[Intro music]

Kiara: [crowd noises] “Say it once, say it twice, we will not put up with ICE!” (x2)

Disha: Hey, hey, Kiara! What's with the slogan shouting?

Kiara: Disha, my friend, you've been living under a rock. Haven't you heard about the #NoTechforICE campaign?

Disha: Nope, spill the tea. What's this campaign all about? And why are you shouting slogans like we're at a protest?

Kiara: Okay, fasten your seatbelt, Disha! Because we're diving into the wild but under-narrated story of digital technology and racist surveillance. But first, let's welcome everyone who has tuned in.

Disha: Welcome, podcast people, to another episode of CRT2! I'm Disha, and joining me is the slogan-shouting Kiara. Today, we're unraveling the mysteries behind the #NoTechforICE campaign that's got law schools buzzing. Right, Kiara?

Kiara: Absolutely, Disha. We're putting on our investigative hats and delving into the tech storm—companies building tools to surveil, incarcerate, and deport racial minorities.

Disha: So tell us, Kiara. What's the #NoTechforICE campaign, and why is it creating so much noise?

Kiara: The #NoTechforICE campaign is a movement built by law students and tech wizards, exposing how technology companies are tangled up in criminal justice and immigration enforcement.

Disha: And today, we're not just winging it, right Kiara? We've got a rockstar guest, Sarah Lamdan, who has cracked the code on legal database giants and tech companies. Welcome Sarah.

Sarah Lamdan: Hi! I'm Sarah Lamdan, and I’m a professor of law at CUNY School of Law in New York City and the author of the book “Data Cartels,” which looks into data brokers like the ones we're going to discuss today.

Disha: Sarah, tell us, how did this whole campaign kick off?

Sarah Lamdan: Yeah, that's a great question. So, No Tech for ICE is a really well-organized

campaign that began with three immigration rights advocacy groups. It started with an organization called Mijente, with Seenta Gonzalez there, and then she joined the Immigrant Defense Project here in New York City. They came together with a legal rights group called Just Futures Law, which also focuses on immigration rights. I feel like No Tech for ICE is actually pretty amazing because they did the first work to look at ICE surveillance, the ICE surveillance program, DHS surveillance program, and unpack which companies are actually contributing their technology and their data stores to this surveillance enterprise. Because, ICE and DHS have maybe the biggest digital surveillance program of government agencies outside of the NSA, the National Security Administration. So, they've done amazing work researching and teasing out which companies are supplying their tech to ICE

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Disha: Kiara, my partner in crime, help me out here, please. What in the world is ICE?

Kiara: ICE, my friend, stands for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They're the folks enforcing immigration laws, digging into customs violations, and handling all things related.

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Disha: Okay, now it makes some sense. So, my question to you, Sarah, is why is the legal community getting involved in this campaign? Why were law students calling upon our law school administration to cut ties with legal database giants like LexisNexis and Westlaw?

Sarah Lamdan: So, the reason law students and lawyers have gotten involved on the tech company side is partly because of my research. In 2017, I was a law librarian at CUNY School of Law, and I saw a news article about the companies that were helping to build the ICE surveillance program. Two intrepid journalists had done a FOIA request and gotten a list of all the people who attended something called an ICE Investor Day. It was a meeting that ICE held in order to teach tech companies about ICE's "extreme vetting program," which was an intensive surveillance program introduced by the Trump Administration. This was in 2017, right after Trump had been elected, and ICE was in the news a lot for doing particularly egregious things. So ICE was in the news a lot, and these tech companies were helping ICE or bidding to help ICE build even more invasive data surveillance.

I was surprised as a law librarian because I saw that representatives from Lexis Nexis and Thompson Reuters, Westlaw's parent company, were listed on the list of potential tech companies that were vying to help build this extreme vetting program. That made me and some other law librarians concerned. So, I knocked on the door of Yasmin Soar Harker, another law librarian, and we decided to write a blog post for the American Association of Law Libraries website just

to ask our colleagues, "What's going on here? How are Lexis and Westlaw involved in ICE surveillance, and should we be concerned about this given everything we're reading in the news?" The blog post was posted by another law librarian on the website and within two minutes, it was taken down.

Disha: Wow.

Sarah Lamdan: Yeah, and it was replaced with just one sentence that said, "This blog post was removed at the advice of legal counsel." We were really startled by that because law librarians are very anti-censorship, and this felt like censorship, like we weren't allowed to ask this question. That made me curious, and I started researching how Thomson Reuters and Lexis Nexis were involved in government surveillance, and what their role was. Along the way, one of the first entities I met was No Tech for ICE, and I became involved with them and have been working alongside them ever since.

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Kiara: Disha, I already feel the LexisNexis and Westlaw questions coming. They are legal databases widely used by judges, lawyers, and law students to research cases, statutes, regulations, law journals, you name it. Think of these databases as giant digital libraries for almost anything you need to know about the law.

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Disha: Sarah, what made you look into the activities of tech companies like RELX and Thomson Reuters who you've referred to as "data brokers"? For our podcast pals, these are the companies that own the legal research platforms that we just discussed.

Sarah Lamdan: What I learned when I started unpacking this research, and I learned this because the companies don't make this clear to the lawyers who use their legal products. Like this isn't something that's in their PR materials that they brag about, but, it turns out that both Thompson Reuters and Lexis Nexis are huge informational empires. So, Reed Elsevier, Lexis Nexus, or RELX, a sliver of what that company does, is supply the Lexis Nexis legal research platform. And a sliver of what Thomson Reuters, as a corporation, provides is the Westlaw legal research platform, right? That's just one of their products. Their other products include other academic research products, financial research products, but one of the biggest products that they are expanding at the greatest rate, according to their annual financial filings, are their data broker companies.

So, what these companies have are huge stores of information, right? They have the entire corpus

of US law, as we all know as lawyers. They have the most robust legal information products. They also have very robust news information products. They also have very robust academic information products and financial information products, right? We know this. What we didn't know... was before 2017 and before a lot of research by No Tech for ICE and me and other people happened was that these two companies are also some of the biggest data brokers to the United States government and to insurance companies, tenant screening companies, employment screening companies, health care systems… they are huge data brokers.

So, a data broker, there's no one set definition of data brokers. One of my first jobs, actually, when I started writing this out, was to define what a data broker was because at the time there wasn't a very good definition. So people like me and other scholars who study data brokers, like Justin Sherman and No Tech for ICE advocates, we've defined data brokers.The umbrella of what is a data broker, generally includes companies that stockpile personal data, data about people. Along with Thomson Reuters and Lexisnexis' huge legal information store, warehouse, you know, along with their academic information warehouse, their financial information warehouse, they have among the largest personal data warehouses out there. And government agencies like ICE, insurance companies, health care systems, etc., pay millions and millions of dollars to Thomson Reuters and Reed Elsevier, Lexisnexis, and a few other companies to have access to all of our personal data. They have these very, very deep data dossiers about all of us.

So, in 2014, the FTC actually did some research and compiled a report about privacy and data brokers, and the authors of that report describe data brokers' dossiers as knowing more about ourselves than even our close friends and relatives know about us. I would argue that your personal data dossier with Lexisnexis or with Thomson Reuters is so robust that you don't even remember some of the information that's in it. Like, do you have all of your license numbers memorized? Do you remember the address of every place you've ever lived, every phone number you've ever had, every place you've ever been employed, your numbers of your credit cards, your insurance policies, etc., etc.? Probably not, but your dossier knows all of these things.

The average size of a person's personal data dossier, if it were printed on paper, is at a minimum 40 pages long, and they have those data dossiers for all of us. And they also collect every time we've been mentioned in the news or in a court filing or in an academic scholarship piece because they also have all of those information warehouses.

Disha: What are the implications on the legal profession? This sounds really wild.

Sarah Lamdan: What we do know is that ICE uses the data dossiers that these companies have and runs them through a Palantir system, so Palantir…is a predictive AI, I guess you would call it today. I don't know if who we would have called it that in 2017, but a predictive AI company that does predictive policing, which is a data processor, some sort of... you know, algorithmic

system that crunches through the data dossiers that LexisNexis or Thomson Reuters provides and makes lists of people and their associates and predicts how likely they are to, “commit a crime,” or be somehow risky, right? What Lexisnexis and Thomson Reuters really make their money off of as data brokers is risk assessment, assessing how, “risky” we all are, how likely we are to commit a crime, be a bad employee, commit fraud, right? And their products and the companies they work with purport to do those things.

Disha: So Sarah you are saying that these data brokers are not just collecting and sharing these data dossiers, but they are also predicting and analyzing our data. Almost like playing data detectives for ICE.

Sarah Lamdan: So they do both, right? One thing that they do is they partner or are partnered with by government agencies. Companies that make algorithms, right, are companies that make predictive systems. Because without robust collections of data, a predictive policing system is worthless, right? They need a lot of information about all of us in order to work, in order toto draw up these predictions, make assumptions about us, and know where we are and what we look like, right? So that is one thing, that these systems do,

Another thing that these systems do, or that happens with these systems, is that they’re paired with something I call designer data systems. So, Clearview AI famously created this idea of a faceprint, right? Facial recognition technology that could recognize us walking down Broadway, in the middle of New York City, right? It could pick out our face, recognize us, and then link us to all of this personal information about who we are, what we do, where we work, where we’re going… That kind of system also relies on robust data dossiers. Like, what good is it to know that this is what my face looks like if you don’t know anything else about me? So, these systems also depend on robust data dossiers. So do geolocation systems that track where you’re going or predict where you might go.

All of these systems depend on kind of fire hose of personal data to make these connections, to make these predictions, and that data has to be supplied by somebody, and a lot of times that somebody or that some entity is LexisNexis, um, type of entity or a Thomson Reuters type of entity.

Kiara: At this point in the story, it’s important to talk about the history of data broker companies. We have with us Mckenzie Funk, the author of the book The Hank Show, which follows the life of Hank Asher, who helped create the data broker industry under the surveillance state. So, McKenzie, how did these data broker companies come into existence?

McKenzie Funk: There are perhaps three streams, and one of them was the credit agencies who, very early on, even in the 1800s, were going around on behalf of businesses and eventually

banks to determine who should get credit. Like when you show up at the corner store, should you have to pay right then, or should you be able to get a monthly tab? They would go around and interview people's associates and try to get a profile of people. This is the early days of Equifax, which was known as the Retail Credit Company, and there's a long history of these, for this very narrow use of checking out someone if they're creditworthy, compiling a whole lot of information about them. And eventually, it, of course, crossed lines. Are they a drinker? Is this woman dating people out of wedlock? There are all these histories from the history of looking into someone's credit history where you'd think okay, this actually isn't relevant. But, for the most part, they stayed in their lane for a long time. That's one thing, the other one is marketing.

For years and years, there were these companies that were compiling lists for marketing purposes, or for election purposes, and they would basically say, who's going to be interested in our product. And these again were relatively narrow, and they would get warranty cards or magazine subscription lists and say, okay, these people read, I don't know, Golf Digest or something, so you know they're into golf. And so they're selling that kind of information and that became much more sophisticated as the years went on, but Hank Asher was the one who saw that both of those streams could be pulled together along with public records from the states and sold to something very different, and I'll tell you how he first got into that and that is he built a very powerful computer in Florida in the 80s and 90s and was using these systems to do programming jobs. Then someone finally came to him and said, "Hey, I want to make a database of all the vehicle registrations in Florida. Can you do that?" and he said, "Sure," and he said, "Well, there's something like 30,000 records," and he said, "No problem."

They went to the equivalent of the DMV in Florida, and they said, "Hey, we'd like to buy every vehicle registration," and the DMV said no, but you can't do that, and they said "yes, we can." Because the way that the open records laws were written in Florida, in particular, all these laws that go back to… the idea that citizens should be able to know what their government is doing were all written in a way that would allow someone like Hank Asher to go out and buy everything. And nobody had exploited it in that way like he had but eventually, it worked. He and his partner went and they got every vehicle registration and then they made a product out of that to sell to insurance companies. Then they went out and got every driver's license in the state of Florida, and they used those together, and then soon they realized the floodgates opened. They could get every marriage license, could get divorce records, they could get all sorts of real estate transaction records and fishing licenses, gun licenses, and it was built on these open records laws.

Once they had their base of information then they went out and they went to the Equifax of the world or they went to Trans Union and they said, "Hey, we know you've been collecting all this information on people's credit histories, can you sell us just what's above the line," which is to say when someone changes their address, they always tell their bank, and then their bank will tell

TransUnion. It's kind of the first thing people do. You might lapse on updating your driver's license, but you're definitely going to want to know where your money is. So they went to the big 3 credit unions Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion and eventually were able to buy credit headers from them, which shows someone's current address and often contact information. They eventually were going to the marketing side and pulling down all this email information

And so they eventually tapped into these other streams. And of course when the internet became a thing because, really when he started, it wasn't, they were going into America Online and then they were getting social identities and everything else you can imagine. But, what I learned obviously was that this went way back before Facebook and everything else, what we think about with privacy laws. And a lot of what these clients of Hank Asher were talking about police departments and Fortune 500 companies and banks, what they're interested in is this very hard information this hard data that you're not going to get from Facebook, they want to know really who somebody is and where do they live and they want relative fidelity with it. So what Asher sold, although it's a lot of information, it's very well vetted. Imagine five different sources all saying okay, their new address is this or their phone number is this. That's the kind of information they wanted to get, and it snowballed from there, but that was the basis.

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Disha: Whoa. So Hank Asher, helped create a digital realm where Big Brother can watch over us everywhere, all the time.

Kiara: [eerie music] Sounds like it, it's like living in a digital panopticon, where every move is under the watchful gaze of the unseen. The concept of the panopticon was developed by Jeremy Bentham and expanded by Foucault to describe the "perfect prison". A panopticon is an institutional building designed to observe all inmates without the inmates being able to tell whether they are being watched.

Disha: But this isn't just any digital panopticon, Kiara. It is the one that disproportionately profiles, restricts, tracks down Black and Brown bodies. It is the digital panopticon of race.

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Disha: How are tech companies involved in illegal/unconstitutional surveillance? What is the racist twist to the surveillance story, Sarah?

Sarah Lamdan: Yeah that's, I feel like, the most important question to ask, and the biggest conclusion to draw from all of this. So first I wanna just really briefly explain why you would call it illegal. Because it seems as if… ICE is doing it, if the NSA is doing it, if your local police

agency is doing it, how can it be illegal? And, one of the main legal issues raised when government entities use these products is that these products skirt Fourth Amendment requirements, right? They skirt obligations that the government has, or that any state actor has, to get a warrant before they conduct a search or seizure. And the way that these companies do that is, the government never takes hold of the data set. What these companies do is they license a *research product*, a personal data research product, to ICE, or to, you know, the FBI, or to the NYPD. And, if a state actor is just licensing a research product, that Fourth Amendment obligation, according to the third-party doctrine and according to the idea of state actors that has been created by the courts interpreting that meaning is that, you don't have to get a warrant in order to use a research product. So that is how these companies skirt Fourth Amendment requirements.

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Disha- So the 4th Amendment is like our privacy superhero, guarding our personal space. But wait, the bigger problem is that there are no constitutional safeguards right, Kiara?

Kiara- You are right. Devon Carbado argues that race-based policing and surveillance that is neither search nor seizure is constitutional and legal, and its constitutionality has been upheld by -none other than the Supreme Court. Let's have a listen:

Voice of Devon Carbado: What does the Fourth Amendment protect us from? The Fourth Amendment protects us from unreasonable searches and seizures. That's the core protection. So, if we pause and think about that for a minute, it requires for us to identify police conduct as a search or a seizure before the Fourth Amendment is even a game in town. So if the police interact with us in ways that don't amount to a search or a seizure, the Fourth Amendment has absolutely nothing to say about that. Why is that important? Because it means that forms of interaction that the Supreme Court concludes are neither searches nor seizures, are forms of interaction that don't require any justification.

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Disha- So, these tech wizards are helping the government predict crimes. How does that impact Black and Brown communities, Sarah?

Sarah Lamdan: So there are two big issues with predictive data systems and the data that these companies sell. The first is algorithmic bias, and the second is data quality and data errors.

So I'll start with algorithmic bias. All predictive policing and predictive algorithms and algorithms that are used in digital surveillance are created by humans. Humans are inherently

biased. I don't want to take credit for this idea. I didn't do the research on this idea. This idea is well formulated by experts like Safiya Umoja Noble who wrote Algorithms of Oppression, Ruha Benjamin who's now written multiple books and reports on this topic, Virginia Eubanks who wrote, I think it's called Algorithms of Inequality [Ed. Note: it's Automating Inequality]. There is a whole body of research. Notice, it's all done by women and mostly women of color, who've really shined a light and done the in-depth extensive expert research on proving the algorithmic bias is a known problem in predictive policing systems, right? So these systems have a tendency to draw up results that focus on overpoliced communities, especially black communities, Muslim communities, Latino and Latina communities, right? These systems are biased to focus on those systems and to draw up particular results that are biased. And then that problem is compounded by what Lexisnexis and Thomson Reuters and other data brokers provide, which is biased and erroneous data.

So. The data that these companies provide is notoriously erroneous. Like I don't know if anybody could open up their own data dossier and find zero errors or mistakes every time that you've entered a wrong number on a credit card application, or somebody has misheard you and misspelled the name of your street, or if you have the same name as somebody else or have lived at the same address as somebody else, and that data has been conflated, that all gets put in the records that these systems use, right? Because the government purchases this data wholesale and uses it in the form that it's in.

It's noteworthy that Lexisnexis and Thomson Reuters, on their data dossiers, they actually put a disclaimer saying, "Do not use this data to make big decisions because this data has not been vetted and might contain errors," right? And then, people who buy or license these research products use the data anyway. We know that the data is erroneous. And the data isn't just erroneous, it has mistakes. It's also biased.

So who has disproportionately large police records? Who has to seek more government services which leads to more government records? You know? Who has to use disproportionately use SNAP, or is involved with child protective services, or has been in some sort of landlord-tenant dispute, right? There are certain communities and certain groups of people who have been disproportionately overpoliced and disproportionately over-interacted with child protective services, right? Child protective services tends to focus on communities of color and disproportionately target those families. So that leads to much more robust data sets for those people. You know if your RAP sheet, if your criminal history is really long, that's all in your data dossier. Now your data dossier is 10 pages longer, and it is more likely to make you look like somebody who might commit a crime in the future. And that is the result of human bias making its way into these datasets so there's algorithmic bias. There's data bias and there are just plain old data errors that all impact these results and make them problematic.

Disha: Do you think such racist surveillance and policing practices are new and contemporary to the digital tech era? What kind of predictive policing and surveillance practices have preceded the digital era?

Sarah Lamdan: Yeah, these systems perpetuate old systems and are built on old systems, right? The digital predictive policing outcome is predicated on old records, paper records, computer records from individual law enforcement agencies, right? And that is not new.

I can't take credit for this idea. But I want to repeat it because it's so important. These predictive policing systems, these data surveillance systems. They don't create new problems. They magnify old problems. And they make old problems exponential. They almost superpower the old problems by digitizing them and disseminating them more quickly, and using a lot more data to create them. But these systems can draw their history all the way back to lantern laws in. In what, two hundred years ago that surveilled black people and forced certain people to identify themselves. They can, they can backtrack themselves all the way to data taken from people coming here from other countries on various ships and used to discriminate against them throughout time.

Ever since we have collected data, ever since government agencies have collected data or surveilled people, tracked people, they've done so with bias, and those decisions and the way the tracking and surveillance has been done has always led to discriminatory behavior right?

When you have data about people. Um, it's very easy to categorize people. It's very easy to make lists of who deserves what, who has access to what, and unfortunately that is a practice as old as government systems right? So these are definitely not new.

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Kiara: In her 2015 book, Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness, Professor Simone Browne argues that lantern laws are an early example of supervisory technology. She urges us to look at the past to ask critical questions about our present. In her words lantern laws are…

Voice of Simone Browne: They are lantern laws that require that Black, Mixed Race, or Indigenous people, if they were to walk around the city after dark and they weren’t in the company of some white person, they would need to have with them a lit lantern as they move about the city. If not, they could be taken up, arrested, and put in the galls until some “owner” would come and get them. They could also be subject to beatings.

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Sarah Lamdan: But the way that these digital systems perpetuate these biases and these issues and these types of discrimination and the harm that the discrimination causes right? The disparate treatment, is, is… I don't want to say terrifying me because that sounds hyperbolic but it's very concerning. Because digital systems have the power to do so to make such big decisions so quickly and people have a tendency to rely on digital systems. Like if the digital… if a predictive policing system spits out 10 names, and you look at those 10 name It's very easy to make assumptions. "Ah oh well, these people are likely to commit a crime" or "these people should be surveilled" without much thought about it. You know, without much critical thinking. It's a very easy way for law enforcement and other entities to make assumptions about people.

Sarah Lamdan: And it's very efficient and easy to use. There's this system that was being used in Colorado, it's called Lexisnexis Lumen, and I guess what it did was it allowed the law enforcement agencies, it allowed police officers, to use their phone on the street. So if they saw somebody walking, and they thought that person looked suspicious, they could just click a picture, you know, snap a picture of that person. And then Lexisnexis Lumen would run that image through a collection of booking photos. Of people who had been booked for crimes. Not charged with crimes, but merely brought into the station or photographed. And it could match the face with, you know, the booking photo. And the government shut that program down. They said you know what we're going to put a hold on this. This seems really discriminatory. People are complaining about how discriminatory that is.

And the law enforcement agents, when they were asked about how they felt about Lexisnexis Lumen being taken away, they were like "Oh we can't wait to get Lexisnexis Lumen back because it was so convenient. It was so easy to use." These digital systems are so easy to use and convenient and they make policing feel so easy that it's easy to imagine a world where they become ubiquitous, and they end up being the decision-makers.

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Disha: So, let's talk about racial capitalism. In the words of Angela Davis:

Voice of Angela Davis: Capitalism is racial capitalism.

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Sarah Lamdan: So, one thing the government hasn't done to this point. It hasn't developed its own technology, right? It very much relies on tech companies to build its infrastructure. Its email systems are Google email systems or whatever. So, these private enterprises have become entrenched in government work, and they've become the undergirding of a lot of our government

systems. And, they're profit driven, you know? I think one of the biggest problems with LExisnexis, Thomson Reuters, Palantir, all of these companies… is, they're publicly traded corporations, and they depend on, um, I don't know if Palantir is publicly traded, I don't want to say whether it is or not because I'm not sure, but a lot of these enterprises are beholden to their shareholders. They have to continue making profit. The line has to go up.

Up, up, up. Profit, profit, profit. More, more, more. And companies that have a mindset like that want more and more customers, want more and more profit, regardless of where that money is coming from, right? There's not much room for ethics or ethical thought in this "the line must go up" kind of model. So, the government, like Lexisnexis, gets a great deal with ICE. That's wonderful for Lexisnexis, that's wonderful for its shareholders. But, where's the part where we stop, and we think about the ethical implications of using that kind of data service in an immigration enforcement enterprise, etc, etc? It doesn't leave room for the ethical conversations that we need to be having.

Disha: Do you think part of the problem is that these algorithmic systems are being treated by us as truly intelligent systems?

McKenzie Funk: Yes, I think that's half the problem, but I don't think it's all of the problem. I think it is half of the problem when we treat this systems as if they are truly intelligent. And I think it's very easy to be wowed. I know I was wowed by ChatGPT, as was everyone else when it came out. And it is incredible. When these systems were introduced to police in the 1990s and even the early 2000s… when they saw what these systems could do with data… It was a similar moment of "oh my god, I can't believe that this exists." Because some intelligence, whatever you want to call it, had pulled together all this information that otherwise a police officer would have to go down and track down herself or himself. Very painstakingly. Making all these phone calls to different agencies. Doing all these things to get all this information. And yet, boom, there it was on the screen. You don't have to subpoena someone, you don't have to get warrants, it's just all there.

And that moment of wow, is something that I think carried a lot.. caused a lot of problems. Because they saw then, as we now see with the current crop of AI, these incredible things that these machines can do, and they are truly incredible. And the other thing is that, the systems, however good they are, or not good, they are also themselves imbalanced. Because they reflect and accelerate and amplify the existing imbalances in society.

And so, predictive policing is a very good example of this. And some of these products are complicit in this. They're sort of the feedstock of these predictive policing problems. The obvious example being where you have a neighborhood that is overpoliced, very often a Black neighborhood, and the computer sees that, well there is this high incidence of crime there. Well,

yes, maybe there is, or maybe there's a high instance of documented crime, but because it's the garbage in, garbage out problem. If you show that there have been a ton of arrests in this one neighborhood, well, by golly, the computer is gonna recommend that you send more police to that neighborhood to stop all those crimes that are happening. And then that will reflect yet more arrests, and… eventually it's a snake eating its own tail, where it's just creating garbage and spewing out its own garbage. And I think that's another danger, is the amplification of these things that were originally, our original human sin. The machines are very good at speeding those up. That's separate from us trusting them. If we didn't trust them that would maybe break down that chain a little bit, but it doesn't fix it.

Disha: Man, this feels pretty heavy. It feels like we're caught in this endless cycle of technological challenges and racial disparities. Is there a way out of this?

Kiara: Of course! We need to think beyond the tech fate! Scholars like Ruha Benjamin are urging us to ditch techno-determinism and explore new perspectives. The problem in Ruha Benjamin's words is:

Voice of Ruha Benjamin: that technology is the driver and that what's missing is a critical understanding of what's happening behind the screen. What are the human decisions, values, insights, ideologies, that are becoming materialized in our hardware and our software? And so, as a first step in reimagining the relationship of technology and society, we have to actually understand the relationship, rather than assume that particular types of technological innovation are inevitable. Because the more we think of them as inevitable, the less likely we are to question, to push back, and to demand better.

[Outro music]