

>> Welcome to the podcast Theories of Raising the Bar Sydney. Raising the Bar in 2019 saw 21 University of Sydney academics take their research out of the lecture theatre and into bars across Sydney all on one night. In this podcast, you'll hear Tim Soutphommasane's talk Love and Hate. Enjoy the talk.

[Applause]

>> And thank you everyone for coming out tonight. I want to talk to you tonight about love and hate and I'll start with a story about Darrell Davis. Darrell Davis was a musician, is a musician. An African-American specialising in R&B piano. In the 1980s he was playing in a bar in Maryland when he was asked by a member of the audience if he could stay around after his set for a drink. He stuck around for a drink. And the man told him he was the first black man that he had had a drink with, in fact the first black man he'd really ever had, had a conversation with. And over the course of the conversation Darrell had with his new friend, his new friend told him that he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, an avowed racist, someone who believed in white nationalism and racial supremacy. This didn't scare off Darrell. Darrell took the view that in order to fight hate and ignorance, you had to educate. So he'd stuck around, he talked to his new friend and they became real friends. And Darrell would go around to family gatherings and indeed to other gatherings that his friend went to, including meetings and events involving the Ku Klux Klan. Darrell was not your ordinary musician. Over the years, Darrell tried hard to win over members of the Klan and take them out of the Klan, and he did so. He did so reportedly to more than 200 members of the KKK. And today in his wardrobe, Darrell Davis has the robes of about 40 former Klansmen who have given him their hoods and robes as a symbol of their friendship. This is no ordinary story and I reflect on this not because I believe that this is what we all should do in order to fight hate, but the story of Darrell Davis does capture something about the way in which we think about hate and about love. Because there's a story about how we can't fight hate with hate, about how love must trump hate. That's an easy story for us to sign up to or to agree with, but I would say it sometimes gets in the way of more basic questions. Is this really how we should be combating hate? How often does this in fact play out in this way? How many Darrell Davises are there out in the world, and is it a fair expectation for those who might cop hate or be on the receiving end of hate to bear the burden of combating hate in this way? Tonight I want to reflect on these questions and I want to, to talk about the politics of love and hate because I think we can only get so far in understanding hate if we confine ourselves to the personal. If we think that a story like Darrell Davis's can get us the whole way in dealing with hate, then I believe we are just fundamentally misguided. We miss the point. Because hate isn't just about something between individuals. It's something that exists in society, it's something that exists in our politics and accordingly, our response to it must involve politics and society. But a bit about hate and me. I want to share some stories about me and hate. I think we all know how to hate in very, in, in various ways. We might hate certain sports. We might hate certain teams in our chosen sport. We might had our neighbours. We might

work on race. When I started as Race Discrimination Commissioner in 2013, I never imagined that we would have extensive debates about whether we would have a right to bigotry under Australian law, but that's how it turned out. Some of you will know that we had long debates about legislation about racial hate speech and there were two attempts by government to change the laws that we had concerning racial hatred. Government wanted to make it easier for people to say things that were racially offensive or insulting or humiliating or intimidating in the name of free speech. Famously, infamously, the then attorney-general George Brandis said that everyone, well, people, had a right to be bigots. He said that on the floor of Parliament. That for me opened the door to debates about hatred. There was once a time when we would have accepted that racism or bigotry were way outside the bounds of what was allowed in political debate but in recent years, we've started to see people arguing that they should be allowed in political debate, not because you might necessarily agree with them the argument rather is that you need to flush ugliness and bigotry out into the open in order to defeat it. Now, that's one way you can look at hatred and how you combat it but I'll say this. In all the years that I've thought about racism or worked in advocating against racism, I've never once encountered someone who's been on the receiving end of racism or bigotry come to me and say that they were grateful for having experienced hatred because it had the effect of driving ugliness out from underground, exposing it for all to see and giving everyone else a chance to counter hatred with good speech and good ideas. Not once have I heard a target of hatred say that to me and I think that says something. That says to me that the model that many of us may have in thinking about hate is wrong. I'm referring here to the traditional idea that we have about free speech. This is an idea that has long roots. You know, intellectual tradition, particularly in the English-speaking world. So when John Stuart Mill talks about free speech and about the pursuit of truth, he says we've got to accept all ideas no matter how offensive, no matter how unconventional, because it helps us reach truth. This is part of what free speech is about. This is what freedom should be about. As Voltaire's often misquoted to have said, "I may disagree with, with what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

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>> Also grand, also great in theory. It's a beautiful theory. It's just a shame that doesn't work out in practice. Because in practice, we find this. We find that the marketplace of ideas is not a perfect market. Who would have thought markets sometimes fail. It's true in the real world of the economy, it's true as well in the economy of ideas, in the marketplace of ideas. And this brings me to the question of power when we talk about hate. Hate is so much about power. It's often about ensuring that those in powerful positions have ways to keep challenges in check, to put some people in their place. And here's the thing with countering hate - it's easy to do it if you have power, if you have privilege. But if you're not in a position where you can speak up or can be heard, to talk about using good speech to fight bad speech, well, that's just fantasy. So how

then do we counter hate? I've already mentioned political leadership. Obviously I'm a believer that you also need good laws to counter hate. You need to have laws which set a standard for what is acceptable in society and what isn't. Now, some will say you can't outlaw hate, you can't outlaw bigotry or discrimination. You can never eradicate those things through the laws. And of course that's true, but here's the thing. Laws can't solve everything. We've had laws against murder for as long as human civilisation has existed. We've had laws against theft similarly. Have those laws succeeded in eradicating murder and theft from civilisation? And is that a reason then to eradicate those laws or to remove them because they're not effective? Of course not, and by the same logic, so we must have laws against hatred, even if it doesn't remove hatred. Because social change comes slowly, never comes as fast as we'd like. But having laws in place does mean that you have at least something on your side when you cop discrimination or bigotry or other forms of hatred. All of this I think shouldn't need to be said but we do need to say it today because in recent times, we have seen a normalisation of hatred. I think of last year, 2018, where we had in Australia a moral panic about African gangs marauding on the streets of Melbourne and in our cities, one which was unfounded. We've had debates as well about giving special treatment to white South African farmers as part of our refugee programme which would have been more or less a dismantling at our non-discriminatory immigration system. We've had motions in our Parliament, in the Senate about it being okay to be white which is a well-known slogan used by white supremacists. And we've had as well politicians talking about introducing a final solution to the immigration problem, language replicating that used by the Nazis in their attempt to exterminate Jews during the Second World War and before it. This is what we're dealing with and it's not just our politicians who are talking this way. We are seeing it as well in our media. In our media, platforms are given regularly to extremists including convicted neo-Nazi criminals, as in the case of Blair Cottrell, who was interviewed on Sky News, who's been interviewed on commercial free-to-air television as well. Been described as a concerned activist by one programme. This is part of the media landscape that we're in. We're seeing a fragmentation of traditional media and we're seeing this being baked in to the business model that media is using. Because newspapers, television stations are struggling to hold on to their audiences, they're feeding off conflict. They're feeding off this polarisation, and in the process they're doing damage to our society. What then of love? Where does love fit into the picture? You might think I leave no place for love but of course there's a place for love. But what is love? I'm not referring here to a personal love. I'm not referring here to the love you might have for your wife or your husband or for your child. I think the kind of love we need to talk about in politics is something else. I'm talking here about civic friendship, the friendship that must exist between citizens. Maybe not the kind of love that gets your heart beating. You're not going to buy chocolates and flowers for your fellow citizens. But there can be something about how you treat your fellow member of society that is based on love. We've got to treat others in our society as though they're one of us. This is a basic rule of how we should go about behaving. It's just

that we don't often live up to that. We don't live up to that because often we don't know who our fellow citizens are. We can live in our own bubbles, we can live in our own neighbourhoods, in our enclaves however defined, and not mix with people from different social, economic, cultural, racial backgrounds, among other things. But if we take citizenship seriously and if we believe that there is a purpose in doing things together as a community, then we should recognise this: That in fighting hatred, we're not just fighting something for philosophical reasons, but rather we're doing it for our community and for our society. That's a form of love. Think of it this way - what does it mean if you say you love your country? Does it mean that you like waving a flag around or that you want to bare open a chest that's adorned with a certain kind of tattoo? Or is it about something more real? Is it about being committed to your country and working to improve your country. Being prepared to take issue with power in your country. Being ready to criticise your country from time to time if you believe it's in the wrong. Because that, I believe, is the key to how we combat hatred and division today. I don't see this as being about humanity necessarily, although it can be. I see it as a patriotic issue. This is about the kind of country or society we want to be and it's about the responsibilities we should have as members of this society and country. Now, to some of you I suspect talking about patriotism may sound a bit strange. You may not agree. Many of you might be thinking well, isn't patriotism the last refuge of the scoundrel. Isn't patriotism just a gateway drug towards jingoism and nationalism and more racism. And of course, that could be a danger. But I don't think we can afford the luxury of surrendering a love of country to the more extreme parts of our society. We should not be handing over our national symbols to those who want to claim it for purposes which are corrupt and odious. So how do we go about then building such a love of country and, and citizenship? So much of this depends on how we go about talking about our politics and it goes to how we should talk to each other, not only in public debates but also in private. How we talk to each other at our gatherings, at our pubs, in our bars, in our sporting clubs and increasingly of course, online. And importantly, we should do this not naively and not idealistically with illusions about progress, because that lies the path to failure. I'm a believer in liberal democracy, but one of the big myths that we have with liberalism is this idea that progress is historical. That history has its own logic which propels us forward. Barack Obama put it in a certain way when he was president of the United States. He said, "The moral arc of history bends towards justice." The idea being that you might encounter difficulty, you might be met with obstacles, but over time you will prevail. That kind of complacency can be dangerous when we're confronted with the rise of far-right movements and with neo-fascism emerging within liberal democracy. When I, when I, when I tell that story about Darrell Davis, I don't, the guy who, the guy who befriends Ku Klux Klan members, I don't tell it as a salutary tale. I don't tell it as an example of how we should be combating hatred. I tell it as an example of what to avoid when we're confronted with hatred. If we are simply to believe that love can always trump hate, I think we're doomed to fail. Which brings me to my last point and about how we've got to deal with,

with hate. I think we need to learn how to live with hate in many respects. And by this I don't mean that we've got to accommodate political hatred or with extremism around race and bigotry. Rather, that we've got to understand psychology in a different way. In all of us, there is a capability for malice. There is a capability for hatred. The question is not whether we can cleanse ourselves of that - it's rather whether we can control it and channel it and know when it emerges. And today, the task is more urgent than ever when you consider what's going on in our sister democracies in the US, in the UK, in Europe, and when you look at the developments even here right now, when it concerns bigotry and racism. If we're not careful, we can slide very quickly into something other than democracy. I don't say this to be alarmist; rather, to guard against any kind of laziness or complacency. But just consider this - when democracies fail, they don't fail because there are threats from outside. They fail because democracy collapses from within. Nazi Germany was instituted through constitutional means. Mussolini took power through constitutional means. When fascism has emerged, it has emerged from within democracy itself, and that's why we can't rely on an easy form of love prevailing over nasty forms of hate.

[Applause]

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