

The Lit Review Podcast

Episode 57: The In-Between Episode! Season 3 Debrief - English Transcription

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[Sound of book pages turning, soft instrumental music begins from the hip hop song "Chicago" by David Ellis]

Monica: *You're listening to the Lit Review Podcast.*

Page: *We're your hosts, Page May and Monica Trinidad.*

Mariame Kaba voiceover: *"I think it's essential for people to learn together in order to be able to understand what we're up against..."*

[Protest Chanting and drumming] "CPD, shut it down! New Jim Crow, shut it down!" [Inaudible chanting] "I said No Cop Academy, 95 mil for community!"

Page voiceover at protest rally: *"We must disrupt, we must disobey, we must agitate, we must escalate, we must break, we must create, we must abolish, we must transform -"*

Young person voiceover: *"...I remember it, she was shot by my house -"*

Mariame voiceover: *"...In sharing our ideas, we're stronger..."*

[Music Lyrics begin] Welcome to Chicago, this is home for most. This is the home of the wealthy, making cameos. This is the house of the heartless, the home of the cold. Man, my dog gets more acknowledgement than homeless folks. This is the house, a generation filled in Audy homes - [Music Fades]

Page May: Welcome back! Hi everyone! Hope you're doing well and are warm and safe wherever you are. Here in Chicago, we're surrounded by many feet of snow, and our hearts are going out to folks in Texas. Also, apparently, sound quality is very important for podcasts, so I've re-upped my game *[gestures to podcast equipment]* and I am back and sounding and feeling very professional. Monica, how you holding up, how are you doing? It's good to see you!

Monica Trinidad: Ah it's so good to see you too, Page! I'm holding up, I'm hanging in there. I'm holed up in my apartment and just watching all of the snow and icicles melting, and it's just a winter wonderland out there. But also, just like too much and it needs to like, read the room and stop snowing. It's awful.

Page: Haha, yes! I have never been so excited to see 40 degrees in the weather forecast. I'm so stoked! There's one car on my block that hasn't shoveled out, ever, this whole time, and it's just, you can barely see the car, there's like this little bit of red that peeks through. What have

you been reading? What have you been thinking about? It's been so long since we've talked and nerded out over books together.

Monica: I know! It's kind of funny that we have this podcast on books and how they help people grow in their politics, and we never get to talk about these books amongst ourselves that we're currently reading that are giving us hope and space for critical thinking in our movement work.

So, currently, I am finishing up reading *Care Work* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who is a queer disabled femme writer and organizer, and the book is all about the disability justice work that they've been part of, that they've helped to lead and just really striking interventions into ableist organizing culture.

And the book is just so full of gems, Page, I cannot tell you how critical and how much thought was put into this book. Leah wrote this book from bed, and that's just one fact I love about it. Cause working from bed is so legit, speaking as someone who has a lot of body pain a lot of the time. And then, it just really goes into detail on disability justice organizing history, the importance of slowness, messiness, and long-term sustainability work as praxis for not leaving anyone behind, especially sick and disabled queer and trans people of color. And, and, just also exploring how hard the work is, like how haaaard it is, especially with people that we are organizing with with shared identities and experiences, because this book is really by and for the sick and disabled people of color community.

There's this quote she said in this book that is sticking with me, and I wanna share it. They said "and it turned out that like every time I've come together with people I've shared an identity with, there was bliss and also heartbreak when we assumed that the bliss would be easy forever." And that quote is just really making me think about, so much about a lot of the work I'm doing and what it means to be in struggle together as people with shared identities. So that's one thing I'm thinking about.

And lastly, the book is really making me think about what can mutual aid work that we were all doing this past year, you know, what can that work learn from the disability justice movement, as in, I hope all of this resource distribution work doesn't stop when the pandemic is over, because this is work that should be built into our movement work, like, by default. so I'm just feeling a lot of affirmation in this text, and a lot of things are coming up for me around the ways that I operate as organizer. So, yeah. But what about you Page? What are you reading that's giving you life right now?

Page: Mmm, I mean that quote, is like, yeah, that's so good. I'm thinking, it's making me think of other books! I've been reading a bunch of things at once and I'm not gonna talk about all of them, but I will give a quick shoutout to *Undrowned* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, talking about these dolphins that tend to click up and have these similar scars, and how we can find sort of a metaphor in that about the ways that we come together around similar harms that we maybe have experienced, and similar wounds, and what that means in terms of how we make bliss and how we struggle together. Yeah. Shoutout to that book!

I want to really take a second to just shoutout this book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which is by an Indigenous author and botanist named Robin Wall Kimmerer, I think is how you pronounce her last name, and it is, oh goodness. The subtitle is *Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants*, and I just - it is one of the most beautiful books I've ever read. Normally when I find a book I love this much, I just want to read it until it's done, as fast as I can, and I've really appreciated, I'm actually reading this book with a small group of friends as like a book club or discussion group, and that's been really wonderful to kind of slow it down and really process it. Because it forces these questions about what does it mean to belong to place, and especially to belong to place that is colonized. There's a lot of really beautiful explanations and stories about plants and how ecosystems work, and how humans are a part of that ecosystem that point to all these lessons about how it's not this binary of nature vs. human, but the ways that actually through paying attention to and being in intentional relationship to the world around us, we can actually learn a lot about what it means to be a better human.

There's also just cute things like she talks about beans have belly buttons and just that imagery always makes me giggle and yeah it makes you, if you do not garden, it will make you want to garden, or just go outside and go on long walks especially. And it makes you appreciate things like several feet of snow I guess as well.

One of the folks we're trying to get on for this next season is, I'm hoping will talk about this book because they actually introduced me to it. So, you know, fingers crossed we can spend a whole hour talking about how great this book is. And also, I did a perfect segway, I'm so proud of myself, I'm so hyped for Season 4, yay!!

So actually this is, for y'all that are listening, this is a special episode that's sort of like a season finale/in-between episode, for us to talk about the highlights of season 3 and kind of process and debrief that together, and then also keep you all updated on what's in the works for season 4 and what you all can be expecting.

Monica: That's right, yes, Page, you're so good at segways, I love it. We are, yes, super determined to just like keep this podcast going in ways that are, you know, relatable for listeners and sustainable for us. We've - I recently was crunching these numbers for this community survey that we have created that we'll talk about in a little bit, but I was doing some research and crunching numbers and we've had over 133,000 listens from over 50 countries, and that just blew my mind. *[Page in background saying Yes, Woot woot!]* Yeah! And, it blew my mind, and we have just gotten so much consistent feedback from friends, and from people we don't know, and from fellow organizers, and teachers, and professors, that this podcast is a resource. And so we definitely want to keep working on this podcast. And in just even the last season that we had, we had 8 episodes, that as of this morning have had over 12,000 listens, so, and today is February 20th is when we're recording, and that to me, is just like okay, we have to keep reading and we have to keep making this podcast.

And you know, in this last season we had our first books that talked and explored environmental and land justice, and a lot of good conversations on just the foundations of organizing, and so like, I don't know, when I look back and reflect on these conversations that we've had, I'm really thinking about how folks have been able to also reflect on the texts that have moved them at a point in their lives when they really needed it. But like how much they've also grown in their politics since reading that book, so that was yeah, just appreciating how folks understand how to differentiate between tangible and concrete takeaways from an older book, I'm thinking about the episode with Maira Khwaja on *Rules for Radicals*. You know, we were going in on that book but we were also really taking out some gems that really resonated with the work that we're doing on the ground, and Maira really went into the work around mutual aid and resource redistribution that they've been doing on the South Side. It's in alignment with the values of the Lit Review, is that we're all learning here and we're all just trying to get on the same page so that we can achieve liberation. Right? And so it's like, how can we uh, how can we appreciate the texts that have served us at some points in time and in moments and how can we, sort of make room for new thought and new, developed building upon that work? So yeah, I really appreciated that, what about you, what are you thinking about for this last season?

Page: Yeah, I mean, I loved this season, I mean, we've, I've loved all of the seasons in their varying lengths, but I thought it was so interesting the ways that these eight folks sort of spoke to each other in the different things that they were talking about and the connections you can make between them and I think, I mean a couple of things come up for me. Before we sat down to have this conversation, I was re-listening actually to Christian Snow's episode on *Groundwork*, and because I was looking for a specific quote, but as I was listening for that quote, she talks about history, and the importance and significance of how we tell history, that, and as she was speaking through that it helped me a lot in thinking about I mean the moment we are all right now and everything that is happening and everything that has happened in the last year or so, the importance of thinking about how this history will be told, and making sure that it, I'm trying to remember exactly how she worded it, that we don't let our desire to tell this story as a triumph, in a way that erases the nitty-gritty groundwork of who is doing what and why the process, and how so much of this work and struggle is failing, in the way that other people who are not a part of it might look and say, oh, this failed. When we try to tell stories that are just about stories of triumph, that's usually, with good intentions of trying to encourage and inspire people but also to relax them, and that that's not what we need. And so that really stuck out to me.

And then, just all the ways that every single guest is an organizer and thinks about how do we win, right? And I thought there were a lot of really powerful stories and histories of triumph but and also of failing that we have to learn from. And so much about how do we win requiring an emphasis on local organizing, and showing up for folks and responding to the needs of what is happening as local people in coordinated national movement, but again in Christian's episode how she talks about what it means, what local people means, I am thinking about that alot as someone who organizes, does place-based organizing in a place I'm not from. And it inspired me to pick up more books on how to organize, right, the how-to sort-of manuals of it all. And

yeah, also just shoutout to *Hammer and Hoe*. So yeah, those are some of the things I'm thinking about it.

Monica: It really brings up for me, when you were talking about the just like, the messiness or like, how do you not storytell in a way that makes it feel like "oh, you know it was great! We did this, we followed this leadership, and then we achieved our goal." and it's like, no, it was way messier than that! And I think that that messiness is what is missing in a lot of our narratives and a lot of our storytelling especially when thinking back on historical movements, and it's making me return to what I'm reading now in *Care Work* where Leah is talking about what does disability justice look in our movements, right, like how do you do it, right? And they kind of talked about how they laughed about that question of like, "how do you do it?" Because they know like, you really know how you do it? "You really wanna know what it looks like? It looks like people showing up late, it looks like people having panic attacks, it looks like the ramp's broken on this supposedly accessible building", it looks like all of the things that social justice-minded, able-bodied people would be like "what? This is horrible!" right, but really it's just, it's how we've been taught to think of what is failure, right? Who is being left behind when we have these certain expectations of like, perfection and constant productivity and constant movement right, without thinking about how our bodies and our minds are complex(!) and move in different paces and move in different ways And so yeah, it's just making me think about all of those things and how much more work we have to do to show up for each other as we continue to shape what our futures look like.

That's what I'm thinking of, I know we also want to talk about what was missing in that season, right? So, something that folks may have noticed is that there was no cis-men on our podcast [*Page laughs*], and this was not an accident! It isn't a hard rule for moving forward, but we definitely are always down and giving the mic to women, femmes, gender non-conforming, trans, and non-binary people that are really carrying a bulk of the work and leadership right now in our movements. Something else that I am thinking about is I'm really missing just more conversation from younger folks, from elders, folks that are just a little bit farther from our similar peer age groups, right. I'm constantly thinking about like, who are my elder mentors but I also need to remember who are the younger people that are like, mentoring me, you know? Who am I learning from and how am I staying grounded in what young people are doing and saying, and I have to listen more.

Page: Yeah, agree on all of that. You know, I loved and was very excited about how much we were talking about colonization and land in a lot of the interviews that we had this last year. But it felt very off that we didn't have anyone who is indigenous as a part of those conversations, and I think that was something that I felt and noticed as an important absence to try to address. Also yeah, I think, all the things you're speaking to. And it was hard, we did invite young folks, we had a couple of folks that had agreed...that's what's tricky, I mean especially last year they were very busy and going through a lot. And that is something we, we don't usually have cis men on, they're definitely not the vast majority, but I think there is a reality of the fact that alot of the work is carried by women, femmes, nonbinary folks and that also means that they're often very busy and don't always have the time or energy to do hour-long conversations about the

books that have influenced them, and that's a challenge to balance those things. So, I agree, all those things that you lifted up are things that we're aware of and want to improve and grow on in future episodes.

And so, I guess we can kind of start talking about that. We've actually got a little bit of a wish list of folks that we've started reaching out to and inviting them to come on and talk to us for season 4 we'll be at, and we are thinking now, instead of, so, in the past, if folks don't know, we have done this kind of by like the seat of our pants where we just invite a bunch of people, get the interviews on the calendar and then are like, interviewing people, and then within the week doing all the editing and then getting it online and doing the social media and all of that, and it's a lot to do all that at once, every week for even eight weeks. We were like oh my gosh, how has it only been six episodes and there's two more...it's a lot of work each week, even with the help that we had, you know, B and Laurel are amazing.

So, we're thinking this time, we're actually going to record all of the interviews this spring. And we're hoping to interview 10-12 people. And then we'll start editing them and releasing them in the summer. And so there will be, you all have, I think this is episode 57, so if you haven't listened to past episodes, please go dig into the archive, there's a lot of wonderful gems, and then we'll have a whole new set that we're gonna be releasing over the summer. And we haven't actually decided or figured out yet. We're looking for more feedback from y'all about how we release them, when we release them: the Netflix-style of all at once versus is it useful every week, once a month? At this point, it's sort of up to y'all that's something that affects you all more than it does us. And so that's the plan.

Monica: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah and so what Page is talking about is that community survey you've seen linked on Twitter and on Instagram and Facebook, and we're just really hoping that folks that listen can help us in determining how we move forward with the podcast. And so the survey just asks some simple questions around you know, how often to release, what books should we talk about, who should be on, what should we change, what do you hope stays the same? So just questions like that, and you know, if you have a few minutes to fill it out, it's online, the link is all over our social media, again. And thank you to folks who already filled it out, you know we hear you, and you know, definitely again emphasizing the importance of transcriptions for all the episodes and to feature more disability justice books and organizers. But yeah, I think Page is more deep into the community survey so Page, what are you seeing so far in there?

Page: Yeah! Well my favorite thing is that the people want longer episodes, Monica!

Monica: What! Longer!

Page: *[laughs]* Haha, JK, so there were only two people that said this.

Monica: Oh okay!

Page: And one person also said they wanted it shorter but this is - if you agree that four-hour interviews are fantastic and should happen, you have a chance to say that, and uh, join my side, which is to, to Monica's dismay sometimes I'm often pushing for longer and longer and longer conversations that are just an editing headache. And ah yeah, but things like that, if you want to share, we've had a few folks comment on the length and we do want to know, right, like is it - we aim for about 50 minutes usually, at - with editing, so if that's feeling good for folks. We've been asking a lot about how folks feel about the Chicago-focus we have and overwhelmingly, I think unanimously, people are talking about how much they actually - even though they're coming from all over the world and the country - really like how much we talk about what's happening in Chicago and that it's serving as somewhat of an archive of the movements that are happening here.

The sound quality definitely has come up more than once so apologies, the microphone is back, I hear you. And yeah, with that piece though, this microphone and the other pieces do cost money and this is where we've said this on past episodes and we've mentioned our Patreon and wanted to just have a moment of like, real talk. Okay, I'm gonna like not look at Zoom right now, I'm just gonna image y'all's faces, and try to have a real humble moment of explaining.

So this podcast, we love it, we just spent 25 minutes talking about how much we loved having these conversations about books. We want to keep doing them, but we can't do them if we have to do all of the editing and buying of equipment out of our pockets and all of that stuff on our own, so we really, really, really need help, and wanna pay the folks that are helping us out.

And all this - so we called it 'the Lit Review' because we were, when we first started we would always have a bottle of wine, and I've always had this beautiful vision of one day we're gonna have an episode at a bar! And we'll record and do it a few times, and we'll be like come with us and we'll all have a drink together and there will be pitchers floating around and like, I'll have some O'Douls, it'll be great, and unfortunately COVID had other plans and that's not happening and so we're asking if y'all could throw us a drink, or the cost of a drink, that would be amazing in the meantime. And one day we'll have this amazing event and we'll all have a drink together but for now, we have this thing called Patreon, we also have PayPal that folks can throw funds to us through. The Patreon, it's set up as a monthly thing, you can set it for a dollar, right. So like, some fancy, bougie, craft beer, \$1 dollar, over the course of the year, that's a \$12 dollar drink, that's ridiculous, but I know people pay that. I'm a dive bar person. Anyway, this is getting long and I'm missing bars and crying about that now, but if you want to help us keep this thing going, for real for real, we need our Patreon to grow. We appreciate everyone that has already thrown down and is a part of that our Patreon community, but we do need more people. And so, if you want to help, also, if you're still listening to this, that's amazing and it probably means you love our podcast and would love to have a drink with us. Okay, I'm gonna stop now.

Monica: *[laughs]* Yes, I'm echoing everything you're saying, Page. I want to keep doing this podcast, and I know people want us to keep doing this podcast. And also, we know that money is super tight right now and if you can't swing it, don't feel bad. You're amazing and we appreciate you just listening, and like even just sharing it on social media! Also, know that on

the Patreon with the monthly contributions, you're allowed to like, edit it, so if like, you're really tight on money and you're doing \$10 a month and you want to bring it down to \$1 for a couple of months that's totally fine, too. So yes, so thank you for listening, we love you, tell a friend, fill out that survey, become a patron, thank you for supporting us.

And I also wanna shout out some of our long-time patrons, like folks that have been our patrons for a long time now, we got Erin Glasco, Joy Messinger, Austin Frizzell, Stefanie Bator, C. Grimble, Frank Bergh, just to name a few. Thank you all so much. We'll try to do better also about giving more shoutouts to long-time supporters in future episodes. And also shoutout to some really brand new patrons. We got Megan Wells, we got Molly Costello, Jaz B., Taylor Nazon, and Brian Lampert, so thanks so much for joining us.

Before we go, I really want to uplift some local organizing that's going on and I know Page does as well. I personally really want to shout out the folks on the south side who are organizing to stop General Iron from coming to the southeast side. The southeast side is my - born and raised, family has been there for decades upon decades. There are folks right now who are demanding that Lori Lightfoot deny this permit for General Iron, who are trying to move their toxic facilities away from the north side, Lincoln Park area, which is a very affluent neighborhood, very white, and they don't want the toxic metal shredder there, they don't want that stuff there too, so they've already kicked it out and now it's trying to find a place to go and they're like "oh let's put it in the southeast side, on the same land where the Republic Steel used to be." The air is already horrible on the southeast side. It is horrible. The wind will push so much of that pollution towards an elementary school and a high school, George Washington, which I went to for a year cause it was near my home at the time. There are folks who are hunger striking right now. Some folks have not eaten for 17 days as of today. Some folks are joining in to start right now or are just doing one day hunger strikes in solidarity with folks. I know Rossana Rodriguez, who is an alderman, has joined for a day in solidarity, some other aldermen have as well. I know that Lightfoot has not met the demands yet, but has reached out to federal regulators for guidance because clearly she doesn't believe the people who are being directly impacted by this. So just wanted this to be on folks' radar. There are hashtags to follow on Twitter, you can follow #StopGeneralIron, #ChiHungerStrike, amplify their work online, shoutout to these hunger strikers who are really doing the work right now in, in fighting for justice for lots of Black and brown people who currently live there right now that are really struggling with some serious environmental racism right now. I can feel myself getting heated, I'm gonna stop, I'm gonna pass it to you Page.

Page: I, I, my blood pressure and anxiety this week, like, really reached new highs. It was a week of Lori Lightfoot reaching new depths of awfulness. Like beyond any - I mean, we've mentioned this before, Monica and I were both a part of a campaign before she got elected trying to raise the alarm that this person was going to be awful, but she is so much worse than I had anticipated, to be very honest. Like she's really, really awful and I keep seeing her getting praised in all of these other cities news and things like that. If y'all are not in Chicago please know Lori Lightfoot is terrible.

There was a lot that happened this week that was dragging and exposing just how awful Lori is. First there was the Office of the Inspector General or the OIG office released a report outlining or just really blasting how terribly and violently CPD handled the protests this year and really exposing that it was a police riot. And really highlighted Lori's role in that, the ways that she participated in making it so much worse and horrible for folks.

I'm still kind of going through it and looking at some of the summaries that are taking place but I mean just - there's a lot of testimonies from folks and stories about how police were threatening folks with rape and things like that as all of this stuff was going down and talking about how if there was any doubt that it was Lori Lightfoot's call to draw the bridges and how that made no sense and led to more folks getting hurt. And yeah. So I think it's something that I'm gonna be looking a lot more closely because before this came out, I think a day before, there's another report that came out that I'm still in shock from. We knew, we had warning that it was going to be bad but basically Chicago got a grant. A federal grant called CARES. That was supposed to be money for COVID, to help with the pandemic, and it was \$403 million dollars, of federal funds, that was supposed to be to help people, in our city, deal with COVID. Lori fucking Lightfoot, she had passed - I'm so mad, okay this is a podcast, focus - she got this law passed that made it so that she was able to make decisions without the full city council vote, and people were warning, this is not going to be good, this should not happen, but it means that what happened with this money, which means it was her responsibility and her call, and she made it that way, and she used of that \$403 million, she directed \$280 million of that to the Chicago Police Department. That's 65% of the funds went to Chicago police payroll. Outrageous. And then you think about all the things they were out here doing and meanwhile people are dying right, folks don't have masks, folks can't afford rent or their mortgage payments.

And just for some comparison, CPD got \$280 million, the Office for People with Disabilities got \$2,000. The Department of Family and Support Services got less than \$200,000 dollars, the Office of Emergency Management got \$8 million. The next largest department was the Department of Public Health, they got just over \$18 million, from a COVID grant, the Department of Public Health only got \$18 million of the \$403 million. So anyways, big mad. Fuck Lori, cannot wait to vote her out.

There are people that have been organizing 24/7 jail support here in Chicago at Cook County Jail every freakin' day and y'all it is so cold here, there are - it would not stop snowing day after day after day and they were out there meeting people as they were getting released, making sure they had a way to get home, providing support that they were able to, and I think there are a formation of folks that are holding this down, but one organization that I know that is for sure a part of this is the Chicago Local of Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee so I wanted to give them a shoutout. I know you can find them on Twitter and you can see ways to throw them some cash and so if you wanna help that effort and help get money into folks that are being released right now into freezing temperatures, that's a great organization to support.

Monica: I love, I love our Lori Lightfoot rants. We always gotta get in that Lori Lightfoot rant. That's, you know, we told y'all. We told, y'all. I recently posted on For the People Artist

Collective's Instagram account the "Queers Against Lightfoot" graphic that Jeanette Martin created and added a Defund CPD hashtag to it and I was gonna try to get some shirts made this summer but you know, this summer was just wild. But we reposted it when we found out the news about the \$208 million towards CPD and we were basically just like "we fought against her because we saw how she was before these elections, we saw how she ignored the family of Rekia Boyd, we saw all of it. But anyway, so people were sharing it and were saying "I voted for her and I regret it so much" and I'm like okay, that's affirming. That's affirming. We got it next time. What is it, 2023? We got it.

Page: Yes, Black queer women does not equal a Black queer politic y'all. Like, that's - values and politics matter. [deep sigh] Next time we're - you know, y'all will be hearing from us will be at some point this summer, but in the meantime [outro music starts] you know you can listen to past episodes, you can please, please, please fill out the survey that is on all of our social media right now, become a patron if you can, or help spread the word about what we're trying to do over here with our podcast, and... *[Page and Monica almost in unison]* Keep Reading!!
[laughter]

Monica: Keep reading, keep reading, y'all.

Page: We almost did it. Yay, bye.

Monica: Bye! *[laughs]*

[Outro Music continues, simple bass and electronic jazz]

Page Voiceover: *Thanks so much for listening to another episode of the Lit Review, a podcast where we interview people we love and respect about books to help grow our movement. We are your co-hosts, Monica Trinidad and Page May, two Chicago-based abolitionist organizers. Wanna learn about a specific book? Email us your suggestions at the thelitreviewchicago@gmail.com or find us on Facebook. And if you like this episode, give it a shoutout on Twitter or Instagram, our handle is @LitReviewChi. Financial support for the production of this podcast is thanks to our amazing Patreon subscribers. Learn more about becoming a patron at patreon.com/thelitreview.*

[Outro music fades]