

## **SESSION ONE: AMERICAN POLARIZATION AND OPPORTUNITY with Brian Hooks and Andrew Hanauer**

Josh Good:

Good morning, everyone. If I could call your attention to the square of the room, we'd love to begin and thank you again.

Today's going to be fun or we sure hope, and there's a lot of wisdom in the room and we're really looking forward to getting to that. When I was reaching out first to Brian and then to Andrew about this forum, they said effectively, "We have some thoughts that we'd like to share, but we also really would love to get to it and open up the room and learn more about what's happening in the newsroom as part of this conversation as well." So I hope that this will be a rich time.

And if can mute the overhead music, that would be good too because we're going to put this on video later on.

But let me tell you just a little bit about them and a little about the mechanics and then we'll get going. Brian's going to speak first for about 15 minutes, Andrew will speak second for about 10 minutes, and then we're going to have a short conversation and then turn it directly over to you. So there'll be a queue for that, try to keep that up here. If you be up for just either raising your card or putting it up like this or just getting attention, we'll keep a list and get it going and that's where the good stuff always is. When you speak and get in, if you wouldn't mind hitting the mic to speak and then turning the mic off to not speak, that's part of the way that the sound will work best.

This is our first Faith Angle West event. We've never done one west of the Mississippi, and it's a real privilege, partly thanks to the Murdock Trust. Steve Moore had this idea and the more polarization that they were seeing in Portland and elsewhere to try to get into it a little bit with some clear-eyed thinking about polarization and also some engagement with the thought to strengthen and encourage democracy in a real way and that starts obviously by thinking clearly about the problem. And I think also these gatherings over the years have been partly about diagnosing problems and partly about rejuvenation and clear thinking and being refreshed and turning on a little bit of the idealism that's still part of the craft, the idea of journalism being a form of expression of public service.

And so Faith Angle is trying to hold up some of those ideals. Seven of you today are completely new to us. It's meant to be a good singular experience but also oftentimes it becomes a little bit more of a community, a little bit sense of friendship and a bit of a team sport, not the sort of lone scholar writing her journalists' piece by herself, but a little bit of a conversational team sport that can enhance and add nuance to ideas that you have in the words that you read on the page. Our goal really is to be a little bit more of an ecosystem as Tom said last night. And our advisory council is a group of 15 established journalists, five of whom are here with us today, Miranda, and Will, and Carl, and Eugene, and Andy. And they helped us choose this topic during COVID as an opening frame for today's conference in part, because it's so glaringly obvious.

It used to be that you wouldn't let your kid marry somebody of a different race. And today it's that you won't let them marry somebody of a different political party. Entrenched partisan beliefs are self-enforcing. We tend to listen conversationally only for those remarks, comments that reinforce what we already believe and to cut off everything else. Robert Kegan had a piece that some of us were talking about last night, about 8 or 10 days ago in the Washington Post, suggesting that our constitutional crisis is in many ways already here, not ahead of us and algorithms and Facebook, as we heard from the chatter with Francis Haugen, the last two days reflect us even more, and we'll get into that this afternoon. You have in your programs already, Brian Hooks' bio and Andrew Hanauer's bio, so I won't go long on those. Brian is chairman and CEO of Stand Together. He's also the author of this very good book,

which I read when it first came out and really was the reason for inviting him to speak with us today, called *Believe in People: Bottom-Up Solutions for a Top-Down World*, that gets into a lot of these themes.

The organization he leads, Stand Together, tends to act more than it talks. It's grown incredibly in the last five years, grounding a lot of their ideas and support, an umbrella of support with others in the ideas of this book, bottom up solutions that enlist local partners, local actors into owning and building solutions. So that was the reason for inviting him to be with us today.

Following Brian will be Andrew Hanauer, who is the chairman and CEO of One America movement. That movement has a big vision and has 21 staff members who are aspiring to do something that is perhaps impossible, One America. Now on the upside, it could be good for job security, right? If you had it for a while and the organization that he leads, confronts toxic polarization by equipping faith communities to confront division and work together across political, racial, and religious divides; to solve problems that matter. So we'll have at it conversationally turn to a couple of conversations and turn to you. Brian Hooks, the floor is yours. Welcome to Faith Angle.

Brian Hooks:

Thank you, Josh. You used the word impossible and for people like Andy and I that's motivation. You can't look at any of these problems as impossible and do what we do. Really appreciate the chance to be here, grateful for the invitation and Andy, for being able to sit up here with you as well. I'm really excited to have a discussion with you all the forum here I think is just seems to be a really unique and a really valuable opportunity. So I want to be brief in what I share and if I do my job here, what I'll do is just prompt a number of directions that we might take the conversation rather than then give you any wisdom. As you said a minute ago, we're here to talk about a very important problem in our country and is a problem, this notion of polarization and increasingly a toxic polarization.

But I thought I would start the conversation this morning on the other side of that equation, thinking about what it means to put forward solutions, a path forward. So share three things with you this morning, one is an example that I think does give some lessons for what it might mean to approach solutions to the toxic polarization that we're experiencing in the country today. Second, I will share my perspective on the problem because I think it's important to really get a handle on what we're trying to address here so that we can get a path forward. And I'll conclude this morning with some ideas for how we might move forward as a country. So the quick example that I wanted to share with you that I think has some lessons for how we might begin to approach solutions to polarization comes from an experience that I had just a few months ago.

This was end of July and it was led by a group that we'd sent to get our fortunate to support called Love Has No Limits, and Love Has No Limits put on an effort in Los Angeles, which they called One Day LA, which was an attempt to bring together a whole bunch of people who don't usually find themselves in the same room together to apply their talents in partnership with some really effective nonprofits to address challenges and help people who are struggling in LA. These are folks who are experiencing homelessness, people that were struggling with addiction, people who were dealing with family separation in the child protective services, violence, poverty, the collateral consequences of our criminal justice system coming out of prison. You name it. Love Has No Limits is an organization that was founded by a handful of dynamic guys and they've been working internationally for the past decade or so.

And this was their first attempt to bring their project to the United States. And what they did was they started with the faith community, apropos to that discussion. They worked with about 640 churches and other houses of worship to get the congregations there motivated and provide them a

path forward to helping the community in Los Angeles. And what they accomplished was pretty remarkable in about a week's time. They called it One Day LA, but it was really activity over about a week or they had 23,000 volunteers show up in Los Angeles to work with these non-profits to address some of these challenges. And it wasn't just about One Day, it was a chance to get involved and stay engaged through these faith communities over the course of the next year, hopefully well beyond that. And a few of the things that we learned from this experience, I think can be instructed with the conversation that we have today.

One is that they united people that, as I said, aren't usually in the same room together. This included different denominations. So you had Catholics and Baptists and evangelicals working together, people from different geographies in the city, different socioeconomic statuses, and many of you know more about the dynamics of the faith community than I do. But as I understand that's pretty unique to have that ecumenical group get together to really work together to solve problems. The other thing that I thought was really exciting and instructive about this is that almost 50% of those 23,000 volunteers were not affiliated with the faith community.

So the faith community catalyzed folks from the broader society in Los Angeles and applied their social capital, their credibility to provide these folks a path forward as a way to help, but regarding... And they've already had a pretty important, positive impact on the challenges that they were working to address, which I'm happy to share in more detail if useful, but thinking about the topic of our discussion today with the research on polarization shows is that every single one of those people that were involved in this exercise, not just the 23,000 volunteers, but all of the folks that they served and likely the folks that just observed them serving, all of those people are less likely to get caught up and engage in this toxic polarization that we're here to talk about.

So I think there is lessons for us as we consider what to do going forward. And then the last thing I'll share on this example that could be the kicker to this was at the end of this One Day Experience. Some elitist entertainers got together led by people like Justin Bieber and Chance the Rapper and threw a concert in SoFi stadium and the price of admission to this concert, you couldn't buy a ticket. You had to show that you had actually participated and volunteered. And so as a way to really lift up and celebrate this civic engagement. And of course this was put out streaming on YouTube and millions of people have encountered this. So I won't unpack all of it, but I think that we've learned from this, but again, I'll throw that out there for further conversation.

I do want to pull out one of the top line takeaways for me from this experience, and that is that the problems of polarization are unlikely to be solved or to be addressed in a sufficient way if we just focus on polarization at the surface, if we just try to address polarization itself, rather, I think it's going to require that we bring people together and help them to see a path to applying the skills that they have, what would they have to offer to help improve the lives of others. And as we do that, we're going to remind people in a really visceral way that despite all of these things that we focus on that divide us, there is always more that unites us, there's always more that we have in common. I think that's what it's going to be going to be required to get through this situation that we have now when it comes to polarization.

So that's my quick table setting hopefully on thinking about solutions. Let me now share with you the way that I think about the problem of polarization. And when we talk about polarization, we tend to focus on the mounting evidence and the evidence that I find to be persuasive, that people are increasingly hostile to those who are different from them, that's how I think about polarization. And this is happening across different groups, different areas of society. But as Josh mentioned, as he opened probably the most severe, the most observable, the most poignant is within the political realm, right? I mean that area of our society, and you guys probably know these statistics, these facts as well better

than I do, but 50% of Americans today can look at their political opponents and they don't just disagree with them, which can be very healthy, right?

And is important part of our democracy, but they say that they are downright evil and a smaller but still significant number of people about 20% of the population says that they believe that our country would be better off if their political opponents were dead. And as I understand it, that's pretty equally distributed across the polls of the political spectrum. So this is a real problem, and there's a whole lot more that goes into that. And so to understand this problem, I think it's important that we take a step back and we think about the larger societal context within which this polarization is occurring, because if we're really going to get at the solutions, it's important to start to peel back the layers of the onion, I think and look for some of the root causes of what's happening right now.

And I'll go through just a handful of facts about the country that have been persuasive to me, as I think about the context within which this polarization is occurring. And again, there's plenty of plenty more we could say here. I hope we'll get into some of this in the conversation. I think it's important to acknowledge at the start that we live in an incredible time. The progress that we see in our country is remarkable in many respects, whether that's the economic progress, the technological progress, or the social progress, the easiest way for me to understand this is just to think about what's happened in the last couple of years. The tragedy of COVID we've seen the scientific community come together in less than a year, produce a vaccine, which is remarkable, absolutely it's miraculous almost. But that said, even given the progress that we see for an increasing number of people, they feel like they are being left behind and that they are not able to participate in that progress.

And as I read the data, I think they're right, and so a number of things that stand out for me, I think this will probably be familiar to most of you. I look at the statistics on the number of people who report that they have less than a thousand dollars available in their bank account or to cover an emergency. And I know this data varies somewhere between 40% and 70%, depending on the studies that you look at. But to me that's not important if it's directionally correct, that's a big problem in our country. One of the areas that we work in quite a lot is criminal justice, you think about one out of three Americans has some a criminal record. And if you work in criminal justice, you have a good understanding that we put up all sorts of barriers in our society.

That makes it very difficult for people with a criminal record, to be productive, to live fulfilling lives, to do right by their communities and their families. We put up a lot of barriers, it makes it hard for them to live their best life. We have a crisis of loneliness in this country. The most recent data that I've seen in 2019 said that only one in four Americans report, that they have a close friend that they can confide in, which I think means that three out of four Americans basically say that if they needed somebody to turn to, they wouldn't know who to turn to. And you start to think about living your life that way that's profound, maybe the most important fact about the world that's helped me to think about this is the study that Nobel Laureate, Angus Deaton and his co-author, Anne Case published a few years ago, where they described deaths of despair.

They looked at the data on life expectancy in this country and notice that for two consecutive years, I think it was 17 and 18, I could have that wrong. Life expectancy in our country on average had declined. And when they really unpack that, they said, "this is being caused by drug overdoses, alcohol deaths, and suicides." And so they called that Deaths of Despair. I think it's a persuasive indicator that for a lot of people, they don't see a future, and so they're literally giving up. 70,000 people in this country die every year from drug overdoses and that's before the pandemic, we put that in context, that's more people every year than all of the Americans that died in the Vietnam war every single year. And of course, everything that I've just described is not an equal opportunity offender, rural

communities and communities of color are bearing the disproportionate harm, the disproportionate burden from all of these tragedies in our country.

And I could go on, but it's nine o'clock in the morning, and this is a tough way to start. But I think it's important that we look at the context within which this polarization is happening. Because when people notice all of those sorts of facts about the world, they look around and they ask the question, why, right? Why is this happening? And I think the way that our country answers that question and the narrative that takes hold in terms of explaining the situation that's happening right now will have a lot to do with whether or not we become more and more polarized as a country, or whether we find a way forward together. So you think about it on the downside at the answer that takes hold, is that the reason that you are struggling is because of other people or more to the point because of people who are different from you.

If that becomes the explanation for the very real problems in our country, then I think our country is in real trouble. And we don't have to look very far to the history of the 20th century to see what happens when that becomes the dynamic in our country, when the zero-sum thinking mentality takes hold and begins to guide our actions. That for me to succeed, you have to fail. And unfortunately, there is no shortage of people in organizations who are ready to stoke that animosity and take advantage of that dynamic for their own personal gain and their own personal power. And I think that's a really important thing to think about right now, but I'll wrap up with this. I think that there's another explanation for the challenges that are characterized in our country right now and it's an explanation that if you agree with it, or if you, you think that there's some validity to it, I think it offers a much more productive path forward.

So our explanation, the work that we do is based in this notion that the challenges that are existing in our society and that are holding people back and resulting in the tragedies that I just went through are not the result of other people, or those who are different from us. They're not the result of some inherent deficiency in people, quite the contrary. They're the result of the failure of the key institutions in our society to do what we need them to do, to help empower people, to discover their gifts, apply them in a way that's productive to realize their potential, which is ultimately the driver of social progress. And that the institutions that our society relies on to do that institutions like education, like robust communities, like businesses that that should be focused on long-term value creation rather than short-term gain and helping people to become their best self, and on public policy, the institution of government, which should be playing a very productive role in people's lives, to the extent that those institutions are failing the throwing up barriers that are making it very difficult for people to succeed.

And if we can bring people together to invest across those institutions in a way that breaks those barriers and gives people a shot at realizing their best life, not only are we going to help solve some of those underlying problems, but the way that we do that by bringing people together, similar to the example I shared on Love has no limits is by definition, going to help to move us away from this path towards toxic polarization.

And so for the conversation this morning, I hope that we can get into some of the discussion about whether you agree or disagree with that theory of change, that way of understanding what's happening in our country right now. But I also think it has very profound implications for different institutions in our society, for the media, for philanthropy, and for the faith community. Each of which I think has a pretty important role to play in really moving us forward in a productive path, to realize more of a vision for a future where everyone has the chance to participate in the tremendous progress that's possible.

Andrew Hanauer:

Good morning, everyone. Good morning, everyone.

Audience :

Morning.

Andrew Hanauer:

I'm really grateful to Brian, when I started the One America movement, it was me and my basement in 2017. And it felt very lonely, not just because I was in my basement by myself, but because there was very few people actively working on this issue and to have an institution like Stand Together, be so committed to it, it's just incredible. And to have a forum like this, where we talk about these issues with people like yourselves is really amazing, so thank you to both of you for that.

I'm going to talk about my own story, but first I wanted to do one little interactive thing, one of the things that we do with faith communities and faith leaders is we teach them the neuroscience of polarization because we believe that instead of manipulating people with science, and I think to Brian's point about believing in people, we want to equip them with science so that they can better understand what's happening in their own brains when they're arguing with their uncle at Thanksgiving. So I need a volunteer, is there anyone here who is both a sports fan and a deeply religious person? All right. What's your favorite sports team?

All right. I will give you \$50 to burn a Lakers, LeBron Jersey on national television. Would you do it?

Esau McCaulley:

Of course.

Andrew Hanauer:

Most people you have to get up a little higher. Okay, 150?

Esau McCaulley:

No, actually I wouldn't.

Andrew Hanauer:

A thousand?

Esau McCaulley:

Nope.

Andrew Hanauer:

10,000?

Esau McCaulley:

Yes.

Andrew Hanauer:

I will give you \$5,000 to renounce your faith on national television.

Esau McCaulley:

Nope.

Andrew Hanauer:

A million?

Esau McCaulley:

Nope.

Andrew Hanauer:

10 billion?

Esau McCaulley:

Nope.

Andrew Hanauer:

Yeah, so part of what's going on there is that we process those questions in different parts of our brain. The second one is processed actually in the part of your brain that processes rules violations. There is no compromise, in fact, if you're asked to compromise, it's insulting. If someone offered you money for your kid, right? There's no amount of money. Although I actually had someone who we did this question with and we said, "how much would we give this much money to betray your children?" She said, "which one?" So that's one answer.

Part of the problem with our polarization right now is that we are increasingly activating that second part of our brain with every issue. Every political issue has become a sacred value immigration, whether to kneel during the Anthem, and the more and more we process those questions in that part of our brain, the more and more we're going to come up against the fact that we were trying to ration with people, we're trying to argue with people who are having their brains activated in a way that makes compromise feel like treachery. So thanks for being our volunteer, and I'm happy to nerd out on science later, but I wanted to just do that. I work on this issue because my own family reflects the divisions that our country is being torn apart by. And I believe that faith communities are, I think our best chance to do something about our toxic polarization, not our only chance, but our best chance.

The reason I believe that is also the same reason that I have a family that is divided, which is my own religious conversion. So I want to tell that story really quickly. I grew up not too far from here and when I went to college, my college roommate and I were polar opposites. I was from the west coast; he was from the east coast; I rooted for fantastic sports teams like the San Francisco giants; he rooted for sports teams from Philadelphia; I was raised in a secular Jewish home, I had no religion, politics was our family's religion, my parents had fled organized religion. He had grown up in an evangelical Christian home, he didn't just go to church on Sundays, he went to church on days when I didn't even know church happened. The only thing that we had in common was that we both lied on our college roommate application form. We had both said we were neat because we wanted a neat roommate and we got each other because God is has a sense of humor.

We would argue about politics, faith, everything. I think in 20 years, we voted for the same candidate for president once. At least once we voted for different candidates and they both lost, which is really hard to do in a two party system, but we figured it out. But over time, I began to be increasingly compelled by the story of the gospels and I came to a place where I said all the progressive social justice stuff I learned growing up, this is exactly what it's talking about. So why did I view this as being on the other team? But there's an old civil rights movement saying this is, "don't tell me what you believe, show me what you do and then I'll know what you believe."

And that was actually the clincher for me, because in a culture on campus where people valued, how good looking you were, the college Christian group said, it doesn't matter what you look like, God loves you. In a campus where everyone was worried about what job you were going to get after college and how smart you were and how witty you were in class, the campus Christian group said, you can be socially awkward, you can be not that good at school, it doesn't matter because God loves you the same anyway. And so that's when I became a Christian and I married a woman from rural Arkansas, her family does not vote the same way that my family in Berkeley votes, we've got all sides of everything.

But after college I realized I was actually just like the same person. I was a progressive person who just happened to use Jesus as justification for my political views. So I was not a Christian who happened to usually vote Democrat. I was a Democrat who happened to go to church. And that difference is the main thing I want to impart this morning. We live in a country where people's political tribe has become like their religion. And I think increasingly in all the stories that many of your outlets have written about the rise of the nones, which always makes me laugh, because I imagine none like Catholic nuns taking over the country, the rise of unaffiliated Americans, what we have missed, I think a little bit is that that is a vacuum that will be filled by something that people who don't have a religion still need belonging and community and connection.

And they will fill that with something. And so what we see is political movements that pose as religion. They demand our allegiance, they demand total fealty, and they offer us all the worst parts of religion like vengeance and dogmatism. And they offer none of the best parts of religion. And so the people that we work with in our organization are religious people who are also in that same struggle. So what our pastors and rabbis tell us is that their congregants are increasingly becoming Democrats and Republicans who happen to go to synagogue instead of Jews or Christians who happened to generally vote for Democrats or Republicans. But this is also, I think why faith offers the best hope, because it offers a framework that actually can call people to flip that back. If you are a Christian, you may go and you may imbibe social media six days a week, and then judge your pastor by whether or not he agrees with what you heard on cable news.

But you still have scripture and teachings that you are compelled to say that you believe in and that you are supposed to aspire to. And so I think to what Brian is saying, which I think is so important about how we help unlock what people already believe in, what they're already capable of. Our work is not about selling people on depolarization, it's not about getting them to be more moderate and more centrist. It's about helping people be the best version of the thing they already say they believe in. We want Christians to be the best Christians, we want Jews to be the best Jews. So what we do in short is we bring religious people together across divides to work on projects together in their community, evangelical Christians, working with Muslims on the opioid crisis in West Virginia, for instance. We do that because as Brian says, there's deep, deep challenges we have to solve.

And it's not just enough to do trainings and interventions on polarization. You have to get people working together on things that matter. The other thing we do is we help religious leaders navigate these divisions inside their congregation. So evangelical pastors who tell us, "I get my people for an hour, a week; cable news gets them every other night. What do I do?" We bring them together,

we give them friends. Did you see that thing that my congregant posts on Facebook has any of your congregants ever posted that on Facebook? What did you say? Right. We give them the training on science, we give them the resources to understand how to confront division in their congregations.

And lastly, when we're doing that, we're building a movement of people of faith who are going to be committed to this challenge of holding our country together. It's not enough to just know how to understand polarization. We need to actually build significant capacity in society to imagine a different way forward. And that's what we're trying to do. So I'm really grateful to be here this morning, I'm grateful to be with all of you and looking forward to the conversation.

Josh Good:

On the strategy front, why do you think it's best to work with religious communities on that project? And as Brian was saying earlier, part of this is about rekindling social trust and building what's good, and not just focusing on the polarization problem. Has it been made more difficult by the decline in institutional membership affiliation? We've seen that it held pretty true for, I think seven consecutive decades and then this last 20 years it's declined from something like 70% of the country being members of a religious community to 50%, a massive drop. So does that challenge the thesis that it's the right strategy, the best strategy, and why would a stand together as you're working on a number of problems in the country, choose to partner with faith communities?

Brian Hooks:

Sure, I'll kick it off and then you can fill out, Andy I'll let you talk about the decline in religious association. I will say Stand Together, we're not a faith based organization, we didn't set out to work with organizations for whom faith is central to their work but we support thousands of university professors, tens of thousands of K through 12 programs, 220 different organizations and community that addressing persistent poverty and so on. And when we looked at our portfolio of organizations that were supporting, it wasn't all that surprising to know that that faith communities are disproportionately represented. So I think about 40% of the organizations, for instance, in the 220 that we support in communities are explicitly faith-based.

And so we set out to find the very best organizations that are helping people to overcome problems. And so it's not surprising that a lot of those would be based on values that matter a lot to being successful in that task and the values that resonate across a number of different faith communities. For us the opportunity to continue to engage with organizations like that is enormous. I think about some of the advantages that we observe in these organizations that we work with, they have these... They're values based, they're principles based or principles based organization as well. We start with the idea that everybody has something to offer, and we succeed as a society to the extent that we help them to realize their gifts and apply them in a way that helps others, resonates a lot with a lot of faith traditions.

They've got a group of people that have raised their hand as what we would say, contribution motivated, they're motivated by helping other people. And some of these faith organizations operate at a scale that's just unmatched anywhere in the world. As you put those things together and you say there's a ton of potential here for these communities to do good in the world. The challenge, and when we talk to these organizations and the leaders of different faith communities, and they tell us this is the challenge as well, is one of innovation, right? Do they have access to the solutions that are truly going to help them to realize their goals and their motivations? And that's where we try to come in and help. So you take something like "Love Has No Limits," the story that I told a minute ago, they've got so much that we can never help them with. But, in order to be effective in a community like Los Angeles, they

need to link up with say the very best foster care programs or programs that help kids avoid the foster care system, frankly, or the very best addiction recovery programs so the very best prison re-entry programs.

To the extent that we can combine our capabilities is the way that we think about it with what they have to offer, the opportunity to make this kind of step-change improvements and solving some of these underlying problems, and I think then spilling over to help to address polarization is enormous.

Andrew Hanauer:

Yeah, no, absolutely. I mean the short, snarky answer is we got 50% of the country. I mean, name a political movement that would be unhappy with 50% of the country being its constituents. I think that means we have more people than Biden and Trump got together, in terms of votes. The more substantive answer is, in addition to the reasons that I listed about having this framework of values that you're tapping and connecting with, there's a lot of more wonky strategy to that.

A lot of bridge-building efforts suffer from some of the same problems, right? First of all, the people who come to bridge-building events are often the people who already want to build bridges, so you're not reaching beyond the choir. Well, we work with congregations that have a built-in ecosystem of people that range from, "I never want to meet with those people ever" to "I will show up to every interfaith thing that's ever happened," right? So when we have our first events in communities, oftentimes you get more of the people who already want to build bridges, but then they get the people here who get the people here, who get the people here. You can't do that if you're just to, sort of, organizing random assortments of Americans by political affiliation.

I think the other part of it is that, I think we're always searching for this national solution to polarization; like if we just ran the right Superbowl commercial, we could solve this thing. The research backs up the idea that most people don't live their identity at a national level. They live it at a local level. It's what club they're in. It's what church they belong to. So the best messenger, if you're trying to reach people with any sort of message, is someone they trust at the local level and that's pastors or youth group leaders or small group leaders or rabbis or whatever it is. I think that's a big part of why working with people of faith on this issue is so productive.

Josh Good:

Because there are more questions, I'm going to do just one more and then throw it over to the group if we can. Again, to the point of, what are people being invited into? What are people being called toward, as opposed to the problem you've clearly defined now of what sort of polarization is? I'm curious to ask, maybe for a little preview of what's said in this book and it's been a year since the book's been out; I wonder if you have any meta level reflections on it, even with this dynamic of polarization and our politics still being where they are, being maybe a little even worse than they were. It's hard to know. Maybe not worse, but you know. I want to ask that, specifically, with a vision of what we have in mind.

There is a sitting senator from Nebraska, Ben Sasse, who recently was in Germany with a NATO general just after Afghanistan transitioned. We pulled out and this is what the general said. I think it's an interesting quote with what is in mind of the opposite of polarization. He said, "Most countries around the world are now agreeing with China, that democracy might be at the end of our history." Because democracy is depending on shared values and there aren't many shared values. It's obvious then in your country, the United States, you're not willing to fight for your values. There's just not enough depth to anything shared. Afghanistan proves it.

We've invested a lot in that country, in the fight against the Taliban for 20 years, but now we're going back to a world with a stronger Taliban, despite the fact that they haven't changed in any way whatsoever. We democracies are simply not willing to fight against the Taliban or willing to fight for anything. It sure looks like China may be right, that democracies are weak. It's obviously the case that China's rising around the globe and most countries are increasingly thinking that they should bet on them.

China believes that it faces only one real threat, their own digital giants; and so, what China will be focused on and reigning in their own digital giants is something that they're focused on precisely, because they realize American democracy is being ripped apart with by the companies themselves and also by the habits that they produce in the populace. In our country, we want to resist China, but we know now, after American leadership in Afghanistan, that we clearly would not be willing to go to war against it. Is there a for different than polarization that you see with this book of mine?

Brian Hooks:

I'm going to try not to take the bait on the conversation about China and Afghanistan, though if people want to have that conversation, they can. I guess I can't resist saying that. I think one of the things that take away from the 20 years of failure in Afghanistan is that we ought to approach all of these conversations with a whole lot more humility than any of us probably do, but maybe leave that at that.

Look, we call the book "Believe In People" and you're very kind to hold it up. It's been an incredible experience to not just have written it, but also be able to interact with so many different people who have encountered the ideas, engaged with them, and given us feedback. I think one of the things that you said in that quote is this idea that if we don't share values, we're in real trouble. I think that there is something important in that.

One of the things that we do in the book, as we go through the history of progress in the country, in this country, and you look at so many inflection points where our country held up an ideal of values, and so many people looked around and said, "But come on, that's not really what we're doing." Our ideal in this country is one of equal rights and from the very beginning, we violated that ideal. But rather than reject the ideal, what people did was they rallied a small group of people to begin with and then, ultimately, a majority of people to change our country. So it further lived up to that ideal.

It was never perfect. It's certainly not perfect now. We all will always will be less than that ideal and we'll always have work to do to make progress in our country. But to me, that's the path forward. We do as the great leaders of the movements for justice over the last two centuries has done. We don't give up on that idea. We rally to it, but that only works if we still have shared ideals in this country.

What I've been very encouraged by, and I would point at anybody who's interested to the research of a group called Populace out of... I think it's San Francisco, in Boston, a guy named Todd Rose, who's the leader there. He does public opinion research, but he does it in a way that makes it very difficult to gain the surveys to try to get at not a publicly express preference. In fact, in other words, not just to ask people to tell you what they think you want to hear, but to really get at the private preferences of people. What they truly believe in their heart.

What Todd's research shows is that we absolutely do share the ideals that have always animated movements for justice in this country. In fact, what he reports is that Americans across all of the different ways that social scientists... The populations that they survey: demographics, geography, age, socioeconomic status, across all of those different categories, we share eight out of 10 ideals. Hard to believe. Don't take my word for it. You should check it out. I didn't believe it until I really grilled Todd on this, but it's things like equal rights. It's things like better health care. It's things like public safety. It's

basics about our society where we say, "Hey, we share these things in common." Now we have different ideas about how to achieve them, for sure, but there is that basis, that shared basis, to move forward on.

I think the defeatism that we see so much in our society, I think it's expressed by that quote you shared. We shouldn't be surprised at that because every generation has encountered that, and it seemed like that was the majority opinion. But it took people we call "social entrepreneurs" to say, "Wait a minute. Let's not settle for that. Let's do better." And every single time, the country's rallied to do better. I think that that's absolutely the mission that's ahead of us. I think that we've got it in us as American people. What I've been encouraged about the book process is, all of these great... These people from all these different areas of society, people I'd never thought I'd meet, that are reaching out and sharing some version of what I just shared with you. The pithy way to say it is that those who look for common ground and defined it and that's certainly been my experience.

I'll be quick. That's 100% right. We are way less divided than we think. All the research shows that, but it's also we're divided in a different way than we think. We're not divided so much over differences in values and ideology. We're divided over this identity that we have created, where we have formed ourselves into two warring teams that view each other as against each other.

We work with people who used to work on conflict overseas and Eastern Africa and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. About five years ago, they started coming to the United States. The reason they did was not because we vastly disagreed with each other over taxes. It was not because we have no values in common. It was because they were seeing the same identity dynamics play out here and the same rhetoric that comes with that, that they had seen in countries around the world. That's the challenge. It's really around identity. It's not around a lack of shared values or a difference of opinion on political issues.

Josh Good:

Wonderful. Just a reminder, when you make your comment or question, just hit that mic before you start and before you finish. First up is Miranda Kennedy and we've got Scott Wilson, Jackie Calmes, Jon Fasman, Sewell Chan, Tom Holman, and then I'm sure others. We've got two or three more questions that are sitting here but I hope we never get to them because we got better wisdom in the room. Miranda, you're up.

Miranda Kennedy:

Thank you both for that. I hear you saying that the shared faith values inside, like faith communities, as a great starting point for change and ending polarization, but what if the political polarization is in the faith community, which I think is happening increasingly. There was a lot of focus on that during Trump, but I think it's happening on both sides inside churches. What do you do with that?

Andrew Hanauer:

Yeah, absolutely. We see that all the time. Our pastors and rabbis, they say, "Well, if I say something, half of the congregation walks out and if I don't say something, the other half walks out." The shared faith is a thing that is what we call a "superordinate identity," if we're going to walk out here. So I'm a Democrat, you're Republican, but we're both Jewish and that's more important, right? And does that always get activated? Of course not. Especially when these two things are demanding our other allegiance, right?

But the existence of a superordinate identity is critical because it gives people a shared language, history, values, rituals, and obviously value systems; so Democrats and Republicans inside a church may be yelling at each other, but they both profess to believe in a savior who says, "Love your enemies and pray for people who persecute you." And they can be reminded of that. Was that always going to work? Of course not, but it exists and it's something there that can call them back towards each other.

That is where there is hope, where I think is really critical. We help pastors and rabbis and religious leaders in all sorts of ways. We help them understand how to have hard conversations about political issues inside their congregations. We help them understand how to shape norms. We had one pastor come to us and say, "I want to do a Sunday school on race and I am pretty sure that if I do a Sunday school on race, there's a segment of my congregation that will never show up." And so we just helped to make sure that everyone showed up by how he rolled it out, how he set it up. That kind of thing is really possible and it's way more possible than we think, but we have to give these exhausted, stressed out faith leaders some support so that they can do that work.

Brian Hooks:

Just to add one of the things that I've learned from reading through this polarization literature is that a lot of the intensity of polarization, that is centered around political affiliation, really moderates when the political affiliation becomes not the first thing that people identify with, but the sixth thing that people identify with.

So if you look at the really shocking statistics on marriage that Josh referenced a minute ago, I think it's 50% of Republicans would be upset if their son or daughter married a Democrat and about 30% of Democrats. But when you dig into that, if the person who's from the opposite party is a Christian first, a father, second, a Giants fan, third, and oh, by the way, tends to vote Democrat, the aversion in that married dynamic goes way down. So what I take it is, I just prefer not to have somebody who wants to talk about politics at my Thanksgiving table, right? So this identity ordinance and identity complexity, I think, is a really important part of this.

Andrew Hanauer:

Absolutely. In fact, we actually literally have people in our events list out their identities in order of importance and tell us which ones they feel are under threat and which ones they share with people who may not be like them. I think, again, that's the thing that we're seeing, is that people who would have once said Christian first, they're maybe not living that and they're putting their political tribe up higher. For me, politics would come after being a Christian, and then five sports teams, and then politics at the end. Yeah.

Josh Good:

Let's go next, please, to Jon Fasman with The Economist. Miranda, by the way, as we're getting to know each other, is with NPR for a long time. Jon.

Jon Fasman:

So I have a couple of questions for Brian and it's sort of about the idea of shared values bringing us together. The first thing to be aware of, I think, is that there's a big difference between saying you believe something and believing it, right? So nobody is going to say that they disbelieve in equal rights, but the more important question is, do you support equal rights, even if... Do you support expanding

rights, even if that means relative loss of privilege for you? I think you get a very different answer there. You get a different answer in practice, right? I think that none of the politicians who support laws to make voting harder would claim to disbelieve in equal rights, even if what they're doing in practice hinges on the rights of others.

So with that in mind, you said a couple of things I want to drill down a bit, that going through this one-day experience that you run makes people less likely to get caught up in polarization afterward. I'm curious how long you've found that effects lasted, because I'm just... With no disrespect to what you do, I'm just very skeptical that a single day of experience can overcome a lifetime of influences and immersion in a community of shared values.

So I'm curious how to make that one day experience last long. How long have you found that effect to last? The other thing I wonder about is you said, near the end of your speech, that their key institutions that aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing. You mentioned government, education, and business. That seems to me a quite easy thing to say, but granularly, what should they be doing that they're not doing? What is their role that they're not fulfilling now?

Brian Hooks:

No, they're great questions and there's a lot here, so let me maybe just signpost some answers and we get as detailed as is useful. On the shared values, you're absolutely right. So the guy I mentioned, Todd Rose, I won't try to do justice to his methodology but he does, and I encourage you to look at it, he does a survey method, which basically asks, tries to get at the same answer, lots and lots of different ways. It asks you to force rank different things several times.

What he believes, at least, about this methodology is that he gets through, what he calls "preference falsification," where people are feeling social pressure; whether they're cognizant of it or not, to say what they think that you, that they're supposed to say. It's difficult to gain it, so when you get at these core values, it's not just what you're supposed to say but it's truly, what would you trade off against other things? And I know that's not quite a full answer, but Todd's the social scientist on this and I think he's onto something here.

It's not to say that it's easy by any stretch. It's not to say that we don't have really important disagreements about how to achieve these things, but I think to the point, you have to start with a basis of shared goals and values. I do think that there's a lot more of that in this country than what we usually say.

In terms of how long does this stuff last. It's a great question. It's a really important question. "One Day, LA" I think is a catchy name. It's not, by no means, is it one day. They're building the infrastructure and I think it's significant that they're doing it within faith communities, within churches and other houses of worship because there is an expectation of a repeated interaction there.

I think this is a really important line of anti-media. You may have some ideas on this. There's a lot of different organizations that we work with where they try to measure the lasting effects of some of this toleration that's built up, this sort of habits towards acceptance that's build up and it's tough. But I do think that just... So that's on the one end of the spectrum, it's hard. You've got to do it persistently. You need to build the habit of interaction, but there is literature, which demonstrates that things that we would feel are pretty superficial actually have a pretty big impact.

Like this identity complexity. No offense to the big sports fans in the rooms, but one could look at that as fairly superficial. But if you have more than one identity and if even that second identity is a sports team affiliation, you are much more likely to be open to others than if you only affiliate with one. So I think there is value even in the service interaction, but you're right. The more, the better.

In terms of these key institutions, there's a lot in here. We try to go into a lot of detail in the book to think about your question, not just it's easy to criticize, but what should they do? I'll give you maybe one example and then we can get into whatever else within the other institutions. In education, if you ask parents, what letter grade would you give your overall education system? 80% of them say a C or below, so there is a general dissatisfaction with the education that is being provided to the general public, to the 60 million kids saying K through 12, but easy to criticize.

What should it look like in terms of what we're talking about here? If the institution of education really is intended to be an institution that empowers all people to be able to succeed, come what may from society, what we try to put forward is a vision of education that's three-dimensional; education that helps a person discover who they are, what is their gift, education that gives them the knowledge that allows them to develop that gift, and then education that gives them the experience, the opportunity to apply that gift in a way that can benefit themselves by benefiting others.

So you say, "Well is that public or private?" It doesn't matter, right? That can exist in public schools. They can do it very, very well. It can exist in private schools, but they can also do it poorly. Is it charter or is it micro? Is it... It doesn't matter. There's a vision for an institution like education, which is based on this notion that every person has dignity. Every person has worth. We all have something to contribute and as a society, we've organized education as a way to help each and every person find their own unique path to contributing in the lives of others.

No, I don't think so. We work with, I think, maybe about 1500 different educational entrepreneurs. Most of them are teachers, like people who have been in the system. Again, public or private. To me, that's not nearly as important of a distinction as people who have made it out to be. I think that the dominant sense of education right now is very much one-size-fits-all. It's very much of the students not succeeding, that's not the fault of the system. There's something deficient about the student. I think that what I've just put forward is actually a pretty radical paradigm change, which again, resonates with core values of just about everybody but how you get that done is a pretty big step forward.

Sewell Chan:

Thanks so much for these really illuminating presentations. I wanted to drill down a little bit on a subject that's been glanced at, but not explored in great depth yet, which is race. I think a lot of the progressive take on what's going on in our society right now, is that we have a white majority that is fearful of losing its status and privileges as a result of sweeping demographic changes. I happen to believe that explanation is too unipolar.

I really appreciated, Brian, your discussion of the economic precariousness, which I actually think is something that unites a majority of Americans. We've all seen the federal reserve study that something like half of Americans didn't have \$400 that they could draw on in the event of an emergency. You also spoke, Brian, too, like people's involvement in the criminal justice system and also the pervasive sense of loneliness. But I'm curious what you make about the critiques that release do center race.

I ask, in part, because I'm now in a state that is going through profound demographic change, just like our colleagues from Utah, for example, are experiencing. And, again, I don't... I think it's too much to say that it's the only driver, but it is a really, really important factor and if I can just be a little bit more blunt, that gets to the level of discussion of religion as well. There are definitely a lot of African-American religious conservatives, but I don't think, in general, black Christianity is seen as having been mobilized or weaponized in favor of a particular party or faction or candidate the way white evangelical Christianity has been.

Brian Hooks:

Well, let me maybe just say a few words about how we think about the challenges of racial injustice without trying to give you a complete answer; but I invite some followups. Our vision of the reason that we exist as an organization, Stand Together, is this notion that as, society is structured in a way that empowers people to realize their potential. Not only do they benefit, we all benefit. Our job is to try to look across society and say, "Where are there meaningful barriers that are violating that vision, that are holding people back for which we have something to offer, in order to help them to be removed, to be broken through."

So when we approach the issue of race or racial injustice, we look at it as something that pervades everything that we do. To the extent that our society is structured in a way that is creating barriers for people based on the color of their skin, I mean, that's absolutely antithetical to everything that we stand for. The question is what do we have to offer to actually make a difference on that front? We can talk about the opportunities, I think, to do more and better there, but when it comes to the... By that conversation, there's plenty of specifics to talk about there. I think though, when it comes to, how can this issue be one that unites us rather than one that is used to divide us? This is so important.

The idea that and I guess I'll just leave it at this because there's a whole lot we could say. I think we find ourselves in a situation where there is a false choice being offered in the country right now. There's one faction on one poll, which says that in order to acknowledge racial injustice is somehow antithetical to believing in our country or what have you, which I think is ludicrous. It's nonsensical. Of course, there's racial injustice in our history. Of course, that injustice persists and, of course, there's a whole lot more that we need to do.

On the other hand, there's a poll in this conversation that says in order to move forward, in terms of making progress on racial justice, we have to jettison those things about our country, which are good. I don't think that's a useful frame either but the good news on this, as I see it, is that those polls, they don't represent very many people in our country. The majority of Americans believe racial injustice is a priority that everyone needs to do a lot more to address it. That as we do, not only will those who have been discriminated against and who have been harmed and born the brunt of racial injustice be helped, but all of us will be helped. Our country, as a whole, will be better off. The stats I've seen on that, it's upwards of 75, 80% of the American public.

So again, this is an issue where we share a whole lot more common ground than the public narrative would indicate. That doesn't mean it's easy, but the challenge is how do we break through that false choice so that we can unite people to actually make the kind of progress that we need to see. Again, there's a lot more we can say on that, but...

Andrew Hanauer:

Yeah, I'll be really quick too, which is just to say that I think one of the things that we should be more humble about is assuming the intentions, motives, beliefs of a group of people that numbers in the millions that we've never met, which seems to be an endemic problem in how we talk about these issues. What I would say is that, within the white evangelical churches where we work, there is broad commitment to racial justice by the pastors and also, I think, a growing recognition that has not always been lived out.

I think that a lot of what they see, our congregants, who have what I would describe as a mix of views; some of which are more sort of characterized as progressive and some of which are not. You'll have people who would disavow racism forcefully, but then not realize or not acknowledge that some of the ways that they talk about race or some of the ways that they live their lives would not reflect that.

I think that all is to say that I think those conversations and those things need to be addressed, but they need to be addressed by people who have trust and credibility within those communities. I think a lot of the attempts to do trainings and other things don't work in those settings. They just don't. So if our goal is to make fewer people racist, if our goal is to make the country more just, then we shouldn't do things that don't work. I think that's a lot of what we hear and see from the people we work with.

Josh Good:

Great. Let's go next to Jackie Calmes with the Los Angeles Times and just go to the order. Restrooms are through that big door outside and just to your left. Adult Learning, we're going to take a break at 10:30 for about 15, 20 minutes for coffee and water refreshment, and then come back at it. Jackie.

Jackie Calmes:

This question goes directly to something you said, Andrew, but both of you have touched on it. The emphasizing the work that needs to be done at the local level and, in particular, to bring people from the faith community to engage with people at their local level to address polarization. But I wonder just how hard that becomes when you consider how geographically sorted the country has become.

I mean how do you do this when so many, and the related question and problem is that, when so many of the local people in the faith community are dividers themselves. I would say the Evangelicals, who are, even on matters of COVID protocols, are making that a political issue. Isn't that a big hindrance to addressing polarization in this country, that you have such geographic sorting, by urban and rural and north and south, just roughly speaking, coastal and heartland?

Andrew Hanauer:

It's a great question. Sorry. We actually had a LA Orange County chapter for that reason and it did not last, not because they didn't like the relationship but because the traffic was terrible. So I hear you. We also have a chapter involving a DC congregation and a West Virginia congregation. They're about an hour and 10 minutes apart. Do they see each other as much as they want to? No, but a big part of the reason we did that was to get people out of their geographic bubbles.

We had people in DC after 2016 who said, "I admit it. I don't know anyone who voted for Trump. I feel like I'm in a bubble. Help me get out of that and see the world and see people who are different." But I'll be honest too. A lot of our chapters are not in LA, New York, DC, San Francisco, right? We work in places in this country where there is enormous political diversity. Those are not hard to find. We do work in the south. We do work in Michigan and Utah, in Oklahoma, and we do not struggle to find congregations that have never worked together before and that have interest in engaging with each other.

I think there's a huge urban-rural divide. I think that's a huge, huge part of that and that is something that the pandemic has opened up. New interest in Zoom and also please, God, make Zoom go away forever, but we are seeing some virtual programs of that nature. We believe that having someone on the ground, locally rooted, doing the work over the longevity of the work to the previous question's point is really important. I don't believe that we're going to do Zoom between Nebraska and LA meetings that will be the solution to polarization. But there are ways to connect people across geographic divides as well, but I think the overall point is that for most of our work, we're in places where that's not an issue. We have people who want to engage in that work across divides who live in the same community.

Brian Hooks:

Let me give you a quick story. The settings are really important issue and one that's gotten worse, right? Everybody knows the current state of things. We are much less likely to interact with people who are different from us than we were even a generation ago. There's a group that we support up in... I guess they're all over the country. We do some work with them in New York. It's called Narrative 4, if you guys have come across this another wonderful organization. It was started by a guy named Colum McCann, who's a storyteller. He's a successful fiction author and he's put together this great group of people with the idea that stories can bring us together. They can create empathy. The standard approach that Narrative 4 does is they get, I think, it's about 20, 22 people in a room, very diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and they have difficult conversations on really challenging issues.

When I encountered them, the example that was shared with me was on "Guns in America." What they would do is they would pair people off and have them spend real time together, like three hours together. Are gun enthusiasts from the south with a woman who lost her daughter in one of the mass shootings, for instance. Really tough stuff. They would go off and what they do is the one person tells, in this case, his story to the other person and then the other person tells her story to the other person. Then you get back into a group and you share the other person's story in the first person, as if it's your own story, so makes sense. The empathy that's created both by having to embody the other person's story, but also in hearing your own story through the person that you have, otherwise just kind of authorized. Seen as the other is incredible. Now to Jon's point, the challenge with this is that it's not lasting, right?

It doesn't stick for very long, but it's a wonderful technique. The reason I bring it up is the experiment that we've supported with them is to see whether or not this method can be scaled through technology and across communities. They do a lot of work in high schools across the country, and one of the high schools that they work in is, I think it's called University High School of the Bronx. And it's a very poor school district, a public school in the Bronx. They've paired up with a school of similar socioeconomic status in rural Kentucky. And then just to take it one step further, they've paired that pair up with a school in the middle of Mexico.

And they've technologies, which is not just a zoom screen, but it's a full screen so it's more like an in-person interaction. But this story exchange, turns out works in terms of creating the kind of empathy. And then there's all these second order benefits, which is really interesting. It's not just you feel empathy for each other, but you get greater self-esteem, you're more likely to venture outside of your community, these kids go to college at higher rates, all of this sort of stuff. But the good news is it does look like when you encounter people from very different situations, geographies, you name it, cultures, all of that, there's still that human connection. And techniques like what Narrative 4 have done, I think offer us some insight into how to create that. But it's tough to do it at scale, and it's tough to do it in a lasting way.

Jackie Calmes:

I follow up just quickly on terms of how long lasting it is. Seems it often would last as long as they go on home and tune into Fox News or Newsmax. And that's there every night or whenever, not every night, 24/7 whenever they want. And, not to just pick on conservative media, though I think they're the most to blame in terms of disinformation, and politicizing even things that should not be politicized. Like MSNBC in the past week, when there was testimony in Congress four women testified, three Democratic Congress women about their abortions they had had to put a human face to this, but there was the fourth one was a Republican Congress woman who talked about she was a child of adoption, her mother had decided not to get an abortion, and so here she is in Congress.

I am strictly pro-abortion rights, so I completely sided with the other three, but MSNBC twice that day when they were reporting on this, two different shows reported on the three women who were pro-abortion rights or the three Democratic Congresswoman and didn't even mention the Republican Congresswoman. And I'm thinking to myself, you have to address both points of view and both realities. And so I guess my point is just that the media, an especially the right wing media is just, I think, the biggest problem we have.

Andrew Hanauer:

Thank you. If the argument is we can't depolarize because we're up against cable news, Russia, social media, tech algorithms, the way our own brains are wired, then yet it's a big challenge. And that's why we need to actually need it because our country has been torn apart and it's going to disintegrate if we don't do something about it. So yeah, it's huge. It's a huge problem. The social media algorithm is rooted in the idea that the business model is based on radicalizing people so you can better sell them things. So when we work with people, they're going back to that every single day. So we have to build resilience to that, and that takes long-term work. You can't do that with a one-time thing, but you have to be committed to actually putting the time and work to help communities build that resilience. And it is possible.

I think one of the things that we use to measure are a number of things that have been studied over the last five years. And so we don't believe you can measure every effect of every depolarization intervention, but there are ways you can measure. So one thing that you can measure is meta perceptions. So a meta perception is what do I think you think of me. It's like every first date you've ever had, every job interview. And so it turns out that if you ask people, do you like Jews? They're often going to lie, if they actually have antisemitic attitudes. But if you ask them, do you think Jewish people like your group, they're more likely to tell the truth and say, "I don't think that they do." And that that correlates, if you think another group hates you, you're more likely to hate them back.

And so we actually use, working with a university neuroscience lab, we use in our surveys measurements of meta perceptions to understand whether people are changing their views. And the results for us have been really positive. So I think we're always going to come up against, "Well, what's the point? It's too big of a problem. It's too hard." We're always going to come up against, "Well, look at the other side. They're so radical and extreme, I could have worked with them three years ago, but look at them now." We have to understand this is a cycle that feeds itself and gets worse and worse. And if we don't intervene now and cut it off, it's going to be even harder five years from now.

Josh Good:

Okay. In the queue, we have Tom Hallman, Deb Saunders, Scott Wilson, Esau McCaulley, Naomi Ishisaka, Alayna Treene, Howe Boyd, Kelsey Dallas and Linda Kinstler. So lots to go. Let's see if we can get two in before the break, if we can, Scott, you've been patiently waiting from the Washington Post.

Scott Wilson:

The faith community, it seems to me, has increasingly fostered a perception of itself as a part of society at large. And I think we did see that quite strongly during COVID. Here in California the churches sued Governor Newsom went all the way to the Supreme Court, the churches won because they were lumped in with other large crowd groups. It was played as Newsom hates religion, he is trying to shut down the churches, even though there was no Newsom hates schools, there was none of that, whether it's same sex marriage, abortion rights. And so I guess in Christianity, elements of Christianity in this

country seem to have a much more Old Testament view of the world these days than a New Testament view, one of punishment and sin, as opposed to tolerance and hope.

And so my question is, do you worry that you're working too much with self-selected faith leaders? Ones that come to you and say, "I want to work with you. I want to solve this problem," and aren't reaching a large majority, majority is a wrong word, a large portion of faith leaders who have no interest and see themselves really as not having shared values in this country at all, encourage parishioners, not to wear masks where major COVID breakouts in the churches and then spread throughout that community. And, so I think it's led to a mistrust of the faith community in large parts of the country. And I'm wondering how you address that, and how you try to expand your reach, beyond liberal or even centrists faith leaders, into the hardcore, "We are unique and we don't have to follow the rules of the country we live in".

Andrew Hanauer:

But I think that group is much smaller than the news coverage reflects it as. So what I would say is that we work with very conservative faith leaders. They're unabashedly conservative. And they want to work with us. And the reason they want to work with us, it's not because they think they should be more centrist, but because they are seeing the brokenness that came from wrapping politics and religion together into a package. A lot of them felt like if they just never talked about politics from the pulpit, maybe other than abortion, for the last 20 years, that it would go away. And then they've seen that that's not the case. And that in fact, by not talking about politics, they created a vacuum that was then filled by Facebook. So it's a little funny because a lot of bridge building initiatives often are progressives talking to other progressives who maybe they're different religions, unfortunately that's been the case.

And so the evangelical community has not largely been part of bridge-building efforts, but they are absolutely engaging with it now. So I don't actually view that as something that's a problem for us. We're working with people very far apart on the political spectrum, who just happened to recognize the need. And I think also rather than always seeking out the extremes, we want that story of the proud boy and the antifa in a phone booth together doing story core or something like that. And that's a really good story and it really matters. We want those people to talk to each other, if it can be productive. But there's a much bigger need to get leaders of groups thinking about how to shape the norms and behaviors of their own group effectively away from toxic division. And so I don't care whether the pastor we work with is centrist, right, left, whatever, what I care about is that we're working with leaders who represent communities that span those divides, so that they are bringing all of those people into that work. If that makes sense.

Josh Good:

I have a mild addendum to offer in response to your excellent question, which is to say that my view is the last five years drew out, particularly for the evangelical tribe in the United States, evangelical Pentecostal, put them together, call it 80 to 85 million, as Wheaton College estimates today, that it is not the community I thought it was. And it has been sobering and fascinating and discouraging at times. I don't know, I'm not trying to be emotional, but heartbreaking. I thought that group was something like 80% evangelical and 20% fundamentalist, that is to say more inclined toward racism, more inclined toward us against the world, not having anything to do with the world, the Benedict option, the other world saves souls, who cares about this one. And it has seemed to turn that on its head, or something close to it. So I think for those of us in that tribe, there are many around this table, that is a real problem, an internal problem.

Brian Hooks:

Yeah. I think it's a great question. I don't have a lot to add because I think you're right. And for us, we haven't set out to try to reform the church, we set out to find the most effective social entrepreneurs who are solving problems in our country. So we are getting people who are self-selecting as those that are problem-solvers and entrepreneurial. I will say that I think, in my experience which is much more limited than yours and certainly Andy's or Joshua's, these labels that we use to generalize people, conservative, liberal, progressive, what have you, very rarely actually fit very well on those people who are trying to actually make change.

We work with a group out of south Dallas, the leader of the group passed away tragically in March from COVID, in his prime he was 47 years old, good friend of mine, a guy named Bishop Omar, who was a leader in the black Baptist Church in south Dallas, a very difficult community that has all sorts of challenges. If you asked Omar, are you a conservative or progressive? He would look at you like it was just an absolutely irrelevant question. He had values and relationships that would fit very well in either of those boxes. Omar was a problem solver. He was a leader. He was somebody that was showing whoever came to him, that they could be more than they thought that they could be, and then he was actually acting to help them to achieve that. So I think part of it is our language isn't very useful when we're thinking about how do you actually envision a better future, and at least in my experience, the role that people who identify as faith leaders can play in that.

Andrew Hanauer:

Really quick. For folks who want to better understand the evangelical world, I would just encourage you to come and attend church places, I'm happy to make connections if people want to meet some of these pastors at any point.

Josh Good:

Story leads and an altar call all at once. So when we come back from a 15 minute break, we'll go first to Esau McCaulley, we just talked about Wheaton College briefly, mentioned it anyway. A 15 minute break and we'll resume.

Okay. Back to it. Back east the 15 minute break normally it's like 21 minutes, and here it's like 16, so something's going right. Maybe we can come back to the west coast next year. First up is Dr. Esau McCaulley from Wheaton College, New Testament theologian, and a speaker this afternoon. Over to you sir.

Esau McCaulley:

I want to give like a caveat. I have read the thousands of articles. It feels like they're just dumps on evangelicalism, and it's an easy thing to do, and I don't find that super exciting. But I do have some questions around the ways that some of this conversation has been framed, and I want to give two quick examples. One of them is the discussion of polarization. And the way that I hear polarization functions, at least for me, it sounds like a very white conversation, and this is what I mean, we talk about these people being very, very divided and then we need to come together, but we don't. And there was a mention of race, but I want to talk in particular about who suffers most during a polarization, because the polarization often happens by scapegoating particular communities, and those communities bond themselves like out of sorts. So in other words, at the black man, I suffered more in America during the polarization, not because I shifted one way or the other, but because there was an added hostility towards me.

And so I want to talk about how we talk about polarization as it relates to the victims of it. And it seems like polarization is often achieved at the expense of particular communities. That's the first part that I wanted to address. And the second one, and this is where it gets down to kind of the relationship to the discussion that your evangelicalism and their participation in operative participation and polarization. I've heard mentioned at least four or five times that we're not as divided as we seem. That we agree on more than we think that we agree on. But if this gets like very, very concrete, you talked about something like police reform, and you look at maybe the three or four major evangelical denominations, you meet annually. Really good way of answering this question. And you say, "Well, how many of those meetings have there been extensive discussion of police reform?"

Now there have been political issues addressed, whether or not you can teach critical race theory at school, something like that. And so when these groups meet and they discuss the issues that actually matter to them, they seem to discuss issues that are arising out of the Republican party talking points and not issues of pressing concern for black and brown communities. So what I'm asking is there one example of a denomination that's evangelical, that's addressing these issues head on, or can we actually name five to seven, even white evangelical leaders who are actually consistently talking about those things, that it didn't then lead to the evangelical credentials being kind of pulled.

You think of someone like Russell Moore, Beth Moore, who did come up and say a few things about what's going on in society. And for that very reason, they found themselves alienated from evangelical mainstream. And so I guess if I can nail that down then, we talked about polarization, but I don't think we talked about the victims of polarization. And two, we talked about shared values across the political landscape, when that actually gets cashed out in the actual subjects of debate in evangelical spaces. I don't see that kind of those shared values on something as basic in black communities as police reform, actually manifesting itself in the public discourse.

Andrew Hanauer:

First of all, I agree with you in the first part. I think groups like ours have done a terrible job of framing what matters and what doesn't matter about polarization. So if polarization is about us coming together to feel good about ourselves and just all get along better, then that's not what I want to spend my time doing. Polarization, as we call it toxic polarization, is a system that perpetuates itself. It creates a series of negative feedback loops that make it worse and worse until we get farther and farther apart, and there are real victims to that. And one of the most important victims of that are groups that are then targeted for violence and rhetoric. So I a 100% agree with you, a lot of the people we work with are people who used to do things like the fellows at the Holocaust Museum. And there's a reason for that. They see a direct link between dynamics of toxic polarization and harm that is directed at specific communities.

I think the other thing that toxic polarization does is it makes everything much more performative and much less actually actionable. And so we spend a lot of time proclaiming which team we're on, and using that as a badge of moral courage, while doing less to actually address the issues that matter. And so we've seen, I think, especially in the last couple of years arise in people, what is it hashtag ism? I don't know how to pronounce it. So, as an organization, just speaking for ourselves, we're interested in never being performative. We're interested in always asking ourselves what is the actual thing that we could do and be part of doing that would actually make the situation better. And I think that that is the opposite of what the polarization industry is pushing us towards. I think that the more that groups like ours talk about polarization as civil dialogue, or can't we just get along? We're doing a disservice to everyone. And we deserve to then be asked, "Who cares?"

I think to the second question, I don't want to defend evangelicalism, that's not my interest or position, I'll just say that I see more hope the closer you get to the ground. So I see a lot more hope in individuals and individual congregations than I see in denominations. And so I think, yes absolutely, our institutions should reflect the values that Jesus actually talks about as Christians. And I don't think that's the case when those institutions are not addressing issues that matter to a huge percentage of their congregants. And I think that's why we do a lot of the work we do at the more local level, because I think there's a lot more hope there. And I think a lot less BS, for lack of a better word.

Esau McCaulley:

I'm on the ground too. I work at an evangelical institution and I'll sit with these students every day. And like I said, I'm not cynical, but what I think that I would really like to hear more, maybe just more of a posture, and forgive me this is not me like yelling at you, we don't know each other, but I feel like, yes, there is hope, but you have to go through the dark part to the hope a little bit more, and it's not simply me meeting more evangelicals on the ground because I've met them on the ground. And that's what makes me happy [crosstalk 01:30:14] towards hope.

And so the students who I sit in the room with are students of color who actually share some of the values that Brian may have talked about, like these shared spiritual values that they have with their evangelical co-religious people. But it's also a deep sense of alienation, and a deep sense of they claim to have my religion but when I am suffering on something related to something, I was talking about the police reform, even though there is a shared statement about values, when it comes down to cashing in it out, there is a real hesitancy and fear. And wrestling with trying to get through to that, in trying to think through that, it's kind of what I was trying to get at.

Andrew Hanauer:

I agree with you a thousand percent. I was referencing the reference to denominations, but no, I agree with you. I think if white evangelical Christians aren't living out those values and they're not doing that, then it's going to die out for one thing, where it's going to become a hack political tribe, which is the challenge. I think that that alienation is also where we need to recognize that churches are in decline in part because they're not living the values that they profess, and that has to change. But no, I agree with you. I think it's not as simple as saying, "Oh, if you just met people, you would realize," but I think that there is also a sense for which we make broad judgments about people we had never met, and I think those are not always accurate or fair.

Brian Hooks:

Three things to what you said. First, absolutely you're right. Those groups in society that have been marginalized historically suffer the worst from the problems that polarization prevents us from solving police reform is an excellent example. I think education reform is another example of this. I think the conversation about immigration right now is another example of this, and we could go on. The second point is I don't think we want to make the case that the faith community has to solve all these problems. I take your word for the way that you just described the challenges within the evangelical community. I don't think we need the majority of any community to lead on this. We need some brave souls to come out of different communities and come together to create the space, the safe space in a sense, for the majority to feel like they can speak their mind, because these are majority issues.

Police reform is a majority issue, it just is. The majority of Americans believe that the policing system right now doesn't work well for whatever they want to accomplish and it needs to be improved. And if we improve it, it's going to help those who have been most harmed by it. Same thing with

education, we went through that a minute ago. Immigration, it's a 74, 75% issue, the majority of Americans think immigration is good. More Americans today think that we need more immigration. This has not always been the case, but it is today. How would you know that from the conversation right now?. So when I say, look, we share values, I'm not saying this is easy or this is inevitable, because the extremes in each one of these conversations are shouting down basically the people who could otherwise sort of carry the day.

But I don't think we can put it all on the faith community, given all the challenges that you pointed out. I don't think we can put it on any one community, but my understanding of how social change has worked well, and by well I mean moved us more in the direction of justice, is it's taken leaders from a diverse set of communities to come together and break the stalemate. And that's what unleashed the flood gates of change. So faith community has an important role to play but we can't put it all on them.

Speaker 3:

Andrew mentioned that trust at the local level exists with pastors. So my question is, what about the local media? If the message of faith is imparted through story, why don't we tell more stories that reveal our shared humanity where lives intersect. And the question I ask you is what should be the role of local media?

And then I want to give you an example of something that happened to me the other night, I went down on one night, eight o'clock at night, to the hot tub, and there were five black women, three black men, and we all looked at each other and I got in the hot tub and it was as if I was in the baptismal waters. We started to talk and I said, "If you came down and there were six or seven white people, would you come in?" And they said, "No," talked about race, talked about COVID. They were from all around the country here to celebrate somebody's 40th birthday.

And we talked about issues because we were both vulnerable in all of our swimsuits. And when I left, I told one of the women, "I said, I went to a black church for a year because I liked gospel music. I was the only white guy in the church." And when I left, one of the women said, "I'm going to pray for you." We all agreed it was a spiritual moment. That story would not be run in any newspaper. That story will die in this room. And I submit that that story has more impact than a profile of a faith leader or a story about a program. What is the role of reporters seeking those moments and telling 1000 word stories?

Josh Good:

May I just quickly name that I'd love for that very thoughtful question to prompt a little bit of conversation with the group. We were talking earlier about how newsrooms are part of this too. Newsrooms are part of the mix on polarization. And frankly, I can't speak for my other white guy brothers up here who are not in a swimsuit, but to try to understand what is happening a little bit more on the newsroom side of this as well, that is part of. Everybody starts out with this ideal of public service and making the country better and being a great reporter, and then it gets more over time. And is there something about what's also the case for you in newsrooms that contributes to this, but please guys.

Andrew Hanauer:

All of our events take place in swimsuits as a rule. I appreciate that too, and I appreciate the question. I definitely think local news is incredibly important. I nerded out earlier about superordinate identities, but there's cross-cutting identities, which is, I'm a Democrat you're Republican, but we both care about

the Lakers, or we both serve the homeless in our local community. That's what our projects are designed to activate, is those cross-cutting identities. And sharing a community, sharing a city, sharing a town that's a cross-cutting identity. I think, in answering your question, it's important for reporters to complexify narratives, to not tell simple stories. And I think that there are of course things happening in local communities that are of the nature that we're describing that could be reported on. And I think the more local they are the better. I don't think a story about one America's programs is that interesting at a national level? I think a story about Tulsans in Tulsa who have come together to do something across their divides is much more interesting to Tulsans. And that's the direction that I think it needs to go.

Brian Hooks:

I agree, I think this is one of the biggest challenge that we've got right now. We were talking about this at dinner the other night, local journalism has played way more of a role than just reporting on what happens locally in communities and in people's lives. And the extent that that is harder and harder to find. I think that's a big part of the problem that we're experiencing right now.

Josh Good:

We've got Naomi Ishisaka, Hal Boyd, Alayna Treene, Deb Saunders, Kelsey Dallas, let's go first to you, Hal, while Naomi's coming back. Hal Boyd about, Deseret News.

Hal Boyd:

We've talked a bit about the faith community, the institution of the faith community, we've talked about the institution of newsrooms and their role and function. I'm curious to hear your thoughts about the institution of politics itself, especially political parties. It seems to be that a gutting out or a vacuum exists of leadership in all of these institutions. And in many ways, these institutions serve as moderating forces, bringing polarization and then kind of putting it through a system in which it moderates because of the interactions with each other, and your work it seems is doing just that, bringing people together from different sides and then moderating through a realization of the shared humanity. So my question is, the most important place where this could take place in terms of moderating institutions is political parties themselves, and so what can be done in using your models, et cetera, to actually reform or improve the actual political parties, where maybe the moderation of polarization, intraparty polarization, is the most important? And manifest itself in actually who gets elected, who gets nominated, et cetera, and either exacerbates polarization or further moderates it

Brian Hooks:

So this is a very challenging question. And Andrew told you his faith journey, I'll share our journey through politics as a way to begin to answer your question. Most people who know Charles Koch or they know Stand Together, the Charles Koch Foundation, which I lead as well as Stand Together, they think about what we've done in politics over the past decade or so. And that's on us, we haven't done a good job of sharing the broader story of who we really are and what we do. Only about 10% of what we do has ever been political at any time in our history, but most people don't know that, but 10% is significant. And, we got into politics in order to help improve public policy in earnest back in 2010. And for three cycles we looked to political parties as the way to advance good policy, policy that would help people improve their lives. And boy, did we get a crash course in what works and especially what doesn't.

And so to your point about the role that parties might play, the role that they are playing right now, I think it's an important point in this conversation. So for us, what we did was we got engaged in

2010 in politics, we went through the way that most people get engaged in politics. If you want to pass good policy, you choose one team, you bet on that team, and then you try to get the best policy out of that team that you can. And we did that for three cycles. And through those three cycles what we learned is, that doesn't work very well. Parties are not actually there to advance good policy. Parties are there to advance parties. Now you might have said, "You didn't need to go through three cycles in politics to learn that," George Washington told us that in his farewell address to the country, "might be where political parties, they're not in it for the country, they're in it for themselves." And that's absolutely the case.

So then what do you do about it? Well, in 2015, we took stock of what we had done in politics. And we said, "Look, we're going to get marginal changes, but we're never actually going to solve big problems in the country in policy by playing the game of politics the way that it's being played, even if we can do it better than anybody else." And so we changed the way that we get engaged in politics. And what we said was, "We don't care if you're a Republican, or if you're a Democrat, what we're looking for is to support people who have the courage of their convictions when it comes to policy that can help people to improve their lives." Now we can disagree on what that policy looks like but rather than taking a partisan approach, what we've said is, "Stand up for good policy, whether you're a Democrat or Republican, and we've got your back," and we'll help to build policy coalitions across political parties, where people care more about advancing policy that can improve people's lives than they do about advancing the parties.

I will tell you it's a very difficult thing to do, but it works really well when it does work. And so you take something like the First Step Act, which was a pretty significant criminal justice reform at the federal level, think about when this passed, this was December of 2018. At that point, we thought the country couldn't get much more divided. Of course, hindsight is 2020, and it did, but it was a very challenging time. But criminal justice reform at the federal level, this is the third rail of politics for 25 years, it passed 87 to 12 in the Senate, at a time when partisanship, Donald Trump, all of that, was front and center in the media and social media and all of that. How did that happen? I think understanding how that happened is part of an answer to the question that you're asking. How can politics at least not be such a contributor to polarization? We may not want to get too Pollyannaish or too aspirational and say, "How can it contribute to bringing the country together?" But how can at least not be such a negative force?

My answer is that people from different parties decided that the goal of achieving criminal justice reform was more important than satisfying that narrow band of primary voters that they usually answer to. And they made a public incredible commitment that they would do the right thing. They believed each other, and then they got each other's back. So you think about the people that were involved in this. Hakeem, Jeffries, he was a champion on this. When we worked with Congressman Jeffries, we believe what he said, and we knew he had our back if we took risks. Ben Jones, he was a champion on this. But then you look at the Republicans who were also there, a guy like Mike Lee comes from a pretty conservative state, but he was a champion on this. So this can work. And it's not just the anomaly of criminal justice reform. You saw this in a number of other issues actually coming out of that period of time.

I think those dynamics exist right now in immigration. I know you may think I'm crazy, but the underlying coalition, the underlying trust that's being built, and the absolutely undeniable damage that's being done by not acting. That was the case in the criminal justice system. We were having a conversation last night, Melinda it was you and I, right? Once you start to see the horrors that exist within our criminal justice system, you can't turn those off. You will risk your political capital to get changed if you're truly committed there. Immigration is the same thing, you can't look at what

happened at the border, a week and a half ago, and say, "Well, I think we'll just work on something else." Right? No, you got to do that. So I think that there is, maybe playbook is a little bit too strong of a word, but there is instructive lessons from doing politics differently, the way that we're trying to do that now, right? Focusing on bringing policy champions together, across political parties to accomplish something. But it exists in a dynamic where if you do that, you are absolutely going to be primary these days. Right? And so what do we do about that?

How do we bring diverse groups together, so it's not just one or two bit players in this, but this becomes a trend where people see that they don't have to sacrifice their political success for policy success. So a lot of things that need to happen, it's a tough road, but unless more people do something like that, I think politics will continue to be one of the biggest barrier to accomplishing everything that we're talking about.

Naomi Ishisaka:

I'm just wondering what you think was the role of accountability and justice and reconciliation in this model of depoliticization that you're talking about. And I was thinking of that James Baldwin quote, which was, "We can disagree and still love each other, unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." So I was wondering how that sort of paradigm plays into it.

Andrew Hanauer:

On an interpersonal level, in our work we believe in creating, when we're bringing people together across divides, we believe in creating relationships of trust and authenticity. And if you actually have a relationship of trust with someone, then it is not compatible to also not care about the injustices that they face. So we don't believe that if you just get this group and this group together, they're going to magically suddenly become rainbows and unicorns. But if we're going to address polarization, we have to, have to be having honest conversations and doing actual work about things that matter.

And so that's why we don't have interest in this sort of, "Let's have dialogue and then feel good and go home." It has to be actually meaningful relationships and meaningful action on things that matter, including injustice, racism, et cetera. So what we found in our work is that there's a lot of people who go into those conversations because they think, "Oh, this will be interesting. I'll meet someone who's different from me. It'll be a good experience. I'll post a photo of myself smiling on Facebook with a person who looks different than me." But if you're actually in that work and you're committed to it, you can't stop there. I mean, it's just very similar to what Brian was just saying.

Like, you either keep going and you get somewhere much more meaningful or you don't participate over time. And that's why we don't believe in one-off events. It's why we believe in long term engagement. So, the short answer is, yeah, I agree. I agree with James Baldwin. I think that's absolutely right. And I think that what we have in our society are a lot of people who don't have relationships with each other, who would benefit from having those relationships, not because just being friends with someone will magically make injustice go away. But because on an interpersonal level, you could actually see other people's experiences and pain and realities in a much more real way once you have those kinds of relationships.

So I try to be clear-eyed about that. I don't think it's a magical thing that's going to solve everything, but if we're going to do this work, we as anti-polarization organizations have to be committed to having to go much deeper than just, "Let's have a nice dialogue and feel good about ourselves."

William Saletan:

Right there. Got it. Okay. So I was going to ask the question that Scott asked. So I'm going to piggyback on Scott's question about the destructive kinds of religion, destructive kinds of faith. But I wanted to pick up on Andrew's answer to that. Andrew, in your response to that, you spoke about, if I heard you correctly, you were speaking about conservative pastors or conservative faith leaders who were motivated to do this work that you're talking about because they had seen a kind of brokenness in their congregations.

And I just wanted to hear more about that. I wanted to hear what it is objectively that was happening to people in these congregations that motivated even conservative faith leaders or conservative pastors to say, "This can't go on. We have to stop this." And I ask this question in part, because I would like to believe that there are objective conditions that are so universal or so universally troubling that no matter what the politics, or the theology of that faith leader or that leader of the congregation, that they would say, "This is wrong. This is bad. And we have to change the direction this is going."

Andrew Hanauer:

They were seeing congregants filtering their faith and their pastor through the prism of their cable news, as opposed to the other way around. But yeah, sure. I mean, in terms of concrete, January 6th, for sure. We had pastors who were shocked that their congregants weren't as horrified as they were by what they saw. Misinformation, conspiracy theories, racism, for sure. You know, I think that there's also just a general meanness in Facebook comments or any kind of social media comments. We hear a lot of times, "Oh, Bob is such a nice guy and he comes to church every Sunday and he's so polite and he helps out at the... And then he screams at people on social media and I don't understand how that's the same person." And so I think it's concrete things like the ones I mentioned. And it's also just a general sense that there's something off, that something is not right. And that, I think to Josh's point, that who they thought they were and who they thought their congregants were is not who they now are worried that they have sort of become.

Josh Good:

Let's jump next to Alayna Treene from Axios.

Alayna Treene:

On polarization, I know I cover politics so I'm coming at this kind of a more political lens and similar to what Hal was asking, but obviously there was this false narrative during I think the 2020 election that polarization might end or least get significantly better once Trump left office. And clearly that hasn't happened, it's only grown more. And we've seen, I mean for me covering Congress, seeing politicians, particularly in this case, Republicans, seeing how well polarization worked for Trump, how effective it was and using that now. And I shared this last night with some people I was sitting with at dinner, how someone like Jim Banks, who's now one of the most conservative people in the house. I had lunch with him a couple years ago. He was like, "I want to be the person who bridges the divide and cut through populism," and whatever else.

And we're now seeing the opposite because politically, and you spoke Brian, it's more effective. And I think we've, like you spoke about January 6th, Andrew. And I think everyone can agree what the problem is. We see people like Josh Hawley, Ted Cruz, perpetuating it. I guess my question is with politics, it's only getting worse. How do you think, realistically, in a lasting way, when you look at

national leaders, how to bridge that divide. And then also I think a lot of people asking questions about the media and I will show humility here. Like we're part of the problem, a hundred percent. I write about this. How do we help as well bridge the gap and what role do we play in it?

Brian Hooks:

Yeah, it's a great question. I showed a little bit of what I think about this a second ago, but similar to what I shared at the beginning on polarization, I think if we just take polarization head on, on the surface, we're not going to make the kind of progress that we all want to see. I don't think that the problems in politics are going to be solved only by addressing politics. I think that they are a reflection of a lot of what we've talked about and the challenges that are much deeper in society. And so politics is downstream from culture, right? The politicians, whether they're right or they're correct in their guess or they're wrong in their guess, they're trying to satisfy what they think the voters are looking for in order to stay in power.

And that's what they do, that's who they are. So we need a lot of focus on changing the dynamics in the current political situation. You know, for instance, the idea that, I think it's about 7% of the electorate on either side votes in primaries and that so many of the districts are so gerrymandered that the primaries where the election is. That's a real concrete example of what's messed up in terms of the political incentives. And you can address that through some pretty straightforward reforms, I think. But even if you do that, if the politicians continue to sort of read the signals from society that, "Hey, the voters are going to reward me for being mean and demonizing people," rather than offering positive solutions, we may make a little progress, but we're not going to make the kind of progress that I think we all want to see.

And so I go back to this idea that there are some fundamental things about our society right now that are creating barriers to more and more people to being able to live the kind of lives that they ought to be able to live. And if we can help to resolve those, then politicians aren't going to have the same kind of incentives that they have right now to do what they're doing right now, but that's real work and that's not going to be solved through politics. It's not going to be solved through policy on its own, right? It's going to be solved through this kind of bringing every one of these institutions in society together to say, "Hey, how do we help to contribute to the solution rather than a kind of continue to create the conditions where this is what it means to be successful in politics?"

Josh Good:

Maybe as a quick addendum to the last part of what Atlanta just raised about the journalism part, because this is what we talked about the other day. I would be curious to ask an elder statesman, 20 years in plus in the field in the room about what you think the kind of guild part of journalism is like. You know, Yuval has that line about, it should be a form experience. Like the military, you'd be formed rather than a platform experience. And is it the case that many people coming up the pipeline are mostly about getting their own Twitter following up and podcasts and name out there and sort of zinger titles, or is it the case that there is real constructive forming happening in the newsroom as you see it, as it relates to this larger question of polarization, and maybe it's Sewell.

Sewell Chan:

I want to be clear, I don't see myself as an elder statesman on a variety of levels, but I do have a couple of thoughts because just being involved in, certainly hiring and training and mentoring younger journalists. You know, when I'm asked about journalists and our biases, and there's going to be a gazillion viewpoints on this, I welcome discussion and disagreement, but I think we do have certain

biases, but they're not the ones typically talked about. I don't think that most journalists who do fact based journalism enter it with particularly ideological conceptions. I do think that the biases that exist in news coverage are often toward conflict, drama, and it leads to the kind of, who's up, who's down kind of horse race nature of journalism, particularly around, but not solely around electoral politics. You know, I do think we're inherent storytellers and we like narratives.

So actually everything that Andrew's talking about, where you can be as specific as possible and show, not tell is very, very compelling actually to hear as a journalist. But I also think that sometimes the focus on narrative really leads to the personalization of a lot of things, instead of just kind of stepping back and looking at more structural things. It's harder to talk about how half of Americans have less than \$400 in emergency savings, or how little trust there is, or how kind of divided we are. Those are very, very abstract things. And journalists tend to like tangible things.

On the question of kind of social media, I don't want to overstate it, but I do think that the relative power of voices versus publications and platforms is shifting. Individual voice and perspective matter a lot more. When I was starting in my career, I would always say the important part of it is what's after the at symbol, right? The organization that you represent. And I'm kind of an institutionalist kind of person, maybe that's why I became a manager, but I think a lot of individual creators, for a variety of reasons, many of them legitimate, have become much more invested in kind of developing their own kind of following. I don't think all those reasons are selfish.

The institutions have become somewhat less resilient. There is probably less job security and certainty than there used to be. People are switching institutions more often than they used to. And of course there's also the effect of social media as well, that kind of social media rewards people with strong takes. And social media also tends to reward a kind of ruthless consistency.

If I can be honest, you follow certain people because you know the take and perspective that they will be articulating at in a really, really sharp way across the spectrum. But unfortunately that does not reward an appetite for what I think is the best journalism, which is journalism that emphasizes paradox, inconsistency, contradiction, and frankly, yes, tragedy. I don't mean to be too literary here, but there is something about humans and the human condition that is fundamentally fallible and tragic, not to step too much into the faith side of these questions.

But I think journalists would do well to kind of recognize that. And instead of just portraying things in very, very certain frameworks, I've been thinking a lot about what you guys have said about how do we portray individuals more, rather than teams and tribes? And that's another big challenge I think our craft faces. But I don't mean to speak for journalism. So just offering my own points of view. Would love to hear from others.

Tom Hallman:

I've been at the Oregonian for 42 years, and I think we underestimate what readers want. We get printouts daily of the top rated stories, and many them are crime stories. Dear Abby. But when I do these narrative type of stories that focus on this humanity, they're the top rated stories, but a reader does not say in a poll, "I want that kind of story." So as journalists, we have to be out in the community, talking to people, and I especially see many young journalists who pick up the phone or wait for the press release and don't go into diverse communities where we- [crosstalk 02:00:31].

Yeah, and also we are not welcome in many communities because of what we bring, we're the reporters. And I think that's part of our obligation. We have to be the scouts out there and the community's looking for individual stories from groups like this. And I think we often grab the easiest story, crime of the day or a profile on a system. And I get letters, actually old fashioned letters from

readers who say, "Thank you for this story." And they don't say, "Thank you for your writing." They say, "Thank you for introducing me to somebody that changes my life and how I think," and we need more of those kind of stories. And I think, as somebody who's 66, we need to help the younger journalist figure out how to do that.

Josh Good:

Linda Kinsler from Berkeley.

Linda Kinsler:

You brought up January 6th and I'm wondering in your conversations with congregations and with politicians, to what extent are you talking about kind of like liberal democracy as something that should be preserved or just like... I think it's just very well and good to talk about shared values, but also to accept that discord is part of democracy and arguably that's what democracy is. And so, yeah, I would be very curious about that. And also Andrew, your organization is called One America Movement, but I just couldn't help remark about the fact that the identities you listed, American didn't come up in that. And I guess, how are the people that you're talking to imagining what that means?

Andrew Hanauer:

What America means?

Linda Kinsler:

Yeah. And the role that faith plays in that, right? I think there's this conversation going on up to what extent are Americans permitted to bring their faith to work, to bring their faith into whatever they're producing, to bring their politics into whatever they're producing. And those two go hand-in-hand.

Andrew Hanauer:

I think this has everything to do with democracy. I think that if you believe that the other side is an existential threat to your existence, you are much more likely to support authoritarian politicians or proposals. I think there's a stat that's something like three or 4% of Americans would vote democracy over party, which is a very, very bad stat. And basically what that means is that if you have two candidates and you agree with one person's policies but the other person is actually supportive of democracy and your candidate isn't, most Americans left and right would still vote for party.

Now, double check that stat, but that's what I've heard. So we have to create an environment in which, I think Brian used the phrase zero sum earlier, where we are not in this death struggle, right? Where we have to do anything it takes to stop them. And so yeah, our work is not about, again, not about feel good. It's about how do we preserve a country in which we can have a system in place that rules and processes for litigating questions of policy, as opposed to how do we stop them?

I think that the question about identity is interesting. I think being part of One America Movement is like a cross-cutting identity that people share, but it's usually not, "Oh, I'm part of One America Movement." It's, "I'm part of One America Tulsa," or, "I'm part of One America Atlanta," or whatever. It's really hyperlocal.

And I think a big part of what we've done early on is we recognize that a lot of these kinds of events were predicated on checking your actual identity and beliefs at the door. That the idea of coming together meant showing up somewhere, getting along with other people who are different from you and pretending like you didn't feel the way you felt. And we would see this in terms of people who felt

like we weren't really talking about justice. And we would also hear it from conservatives who felt like, "I have to pretend not to be conservative to come into this room." And so we tried to create in our work an atmosphere where everyone can be their true selves when they walk in and they can express how they actually feel and not feel like you have to check your identity when you walk in. So I think that's a big part of it. We can't really get anywhere meaningful if we are just tamping down those differences. I think that's really a big part of it.

Alayna Treene:

I want to quick ask Andrew a question, because it relates to yours, Linda. You said that you had a lot of people comment and want to join the movement after that, after what happened then, and I was just talking with Sewell, he was asking me about it, I was there on January 6th. I'm curious what it was about that day and what you saw that brought people what they've been saying about that, wanting to join this and make it more of a faith-based conversation.

Andrew Hanauer:

I think for some folks at the national level, it was looking into the abyss, right? It was American exceptionalism includes the idea that what happens in other countries in terms of civil war or genocide or other things like that could never happen here. And I think on January 6th, a lot of those people were really shaken and thought, "Oh my gosh, this might actually be a really big problem." Right? But I think in terms of our faith leaders, as I said before, I think a lot of folks were shocked that it wasn't universal, that this was a big, big problem what had happened. And so it was just a recognition that maybe the problem that they were grappling with that we were trying to help them with went deeper than they realized.

Josh Good:

Next up is Deb Saunders, a syndicated columnist from Alexandria, Virginia.

Deb Saunders:

So Andrew, you were talking about how we live in a country now where people will judge millions of others, people they don't really know. And I don't think anything... If there's one thing that's magnified that, it's COVID and we have a country where, I mean, I judge people wrongly. I saw a couple walk by here while you were talking and they had a little girl with a mask on and they're alone outside. And I'm thinking, what is that? Right?

So I'm not saying I'm not like that, but when you meet people, they'll make statements. I've been to parties where the first thing people do is just dish on people who aren't vaccinated. And then I've been to other places where people are talking about the real problem are these busy body rules and that we need to get going. So is there something that can make people do less of that, because really, everybody's blaming someone else. Obviously we know it's COVID but the approach to COVID and is there some way to get past that?

Andrew Hanauer:

But I think first of all, we're wired. Our brains pick up in less than a fraction of a second, whether a person is part of our group or not, right? And masks have become just yet another way that our brains can instantly say, "Oh, that's one of us or that's not one of us." Look, I mean, there's this concept in social science called motive misattribution, which is actually the less wonkier name. The real name is

motive attribution asymmetry. And the idea is that we're really bad at actually understanding the motives of other people. We might disagree with their policy views, but we unintentionally ascribe their motives to be more negative than they actually are. So what we've created with Facebook and social media, frankly, is a world in which people are hearing utterly different information and then they're fed the idea that they are the moral right people and that these are the bad immoral people because they're acting rationally on the very information they've received. Right?

So if you're constantly flooded with people telling you that the vaccines are harmful, and then you decide not to get vaccinated, that is a motive. And then this person says, "Well, you must be a horrible, evil, selfish person who doesn't care about anyone but yourself." Then we have a huge disconnect in actually motives. It doesn't mean there isn't a right or wrong answer to questions about whether vaccines are safe, but the motive attribution is totally off. And again, this is part of the business model. Facebook tells you how great you are and how right you are and how great your team is and how crazy they are so that they can better sell you things. So yeah, we can do something about it, first by checking our own instant reactions. But also secondly, by doing something about social media's business model.

Brian Hooks:

Speaking of cognitive biases, right, that we're bad at inferring other people's motives, we're also bad at estimating the number of people that actually agree with or that the extremes represent. And so if most of the time, the only time that we encounter people that are different from us are on Facebook or on the news, or in some story about the worst example of that person. We don't just say, "Well, that person does really bad things." We say, "Wow, that's how people like him are and I bet there's a lot of them," Right? So it's not an anomaly. It's not just at the tail end, and I think the social science says that we're bad too about, we tend to overestimate by a factor of two, right? So it's twice. We imagine it's twice as bad as it actually is.

And so I think, and you've seen again, Andrew mentioned earlier that we're now relying on some of the folks who have really learned their lessons in international conflict resolution. I think there are some good solutions that we can import from deescalating conflict internationally. And again, some of these seem pretty pedestrian, but given the cognitive biases that we know are present in all of us, they make a lot of sense. So the more that we can lift up the voices and the actions of people that are actually more representative of those who are different from us, such that more people can encounter those just as they're encountering the extremes. You know, we ought to be able to play in the sense to all of our cognitive biases. So when we see somebody doing well more often than we see someone doing poorly, even if we disagree with that for person, but it's like, "Yeah, that's the reason I disagree with it.

Our brains will also overestimate that, right? Or maybe they'll estimate it at a greater degree of reality. And you guys have very tough jobs that I'm the last person to suggest that I know how you could do them differently or better, but you have an important opportunity in that, right? I mean, lifting up these stories of not idealized people, but people who are real people who are more representative of what most people who are different from us are like, I think can have a real positive impact.

Josh:

Hopefully get to two more. First up is Kelsey Dallas of Deseret News.

Kelsey Dallas:

So I'm glad I'm going now, because it follows on some of these remarks about social media making the problem a lot worse. If you got to control the future of social media and sort of put it to this end of depolarization, what would that future look like? Would it go away overnight? Would it only allow personal posts about our pets and kids? How would you shape social media to bring it back to a better, healthier place?

Brian Hooks:

I'm reminded, I forget who said this, but somebody said, if you were king for a day, what would your first action be? And the answer was, I would abdicate. I'm tempted to give you that answer. It's a really hard question. So two things, I think probably the biggest thing that is lacking right now in social media, and I agree with a lot of what has been said about the challenges that are out there, I think the biggest thing that's lacking right now is better choices. And I know that there are all sorts of things that make it very difficult for new entrants to compete in the current landscape of social media, given the advantages of incumbency, a lot of the way that the market is structured. All of those things I think make my answer very difficult to achieve, but I think that attempts and a lot of those that have been proposed to kind of reign in what we see as the harms of social media right now, kind of ignore the political economy of the situation. I don't think that they work.

The analogy that I used last night was the war on drugs, right? It's pretty clear that a lot of people who abuse drugs are not just self-destructive, but they're hurting their communities, but we've spent decades, billions of dollars, hundreds of thousands of lives destroyed, probably more than that. And drug use has only gone up. And so we can all agree that there's a harm out there on social media. What you do about it is really tough as long as people continue to use social media, right? So, I'm skeptical of sort of the king for a day opportunity. I do think that if people are offered a better choice, that's probably the best way to improve the overall quality of social media. I recognize the challenge of this.

I will say though, and we talked about this last night as well, it's very easy to have kind of a presence or a status quo bias is here, right? It feels like, "Well, nothing could ever change. They're so big. There's so few of them." All of these things, but then you say, "Well, Facebook is only 17 years old, right?" And so if you take a little bit longer time horizon, there are any number of companies that you might have said that about that no longer exist. And so I think, I don't know how to bring it about, but if I were able to sort of fee out a solution then I would say, let's offer people something that they value more as the way to really shift the quality of social media out there right now.

Josh Good:

As just a quick data point, I was reminded in seeing the 60 minutes piece just the other day, trillion dollars for Facebook as a company, 2.8 billion users in the world, which represents 60% of the world's online population, just for sort of reach.

Brian Hooks:

That's huge.

Josh Good:

John Fasman, The Economist.

Jon Fasman:

Thanks. Andrew, I want to sort of ask about how you square two things that seemed to me to contradict. On the one hand, you said that people were sort of drawn to you after January 6th because they looked into the abyss, right? On the other hand, you think that one of the aims of your group should be to convince people that politics is not a matter of existential disagreement. But the truth is politics at this moment is really existential for a lot of people, right? Should police suffer consequences when they shoot someone who's unarmed, there's one political party who thinks that essentially they shouldn't. If that view prevails, there'll be a lot more unarmed people killed, they'll come disproportionately from certain communities, right? Should children be ripped from their parents and thrown in jail? Does COVID exist? Should the person who won the most votes win an election? I mean, these are existential questions. And I just wonder what the benefit is of convincing people that they're not?

Andrew Hanauer:

Sorry, who's trying to convince them that they're not?

Jon Fasman:

Or what is the benefit of acting as though politics is not existential, when in fact it is existential at this specific moment for a lot of people?

Andrew Hanauer:

Right, so here's where I would say it's important to differentiate between productive conflict and toxic conflict. And I think if anyone's seen Amanda Ripley's book *High Conflict*, I think it spells it out really well. If there's an injustice in the world, if there's a policy that's a bad policy that's harming people and there is conflict over how to solve it, and that conflict leads to an actual solution that helps make the situation better, that's productive conflict. That's good. Polarization is good. A society with no polarization is like an autocratic dictatorship, right? Nobody wants that.

Toxic conflict is when we're not even talking about the issues. We've just formed these teams that are based on this concept of our identity that is at sort of war with each other. And it's being fueled by a number of factors, including sort of the conflict entrepreneurship of things like Facebook that tells us, just keep going, keep going, make it worse, make it worse. That conflict doesn't solve any problems.

That doesn't lead us to police reform. It doesn't lead us to a better, stronger democracy. It just makes us hate each other more. And I think that after what we've seen over the last four or five years should, I think, convince us of the fact that that is not actually productive conflict. So what we tell people is, "Yeah, of course, there are incredibly important issues that we need to get solutions to." We need to work for, and sometimes disagree strongly with other people about. The way to do that is different than what the sort of cycle of toxic conflict does on our brains and on our actions.

So I think that like, yeah, again, we need to differentiate between two types of conflict. We need to make sure that we're not confusing them. And I think also again, that's also on groups like ours, because if what we're selling to people is this idea that like, "No, no, no, every view is valid and we just have to get along." Then I think we're doing an injustice, but what people saw in the abyss was not, "Oh, we need to be careful because we aren't fighting enough for what we believe in." What people saw in the abyss was that the system we're in is creating radicalism in a way that is going to destroy our democracy and also lead to violence against particular groups of people. And so that system has to be upended somehow.

Josh Good:

I think with that, we should thank our excellent speakers for today.