in the middle of it.

Ebony: What I think has happened ... I so agree with Fish here. And by the way, I'm a fan.

Duane: Oh.

Ebony: I was just looking up your work and I said, "Wait a minute, that's Mr. Fish. I do know his work." Because I-

Duane: That's Dr. Fish please.

Julie: Oh, Dr. Fish, I presume.

Ebony: And so, here is the thing that I find most disheartening about the 2010s. I agree with everything you said. Around mid decade there was a huge movement building among the most marginalized youth, so poor youth, black youth, trans and queer youth, and the state pretty much crushed a lot of that momentum.
Ebony: We know and I will not state what happened to the Ferguson activists. You can Google that and find out what happened to those young people who inspired the world.

Ebony: We have seen backlash against queer and trans organizers even here in the city. We have seen LGBTQ youth in the years after Ogburn. What a pronunciation. We've seen queer youth in the years after the landmark Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage face unprecedented political backlash.

Ebony: So here's the thing. I think that the great American middle is like the quest in Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings. We're at the ends of a knife. They could go either way.

Ebony: We could go into a forthright right now. Sorry, that's really scary. Or we could have a Socialist or some other kind of government that some of us have dreamed of, but it's going to go one way or the other. We're in this really odd moment before a mega quake.

Ebony: But I just really ... Because there were people organizing in '14, '15, '16, but I mean the state, law enforcement and others, just made sure that that descent was suppressed. And so, I don't know if you had anything.

Duane: Yeah. No, I think you're absolutely right about that. And one of the things too that we have to pay attention to is when it comes to movements and when it comes to activism I think that the way that we engage information is different now particularly for younger people.

Duane: I think that one thing that is very important that we have to pay attention to is for any movement to sustain the participants have got to be used to the difficulty of it and the fact that it's going to go on for a while. I think that what modern technology has contributed to is a certain impatience and a certain inability to suffer for your politics.

Duane: And so, I think quite often of what happened to the Occupy movement. While it was really, really meaningful and I thought it was really, really important and the fact that they didn't have figure heads and they didn't have bullet points that people could therefore then attack. People were congregating around their own pain, their sense of injustice. That was beautiful.

Duane: What did it take to dismantle that? It took for police to go into Zuccotti Park in the middle of the night and essentially push over the free library and grab people's sleeping bags, right?

Brandon: Yeah.

Duane: So in order to sort of like maintain and regroup, don't leave. Make yourselves lay naked. Not naked on the ground, but I mean without a sleeping bag.
Duane: Do not allow yourselves to be pushed so consistently in order to regroup. Because, as I said, I think that it's really important for people to understand that, as Ebony said, we're at a place now where the stakes are very high.

Duane: And if you read somebody like Chris Hedges, for example, who is constantly talking we're at the stage now where we have got to actually ignore the law. Chain yourself to things. Be a nuisance in a way that is going to be impolite and also in some circumstances unlawful.

Duane: Peaceful yes, but occupy and be a nuisance because that's the only way to move this ball forward, this movement forward. Because, again, you are 100% right that we are at a place not where it is deadly serious and people have got to recognize it is something that is deadly serious.

Brandon: Occupy is interesting because it appears as kind of a footnote on this decade, but in actuality I wonder if maybe those people got more involved in the process instead.

Duane: Yes, but then it begs that question of just like, maybe, it's getting involved in the process. What does that mean? What doe it mean when-

Brandon: Well, I would think of them as Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren supports at the moment.

Duane: Well, again, but there's a certain frustration with that. It's still part of the system. It's still figuring out how to get the right vitreal worded properly into the right in box for a committee then to see if it is financial [inaudible 00:34:13], makes financial sense, makes all of these other variables that will therefore then have it enacted. We can't wait for that stuff.

Duane: I mean all the lessons of previous decades of activism. Just look at the civil rights. People know that's a very easy thing to look at. And look at some of the stuff that Martin Luther King talked about. People tend to look at Martin Luther King and say, "Yes, his contribution was to say that black people and white people should get together." Look at his speeches. He was much more radical than that. He was disruptive in many ways that people just don't even recognize now.

Duane: So yes, if you're looking at the civil rights movements, for example, go sit at the counter where you're not allowed to sit and be dragged off the counter. That's not about finding the right politician who is safe in his or her seat who can therefore communicate a connection to a community, a marginalized community that is in trouble, and therefore will support it.

Duane: If they're not going to be ... It they see that they were going to be voted out, they're going to be your enemy. So yes, keep the pressure on politicians, yes. Keep talking to politicians. But really expect, if you're expecting change and any meaningful change, it's about organizing and where's the "we the people" part of this conversation. The people have got to actually demonstrate this.
Brandon: They do show up for certain issues. For example, healthcare.

Duane: Yes, they do. But again, I'm not saying-

Brandon: It definitely reaches a certain point and then sort of tapers off.

Duane: It does. It does.

Ebony: Well, the way that US capitalism works is that being self interested is in most individual's interest and I see that in some of the movement cultures. One of the things that dismays me most as an educator moving into the 2020s is sort of this vulcanization of movement.

Ebony: That means that there was always an understanding. I get it. I listen to ... We all teach Millennial and Generation Z students. We value you. You all are amazing. And yes, your critics are seen, heard, and listened to at least on my part.

Ebony: However, our movements need to be not only intersectional, but I still think there's value in coalitional movement building and in social solidarities and forming solidarities. I see a lot of, "These people haven't shown up for us, so we all we got." And if each identity says that we're all we've got going in to the 2020s this is going to be a terrible decade.

Ebony: We have to, despite our differences, try to figure out a way to work together to build a new world. I get it. The Obama coalition is no more. I get that. This sounds like 2007, 2008 talking before the crash, before the 2010s happened.

Ebony: However, I don't think that we're going to get anywhere if each of us builds alone in our own little individual corners. I'm speaking as a black woman who grew up working class in Detroit. So that's a lot of different marginalized identities, but if I only work with other black women who grew up working class in inner cities we're just not going to get anywhere.

Ebony: Maybe it's my generation X perspective. Our generation tends to be pretty cynical. Nothing has ever worked politically in our lifetimes. Don't @ me on that. No, it's true.

Duane: Well, they can't.

Julie: They can't, yes. That's reason enough.

Ebony: I want to get you in here because I know so much of your work is around this issue, your actual teaching and scholarship, so you can-

Julie: Well-

Ebony: Yeah.
Julie: The thing that struck me, Fish, about what you, Dr. Fish, about what you were saying ... I hereby insist Dr. Ticona, if we're going to do that.

Ebony: I love it.

Julie: ... about what you were saying is I agree in many respects and I don't think you would disagree with what I'm about to say. But I think the folks who have been doing that, who have been like showing up in these impolite ways, have gotten murdered, right? Or, yeah.

Ebony: You said it. Yeah, you said it.

Julie: And I think that's ... That doesn't negate what you're saying. I think the point, if I'm going to merge both of your points together, which are not oppositional at all, is to say that if we all ... And I mean like white. If we all start doing that, then it'll be a more fair situation or maybe those tactics will be more successful, right?

Brandon: Yeah, yeah.

Julie: So yeah, I guess the places that I've seen, again, I'm going to be the rosy eyed optimist here about this stuff, which is a very comfortable place for me to be I should say. But it's interesting because in the algorithmic justice and big data justice and like race, gender, sexuality conversations that I'm in, the activists who have been really inspirational and really successful, I think, in moving the needle on these issues have been working the system.

Julie: And working to speak to institutional actors who are implementing automated systems for deciding like what kids should be taken out of their homes or not in the foster care system. Or with healthcare system, right? That grade people, flag people, for extra preventative screening who cost the hospital more versus cost the hospital less.

Julie: Of course, there have been decades and decades and decades of research and discrimination of black people within health systems, black people and brown people within foster care systems, right?

Julie: And so, just pointing out the fact that the data that gets fed into these algorithms is tainted by those histories and is shaped, not even just tainted. It is what it is. It's not taint or not taint. But it's ... They've been affected. They've been shaped by those histories.

Julie: The scholars that I've seen, the activists that I've seen, who are just doing that pointing out work to the institutional actors, to the engineers, to the politicians, to the folks who are just literally the ones who are signing the contracts on these algorithmic systems or not, right? Are saying like, "How does this algorithm actually determine cost, right?"
Julie: Can we talk about that? Because this organization over here data for Black Lives, the Center for ... I'm going to get all these names wrong. Center for Critical Studies and Digital Technologies or race and data at NYU. The scholars who are just going like, "Let's ask these questions. Let's push these industry actors, push these institutional actors, to just be more critical about these systems that they're adopting."

Julie: That within the system kind of activism has been at least again as a scholar what I have access to and what I've seen be really influential and has been kind of making me more optimistic about these things. But again, it is very ... I mean it's very incremental. It's in a lot of cases not saying don't adopt these systems, right? Which is another option. Let's not automate that.

Julie: Which a whole other conversation that we should be having. Do we need technology for that? Probably not. You should spend more money and hire people and train them well to do case management. Which is what really needs to happen with families to keep kids in their homes and all these things.

Duane: Yeah, yeah.

Ebony: Absolutely.

Brandon: Right.

Julie: But yeah, so that has been giving me some kind of optimism on the within institution stuff. But to you point before, I completely agree and I think the place to be is in the intersection between your two points about building coalitions and also not waiting for permission.

Duane: And in physical spaces.

Julie: In physical spaces, yes, yes.

Duane: I mean that I find really, really important too.

Julie: Although, Hong Kong. Hello. Let's learn some lesson, I guess.

Duane: Right, right. Yeah, yeah.

Ebony: And I just shout out to all the activists in Hong Kong and around the world, but I just have to lift up young black queer folks who keep saying and reminding us, "We are trying here in the United States. We're doing the work. Join us. Join us. Join us."

Ebony: I think it's so much easier for us in the US to sort of look at movements over there and be a little wary of movements, especially movements in the streets here. Just because institutional power does and has historically cracked down on all of them going back to colonial times.
Duane: Yeah, yeah.

Ebony: We all know that sitting around the table. Every time we try to do interracial coalition building here in the States it's-

Duane: But what at one time made that easier, and I would argue it's much different now and this is something I talk about quite often in my classes, is that one time the art community are involved in political conversation. And I think that that's one of the major things that's missing now.

Duane: For any conversation about what might be wrong with our government, people are only engaging in that subject from a political position. Meaning that when it comes to descent and maybe, for lack of a better word, revolutionary ideas, there's not going to be any sustenance, any way to sustain that, unless it's in other parts of the culture as well.

Duane: If it's in our literature, which engages in the human experience in a way that is totally unique, poetry in the same way or satire, which is what I teach. If that can be seen as a demonstration of humanitarian ideas and if you recognize humanitarian ideals as a kind of politics, which demonstrates our vulnerability and the fact that we are precious, that we need protection, then that will cue us into recognizing the dangers we are in politically.

Duane: We will want to organize. And guess what? We'll have songs to sing. We'll have literature to share. We'll have stories to tell.

Duane: And that's what's really important when it comes to politics to me is that, as you probably heard the way I was talking about it earlier, I really have a strong disdain for allowing the white, rich, legislation that really makes up the majority of what this country is about making decisions that are life and death decisions for me, my community, and my family.

Duane: I think that it's a huge disservice. I mean I can't even ... I'm trying to stop myself from swearing, but it is a really serious situation.

Ebony: How do we get sort of artists and scholars and really the white middle and upper classes on board to do this activism? I think that's the key and I know all my activists friends are now in my mind who said, "Well, that great American middle did not agree with the civil rights, women's rights, or gay rights movement at all." But you had a plurality of people back then who and currently who are pushing.

Duane: Yeah. Well, you had a stronger alternative press. You had these other places. Because really when push comes to shove, if you just want to get very general about how things function, we are different people in public than we are in private.

Duane: You can do this experiment. We all just went through Thanksgiving, right? There are members of my family who outside of my presence and listening to the news I can lump
them into the people that I am outraged by, and I can hate them when they're not in front of me. When they're in front of me, I see them. They're human beings and they're three dimensional, right?

Duane: So again, we need places in public where people can actually voice their hearts because it's not encouraged now. People are much more conservative. And not to be politically conservative, I just think it's inappropriate to go against what contemporary society says.

Duane: It's like mainstream thinking that says it's impolite to actually scream in pain. And a lot of people are in pain and they're not screaming in public because it's impolite. They're doing it in private.

Duane: Now this is where you look, where you engage with these ideas. Where can you engage with them in private and then demonstrate it in public? Through art. Through art where you congregate and you can.

Duane: Because that's one of the things about satire, which again is what I'm teaching this semester. One of the great strengths of satire, and everybody probably has an experience with this who's sitting around this table, where you have heard a really important piece of commentary come through any number of satirical places. John Oliver, The Daily Show, all these places. Saturday Night Live even.

Duane: What do you want to do? You want to share that with people. And if it's in humor you can even share it with people that might not politically agree with it. But they're still going to listen to the content of what this is, right?

Duane: At least you're allowing for certain conversations to have happen that without humor or without art nobody's even going to come close to having. It's really important to try to invigorate first the alternative press and also the arts community as far as, what are we doing? What are we doing in this society?

Duane: Let's send some novelists to the Republican Convention or the Democratic Convention. That's what they used to do. Where's Gore Vidal? Let's get Gore Vidal. Oh wait, he's dead, right? So I'm just going on and on and on.

Julie: I'm convinced.

Ebony: So am I.

Julie: More art.

Ebony: Yeah.
Brandon: I'm going to switch gears before I let you guys lose to make your latkes and finish finals. But, I guess, is there anything anybody wanted to add to that discussion before? Okay. So I asked-

Duane: It's all about love. I'm just trying to inspire love. I think we should inspire love. It's a holiday of love.

Brandon: Love, yes.

Julie: Go back outside and check out that statue out there then.

Duane: The love statue, yeah.

Ebony: We're in the shadow of love in the library as you can see.

Brandon: Throughout this podcast, every podcast, I have asked each and everyone of you what you think is an overrated virtue and I love that you all have different answers.

Brandon: Julia, you said that confidence is an overrated virtue. To not take others confidence at face value or let it intimidate you or affect your own lie of thinking. And as researchers to not let that confidence imply they know the answer to something. Am I summarizing that correctly? I think, yes.

Julie: Yeah, that was wonderful.

Brandon: Ebony, you said silence is an overrated virtue especially when something is unjust. And Mr. Fish, Dr. Fish, excuse me, you said patriotism is an overrated virtue. And then, you quoted Mark Twain who said, "The last refuge of a scoundrel is, of course, patriotism."

Brandon: I wondered if you all stand by that or if you maybe learned something since our last conversation that has maybe changed that? Or what do you think of each others overrated virtues?

Duane: I can just say for mine it is, yes, I, of course, agree with that. I will always agree with Mark Twain. But I would just extend it just in light of what we've been talking about.

Duane: I think anybody who proclaims to have to know the truth and wants to make it a kind of permanence that everybody needs to rally behind, I find that distasteful and I find it very reprehensible. Because I think that all the best that we can actually offer are our best assumptions about what the truth means and we're all going to have different versions of that.

Duane: It's a different version of what is your favorite color, right? I will go to my death telling people that the most beautiful color is blue foil. I know it's a texture. There's a texture in there. The fact that it's a reflective blue.
Duane: But I'm not going to say to somebody if ... Ebony's looking at me. Her favorite color is probably not blue foil.

Brandon: Green foil.

Ebony: Blue is my favorite color.

Duane: Oh really?

Ebony: But I think the majority of people who have a favorite color, isn't blue at the top of most polls.

Duane: It is. But the point is, is that if you have a different color that is not blue, that is not a judgment against my favorite color of blue and that's what I find really important to recognize. The fact that we all can think and feel differently, so we're all going to think and feel differently.

Duane: It's problematic when all of a sudden somebody says, "You know what? You're wrong for thinking the way you do. And until you start thinking like me, there's going to be trouble." That's terrible.

Duane: That's what I would add to the patriotism piece. I'll let you break up into discussion groups and see how those two connect, but I think that they do.

Julie: That's confidence though, right? That's misplaced confidence I think when people think that their idea of what a thing is is the only way that thing can be. I just think that pluralism is a fact of life. It's not even a value that we have to aspire to. It's just a social fact.

Julie: And so, I think that ties into, right, my overrated virtue as well? I think that's what bugs me is when people just have the answer so unproblematically.

Julie: Not only because I struggle because I struggle to have any answers as a social scientist, but also that I think ... Well, maybe this is a very confident assertion of incompetence. I think everybody should be that way.

Julie: Yeah, I think just recognizing pluralism is a way through this problem of being overly confident about anyone and any-

Duane: And recognizing the emotional component to that too. I mean because it's really important to recognize. You could ask anybody, I am a different person throughout the day. And it's not just because of whatever my intellectual confidence is. It's my mood. My mood can change how [inaudible 00:53:03].

Julie: What you eat. There's all these studies now about-
Duane: All these things, yeah. So just the chemistry of that changing variable constantly is something that people should recognize too. The emotional truth involved in that.

Julie: Amen.

Ebony: I still think that silence is an overrated virtue, but I think I'm going to double down and say that silencing certain people and opinions, ideas, truths, is a huge problem in society today, sort of the selective silencing.

Ebony: I kind of smiled when you reminded me that I talked about silence is our Office Hours earlier this year because I'm choosing to use my Twitter account in the 2020s in a way I said that I would never do because I have been on social media since the mid 90s. I said, "This is a blend of myself."

Ebony: So as Dr. Fish said, we're different people throughout the day, but even when you're screaming to show your differences ... I am not just a protest bot. As a black woman who is highly visible online that is all people see. People see your protest. They don't see your tweets about your favorite food or your funny tweets.

Ebony: It's so interesting because I think that just like with all facets of discourse silence is socially situated and context dependent because silence and silencing depends on who's listening and how you're being listened to as someone in a conversation.

Ebony: I'm becoming much more aware of sort of the inescapability of my identities and social subjectivities and trying to be a little bit more strategic. No matter how much I insist, "No, I'm a scholar. I'm an intellectual. I'm a children's book critic," et cetera, people see black woman and they and they read me accordingly.

Ebony: That is sobering, but that is reality. And now, at this phase of my life, early middle age, I am going to have to adjust so I can stay sane, stay healthy, and make the most of my voice.

Julie: Ebony, you said that you were going to use your social media in 2020 in a way that you said you never would. Can you say more about that?

Ebony: As a professional updates account.

Julie: Okay, yeah, yeah.

Ebony: I'm saying I would never subsume my social media presence to my profession because I have been ... A huge part of my adult life has been talking with people online. I've made friendships. There have been a couple of romances. There have been ... I've had a full digital life.

Ebony: And in some periods of that 25 year stretch it's been even woeful and more rewarding than embodies life because black life is what it is in the United States. But unfortunately,
corporate social media has really squeezed the life out of the social web and it should be indited because of that.

Ebony: And the big ... Oh gosh. The big platforms absolutely must be broken up in the early 2020s. Facebook has too much power. So does Google. Those need to be broken up. [inaudible 00:56:39].

Duane: That was great.

Ebony: [inaudible 00:56:44] happening. [inaudible 00:56:49]. Ranting black woman.

Brandon: Any closing thoughts as we end this decade?

Ebony: Whee!

Julie: At the beginning of this decade I was graduating from college.

Duane: Wow.

Julie: I just thought about this the other day. Did you guys see all those like beginning of the decade, end of the decade photo things, right? People putting up their photos next to each other. I was like, "I'm not going to do that." But I was a child.

Julie: I was a child at the beginning of this decade and I'm still not a fully grown woman, I feel like, even though I just had a child, right? So now or never.

Julie: But a lot has changed, right? 10 years is a long time. I guess it depends on the time in your life, right? It could be 10 years and like not a whole lot has changed, right? But for me this decade has been huge.

Julie: I'm so grateful to be where I am. I'm so grateful to be in the position that I'm in. To be able to say anything, to have a microphone in front of my face right now on this campus is not what I ever thought was going to happen for me this year or this decade. So yeah, I think that's huge.

Julie: I think I always love new years as a time for personal reflection and really thinking about the year, but I think at the end of the decade it's time to. It invites long reflections, right?

Duane: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Julie: But yeah, sorry, that was intensely personal.

Ebony: I mean I can talk about the fact that 10 years ago today I was a doctoral student finishing up my dissertation applying for jobs having been laid off from my first career as a K-12 urban public school teacher in Detroit. And having failed, utterly failed, to publish
my black fantasy novel because people were like, "Wait a minute." In the mid 00's who had hear of such a thing.

Ebony: And so, now 10 years later I'm tenured at Penn. I have a literally agent who will be submitting that novel and children's publishing media has gone through huge change.

Ebony: Another plug is for the Penn GSE Best Books list, which was just released today. It is my fifth annual list and we are getting so many diverse books.

Ebony: The first year I put together the list it was quite easy to pull together all the diverse books and books of interest by creators from all over the world on one list because we just weren't getting a lot that broke the mold. Five years later I could not put everything that I wanted to on my list.

Ebony: Here's my question. Is this a moment because of a movement or is this lasting social change? Is this a moment because of a movement or is this lasting social change? And I think it remains to be seen.

Ebony: To quote Langston Hughes there were other periods in US history When the Negro was in Vogue. And I don't know whether or not in another five years if publishers and audiences will be tired of people of color, Indigenous people, queer people, in books for the young. I mean maybe we're facing another dry season. So it will remain to be seen in the 2020s what happens next.

Duane: Yeah. And that's great. It points up to a lot of what we already talked about today, which is I feel like time is going to be moving. Things are going to start moving even faster.

Duane: So I feel like it's our responsibility to keep a white knuckled grip on our understanding of history and our own understanding of each other and what it means to be a community that ... We need to really link arms and hold onto each other as things move faster and faster.

Duane: I mean 10 years ago my only job was I worked for the Village Voice Media Company, Harpers Magazine, and the Los Angeles Times, and other places like that that have since either completely dried up and gone away or they do not allow for any kind of commentary that has real depth to it.

Duane: And so, as a result I too have been writing a lot. I have three books out now. I have two more coming out in this summer and I have a third one coming out next year.

Julie: You're ruining it for the rest of us.

Duane: Well, I'm just saying that, as Ebony was saying, there's this thing that's happening where I'm heartened by the fact that people still read books and that people really ... People actually need books.
Duane: And so, if we can keep that, if we can slow down the conversations and allow people to breathe into the conversations and also deliberate on topics rather than simply react to things, then we have hope. And that's the only way we have hope, but it's going to be up to us to maintain that.

Brandon: Office Hours is a production of the University of Pennsylvania's Office of the University Communications. Missed an episode or two or three or the whole thing? Check us out on Apple Music to find one of our previous conversations with Penn's endlessly fascinating faculty and read more about what's happening at the university at PennToday.UPenn.edu.