There are some overdue words that I owe to those who follow my work. I know that there have been occasions when I have not engaged productively on social media. I feel awful about what I recognize as instances of insensitivity on my part. I recently had a conflict with a colleague whose feelings I harmed, during a debate about the recent protest movement in the United States, and I deeply regret that. I respect everyone who works at The Intercept and never wanted to do anything to suggest otherwise. One of my goals as a journalist is to question prevailing wisdom and share dissenting perspectives. I know however that, especially at a painful moment, this must be done with the greatest sensitivity to the lived experiences of others. I know that with a few tweets, I failed at that. For the hurt that I caused, I am genuinely sorry.

A lot of people have engaged in speculations about me recently or attributed views to me that I do not remotely hold. Especially given what is going on in the United States today, I want to clarify where I’m coming from and what I actually believe about police violence, racism and structural injustice.

I grew up in Prince George’s County, a working class and racially diverse DC suburb, where policing has an ugly history. As a teenager, I witnessed a tragic killing by local police of a young man outside my home, an incident for which the cops involved were never prosecuted. I volunteered at a nonprofit for trafficked women in West Baltimore in which two homeless clients we worked closely with were murdered in a 3-month period. Police never investigated the deaths of these people. The stories never made national news. There was no justice – their lives were deemed expendable by the system. I do not come from a background that allows me to view the injustice of American society as a strictly academic matter. I know the stakes of these discussions. And there are too many communities across the country in which black people face constant structural racism and violence in America.

When I posted a video by a young black man whom I interviewed, Max, at a Black Lives Matter protest against police violence in the Bay Area, some people, including people I deeply respect, took this as a suggestion that I intended to feed a “black-on-black crime” trope in order to dismiss concerns about police violence. I know very well that there are cynical actors, often racists themselves, who weaponize such tropes, retorting “All Lives Matter” when their true purpose is merely to reject the idea that black people’s lives do. I am not one of those people and neither is Max, whose comments I shared. I’ve spoken to Max in recent days after our interview. He is glad that his critiques received a platform at a moment when dissenting views are often censored, but he is hurt and angered that his words were taken out of context by many on Twitter. He is coming from a humanistic perspective and wants to reduce the senseless destruction of life in this country.

The United States is an extraordinarily violent country and I believe that the recent scenes of police violence inflicted on protestors nationally are a reflection of that. My concern for the victims of violence, including friends and people I grew up with, is not just genuine but deeply personal. It grieves me to think that people have the opposite impression, or that they believe I would say anything to undermine the fight against structural racism in this country. I strongly believe that criminal justice reform goes hand in hand with reducing violence broadly in society and promoting shared prosperity. If we succeed on the criminal justice front, but fail to reduce violent crime and rampant inequality, a backlash will bring us quickly back to the policies of mass incarceration. I don’t see one issue as a distraction from the other, but rather see...
them linked. There is no justice when millions lack health care, good paying jobs, an education, and a meaningful voice in the political and policy process.

Progressive journalists and activists are divided about the role of violence at protests. I feel convinced by my reading of history and social science that nonviolent civil disobedience, critical reporting and thoughtful political action, rather than vandalism or violent attacks, will ultimately lead to the long lasting changes that this country needs. Others may disagree with me on that, but I want to be understood: I’m not conflating violence or riots with the millions bravely engaging in Black Lives Matter protests. I am skeptical of the few voices on the left, some of them from much more privileged backgrounds than my own, who are encouraging or dismissing violence whose consequences often fall on working class communities, including many struggling communities of color. Even if you disagree with me, do not suggest that my feelings stem from anything but concern for these communities.

As a mixed-race person, I grapple with issues of race and identity. There are many people who do not fit neatly into boxes of political and racial identity. It is a difficult subject for me personally to reflect upon at times. I have endured many forms of racism and bigotry from my peers and in social and professional settings, and like many mixed people, have felt a constant sense of alienation. I have sincere concerns that ethnic and racial chauvinism can dovetail into unproductive forms of essentialism and sectarianism. But I recognize I experience many privileges as well. I have not been stopped and frisked because of my race, or stopped in traffic because of my race, or been assumed to be a violent criminal because of my race, among the many horrors that so many African Americans face.

Conversations about difficult and emotional subjects rarely play out constructively on a medium like social media and sometimes people unintentionally hurt one another. I hate that in even the smallest way I may have contributed to a toxic discourse that causes pain to anyone. But even more than that, I am saddened that my words caused harm to colleagues and to many people whom I care deeply about.

In case it needs to be said, I am outraged by the killing of George Floyd. I am sickened by the ongoing discrimination African Americans face in society, which I have witnessed for years. I am sickened by our failure to reckon with the history of racism in this country and the continued terror imposed by tyrannical forms of policing. I am hopeful that these protests and the Black Lives Matter will make positive change. I’m deeply passionate about making the United States a more just, safe and decent place for everyone to live. Sometimes I make mistakes, including painful ones. I hope people can forgive me for the hurt my words may have caused at times. But no matter what, I am going to do my best to continue doing honest reporting that shines a light on injustice in this country.