

# OpenTheo

## Are We Better Off Divided? | David French & Angela Simms

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### The Veritas Forum

In the aftermath of a contentious election season, we may find ourselves questioning the future of a nation that seems irreparably divided. We may ask questions such as, “is political and/or social unity possible or even desirable?” and, “if unity is desirable, what is the best pathway to that unity?” • Attorney, author, and political commentator, David French, discusses this topic with assistant professor of Sociology and Urban Studies at Barnard College, Angela Simms. Presented by the Veritas Forum at Columbia University.

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### Transcript

[MUSIC] Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is, which one has the resources in their world view to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with? How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are in the street, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God. Today we hear from attorney, author, and political commentator, David French, as well as assistant professor of sociology and urban studies at Barnard College, Angela Sims, as they reflect on the contentious politics of 2020. And ask the question, are we better off divided, presented by the Veritas Forum at Columbia University.

>> Thank you so much for having me and having us. I won't repeat what's on the website or has already been said about our distinguished panelists except to say this. That Angela and David who have given me permission to address them informally, bring a rich diversity of experience and training to the table.

In law, David, in sociology, Angela, in political commentary, David, and in public policy, Angela, in both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, you can find out more about them on the website. Here are a few things that you would not otherwise know. David French is the father of three children, one of whom he and his wife adopted

from Ethiopia.

He was profiled by a world of warcraft gaming magazine, which he describes as his proudest media moment. Professor Angela Sims has made the church rounds. She grew up in the Episcopal Church, as I did, was for a time in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and takes her membership now in a non-denominational congregation.

I want to give you a chance to introduce yourselves by telling us something about yourselves that wouldn't show up in your CV. So Angela, how about you? Tell us something about yourself. >> First of all, thank you to Veritas for hosting tonight and thank you, Reverend Charlie, for being our moderator.

So when I was thinking about something to share, I was thinking about the process of learning humility that I think comes through in the Veritas themes that they have hosted throughout the years. And so for me, learning my PhD really was an experience of deepening my faith. I think the more I knew, the more I recognized I would never know.

And so I think that deep reverence and that sense of all for the Lord really was an enriching way to sort of live in me, even as I was doing a lot of rigorous work to develop my mind with the social client. So I think what's not on the CV is a rich walk with the Lord, and a gratefulness that I'm not completely reliant on what I can sense through my work. >> Thank you, Angela.

David, how about you? >> So what's not on my CV is I played a very small part in the very first Veritas Forum. So this is the event that sort of launched the Veritas Forum, and it was, gosh, fall semester of '92, I believe, at Harvard Law School. And we were petrified it wasn't going to that nobody was going to come.

We were really worried that nobody was going to come. We had just had Antonin Scalia come speak at the law school. We had just had Jesse Jackson come speak at the law school.

We were right on the edge of exams. We didn't think anybody would come to this first Veritas Forum. And lo and behold, not only did so many people come, but there were overflow rooms.

It was remarkable. I was not one of the driving, like, intellectual organizing forces behind it. I did pray, and I did hang up flyers.

So I did that. So I can say I was present at the inception of the Veritas Forum. Great.

Great. Marvelous, thank you both. You know, one of the things that neither of them said, but which I know is true, is that they are both dedicated, serious, and very engaging Christian people.

And because I know that and because I share their faith, I would like to just pray for our time together tonight. So would you all pray with me? Father, we thank you for the opportunity to hear from Angela and David this evening. In our angry time, we need more light and we need less heat.

So would you please enlighten our minds and hearts as we hear them. And we pray this in Christ's name. Well, as Grace Alyta has already announced, we're going to be talking tonight about the question of political and social unity.

Is it really feasible, or is it just a dream? Is it even desirable? Maybe certain kinds of unity are not desirable, whereas other kinds of unity are. That's a question that's before us. Can we survive as a country without unity? And assuming that we want to aim at unity, or at least in some form, what's the best path forward? And how in particular can we address the troubling and divisive problem of racism in America? We will, in the course of our discussion, be giving special attention to that issue.

They'll be talking about other things as well. Now, it seems to me that we can expect at least two outcomes tonight. One is to learn something refreshing from two very able and gracious people about how to conduct ourselves in political discussions.

The how, it seems to me, is extremely important in our time. And they'll give us an opportunity to see how it's done. The other takeaway is that we will catch a glimpse of how diversity of experience and training can influence how we think about issues.

How, for just one example, might training in law, David, and training in sociology, Angela, influence the categories and the priorities that one brings to a discussion of race and how we deal with it. Deal with it. Well, we'll see.

Maybe they're completely agreed. What we'll see. Now, each of the panelists is going to now take eight to 10 minutes to give us a summary answer to the cluster of questions surrounding this unity issue, after which I will put some additional questions to them.

They'll have a chance to interact with each other. And then, as has been told to us, there'll be an opportunity for students to ask questions of them. So we're going to start, David, with you.

So, fire away. Well, thanks so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

And I apologize that I'm doing this for my podcasting studio and not wear like if I have a TV thing in your home now. This, according to Room Raider, is only a five out of 10. My TV studio is a nine out of 10.

So, and I don't really have a TV studio. It's just a one. But anyway, I've got a bunch of people in the house.

This is the only room that's quiet. So, I'm sorry, you're treated to a lot of southeastern conference sports in the background. So, I just released a book in September called *Divided We Fall* that begins with a couple of pretty sweeping statements that I think are absolutely correct.

One is that the continued unity of the United States of America, the continued existence of the United States of America as a united country can no longer be assured. Now, I don't mean that it's going to fall apart right away. That it's going to fall apart this year next year and next five or 10 years.

But what I mean is that it is on a collision course. If nothing changes, it is on a collision course with division. And why is that? I said, because there's not a single, important cultural, political, religious, or social force that is pulling Americans together more than it is pushing us apart.

Politics are in the grips of negative polarization. Negative polarization or negative partisanship is this phenomenon where I belong to a particular party. I don't belong to any party right now.

But if I did belong to a party, I would belong to that party not because I necessarily love its ideas or love its leaders, but because I strongly dislike or fear or perhaps even hate the people on the other side. So that no matter what flaws my candidate might have, my candidate has one abiding virtue. He's not the other person.

So that's negative partisanship. We're beginning to split apart politically, not on the basis of a healthy partisanship, which is we're dedicated to the positive ideas of our party, but more of the negative partisanship of combating the worst of the other side. We're also splitting apart religiously.

It's often said that America is a secularizing country. And that is true, but it is not secularizing everywhere at the same rate, not close to that. If I'm coming to you from Franklin, Tennessee, it's a suburb just south of Nashville.

And I dare say, if you get near town, it's hard to look around without seeing in your line of sight a mega church. They're all over the place. Sunday morning, police cars are out directing traffic in and out of churches, all up and down, all of our main roads.

And if you were in Franklin, Tennessee, you said America is secularizing. You would say, what are you talking about? And yet there are many communities in the United States that are quite secular, where church attendance is frankly pretty rare. And so guess what? These divisions, where places are secular and where places are highly religious, also correlates with voting patterns, red and blue.

The most highly religious counties in America tend to be more red, not universally, but tend to be more red. The less religious parts of America tend to be more blue. So you're

separating politically, you're separating religiously, you're separating culturally.

We no longer really have a common popular culture. It's interesting after the 2016 election, when a lot of people were trying to figure out, what? Wait, what's going on in America? Now, New York Times did a bunch of ratings maps of television shows showing who watched what shows and where they lived. And it was fascinating.

It turns out that there's a lot of blue television and there's a lot of red television, that if you watched Game of Thrones, for example, the most popular show then before it just torpedoed itself in season eight, but that's a whole other discussion, we probably can unify around that idea. But it was the Hillary Clinton map. The Game of Thrones viewing map was the Hillary Clinton map.

The Walking Dead, the AMC zombie show was more or less the Trump map. This sort of ode to apocalyptic, this sort of ode to the second amendment, which is Walking Dead, was a red map. So you're separating religiously, you're separating politically, you're separating culturally, you don't have these common touch points, even sports, college football, you're looking at a red map, NBA basketball, you're looking at a blue map.

I find myself in this really uncomfortable position of liking it all. College football, NBA basketball, Game of Thrones, and zombie apocalypse fiction. So I can reach everybody, but every people are walling themselves off in pop culture.

And now all this would not be all that alarming if we actually appreciated each other across differences, but we really don't. We really don't. The numbers on what it means for negative partisanship, as far as my opposition to the other side, are staggering when it comes to my animosity towards the other side.

If you look at, and I don't care which survey you look at, if you look at what do Republicans think of Democrats and what do Democrats think are Republicans, the negative feelings are off the charts. There's even this phenomenon. Some researchers are calling lethal mass partisanship.

We're thankfully a minority, but still a lot of people, they ascribe subhuman characteristics to people from the other side of the aisle, or would even say that if a significant number of these people were to die, that would not be a bad thing. That's how little regard we have for each other right now. And so my essential response to this is I don't see anything good about this.

I don't see on the one hand, I could imagine if we had a lot of diversity of views across an affection with accompanied by affection, that could enrich the tapestry of American life. I mean, who really wants uniformity and pop culture, for example, or uniformity in our sports likes and dislikes. But when all of these things are accompanied by animosity, what it is doing is creating a stew of misery and a stew of hatred.

And that is terrible for our country. And what it is also doing is sharply dividing the church, sharply dividing the church. It's fascinating.

The two most church-going segments of American life, white evangelicals and black Democrats are on opposite sides, opposite sides of the political divide. And that is not at all, and we'll get into this more. That is not at all healthy, that's not healthy in any way, shape, or form for the future, the present and the future of race relations in the United States.

So I'm, I don't want to, I'm running out of time for my opening, but I just want to say as far as part of the, one of the questions that we have here is, are we divided? Yes. Is that bad? The way in the way in which we are divided? Yes. But differences do not have to equal animosity.

They do not have to. In fact, our system is built in many ways to accommodate differences in the absence of animosity, and we can get into that more. But I think one of the, one of the fundamental problems that we have is that animosity is driving an unwillingness to accommodate the existence of our opponent in public life and in political life.

And that is not a tenable situation for the future of our country. It's a dangerous situation for the future of our country. And right now, sadly, in many ways, the church is not an instrument of reconciliation, healing.

It is driving the division. It is that the front of the bus driving the division. All right.

I think that's my minutes. Thank you, David. How wonderfully depressing.

Thank you. I think we should just all weep and go home. I realized there is more to be said and there's more to come.

We need to talk about hope. And we will. Angela, how about you? Or I am going to offer my 10 minutes and pardon me reading a fair amount, but I want to make sure I stay on time and hit all of my points.

So let me just dive right in. I'm excited to engage with you, David. I think you raised many great points about animosity as I'm interested really unpacking where that animosity comes from and thinking about our path forward.

So with that, let me start by saying we certainly live in a political union in the United States of America. And so unity is a value that we hold dear. We discarded the Articles of Confederation in the 18th century and adopted our current Constitution because we needed a stronger union.

In the 19th century, we fought a civil war to maintain our union. Today, we've inherited a

constitution brilliant for how it mediates power between free branches and creates a federal system of diffuse government that fosters democratic participation, particularly at the local level. And that the Constitution has 27 amendments demonstrated the American people's capacity to change our poor document to reflect our will.

And we hope values promoting our flourishing. Despite the political structures in place, unity does not happen by default. However, it's actively nurtured at infinite and each moment of each day.

It's underpinned by mutual respect for others participating in the system in respect for the system itself, something that David just brought up. Add to that, our political structures have not consistently fostered unity. Take for instance the 14th amendment to the Constitution.

Past in 1866, the aftermath of the Civil War, this amendment granted formally enslaved African citizenship and equal protection of the laws. Yet in 1896, the US Supreme Court famously ruled in Plessy versus Ferguson. I should say infamous, you hold Mlessy versus Ferguson that separate is equal, approving of Jim Crow policy systematically stripping black people of access to material and social resources.

Last four years, in 1954, the US Supreme Court reversed course dating separate is inherently unequal and Brown be board of education. And yet even with Brown, meaningful change was only realized after protest, myriad court challenges and the enactment of complimentary legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And since the 1960s, the state federal courts have retreated from enforcing racial integration.

In the history of this one amendment shows unity is not given to us. It is pursued and often we fall short. The 14th amendment example also highlights the true unity is actually a byproduct of just social relationships promoting shared prosperity.

Much of what has passed for unity in our country is not unity at all. If genuine unity is on the one side of the continuum and forced compliance on the other, we need more precise terms for unity for the versions of unity experience. Unity is akin to a taught growth each strand distinctive woman together and working towards shared purpose.

The Bible uses the metaphor of a body, simply joined together to describe how the members of the church live out Christ's mission to bring the good news of the gospel and extend God's love and lightness to the world. Well, I don't conflate nation state, then conflate the nation state with the church and do not keep it theocracy. This metaphor is apt for us nonetheless because it helps us to see the unique role, see our unique role or each distinct unique role and how that is fully realized in relationship.

It's a deep interdependence. So, you know, we might ask ourselves, you know, what is a big toe without a foot? What is a foot without a leg? What is a leg without blood pumped

from the heart? The great tension that paradox at the heart of American unity is free people consenting to be governed by elected leaders who seek to preserve the good of all people so consenting. But here in lies the rug, who is free? Who is imagined in the we of the we the people hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created people? To this day, some people are more free than others in our country.

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass asked in his 1852 speech about 10 years before the Civil War began. What to the slave is the Fourth of July? We might ask today, what to the parent working three jobs but still can't make ends meet is the Fourth of July. From our country's inception, white male elites have differentiated people by race, gender, and class and with significantly influencing life chances where we live, go to school, work, and for how much if we're paid at all regarding race, legal scholar and sociologist Dorothy Roberts in her book, *Fatal Invention*, tells us race in the political category, masquerading as a biological one.

Racial hierarchies denote racial group standing in relation to dominant institutions, especially governing systems where one group is ranked, where one group is where one's group, excuse me, where one's ranking determines the degree of access that group has to society's benefits and the exposure to its burdens. White elite men's invention of race was used to justify the unjustifiable, a democracy based on the forced removal of Native peoples from their land and chattel slavery. Racialized capitalism is as American as apple pie.

Today, we often under-script knowledge that power asymmetries endemic to our social order. As a black woman academic who studies the black middle class, it's not lost on me that I must both account for the opening of the opportunities structures that allow for my parents to attend college, to graduate from college, and my ability to earn a PhD. At the same time, I must understand how shortly on the heels of the opening that they experienced, black communities were ravaged by the expansion of the prison industrial complex or what we often call the carceral state.

This exponential rise in the prison population was fueled by the war on drugs. And when, by the way, white men ages 18 to 35 are the most frequent drug users, yet they are underrepresented in prisons just as a point of fact. Presently white men due to centuries of racialized capitalism and attendant policies are best poised to make fortunes now that marijuana and other substances once illegal now are legalized in many states.

In a shout out to Governor Newsom of California for releasing people in prison on drug crimes that are no longer illegal. That's all states have done that. So what does meaningful unity require? First, let's be clear about what it's not.

It's not uniformity. God granted us of London, and we should embrace its vibrancy by creating space for individual expression and interests. But that expression is connected to a greater whole, and without the integrity of the collective, there are no resources,



social or material for individual to draw from.

In addition, true unity requires clear-eyed rigorous honesty about how history shapes the present. To quote black activist and thought leader James Baldwin, "The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it with us, our unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. Therefore, a historical conversation about merit erases how some players enter the field, better equipped than others, enlivens their advantages to attain and retain power, and then ask everyone else to co-sign the power graph in the name of unity.

Activists and social scientists Ida B. Wells admonishes, the way to write longs is to turn the light of truth upon them. Her wisdom resonates now more than ever. If we're willing to be honest, we need to bring to light disturbing realities facing inequities in America.

Here are a few. Overall, about 10% of Americans live in poverty. Poverty is about \$26,000 for a family of four according to the Office of Medicine and Budget.

And for the policy wants to be one of the discussed, how we measure poverty, we can get into that later. But \$26,000 is the baseline. And for white Americans, that rate is 9%, for black Americans, 20% Latin, Mexican American, 16%, Asian American, 7%, and indigenous Americans, 25%.

And these are the pre-pandemic numbers from the Census Bureau. The black, white wealth gap is 10 to 1, meaning for every \$10,000 a white family has, a black family has 1,000. On average, poor, white households have more wealth than middle-class black households, reflecting how both race and class shape people's trajectories.

We know that wealth cushions households during economic downturns and gives people options for massing more wealth. So just through home ownership, I'll be here too, black homeowners on average who not receive the same return on their investment. So after we sit with such stark realities, we must commit to operate out of that understanding.

Certainly hard work, perseverance, and spill are necessary, but not sufficient. That is, we must repent of racialized capitalism, the social system at the heart of our country, and imagine a more just and inclusive social order. The Bible calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, speak truth in love, to pursue justice and mercy.

It tells us our leaders are to be servants. These tensions are guideposts inviting us to wrestle in the moment with how to embody multiple goods at once. Greek philosophy speaks of wisdom gained through practice, philosophy and practice.

We must practice as a public what it means to be a good neighbor pursuing individual interests while committed to the maintenance of institutions that allow all people to thrive. To be clear, I don't believe Democrats or Republicans have a silver bullet. I don't believe Democrats or Republicans have silver bullet solutions, yet I don't think the issues

are too complex for us to act.

Here are a few thoughts on policy directions aligned with what I've shared so far. William Berry, Jr., Duke University and his co-author A. Kerstin Mowin have laid out what reparations for Black Americans would entail and their 2020 book from here to equality. Reparations are a step toward repentance.

Next, we can champion policies that account for historical and ongoing injustice by targeting resources based on communities past and ongoing experiences with and complicity in racialized capitalism. We can fact check the assumptions in policies, many of which are designed with certainly supposedly deserving communities in mind but not others. One of my favorite parables and the Bible is the parable of the persistent widow.

And if a widow relentlessly pleads her case before a judge that while the judge doesn't change his mind about the merits of repetition, he can see to the widow's demands because he's tired of her coming to see him. Believe me, I want to change hearts and minds. My faith teaches me to pursue peace and reconciliation for God first reconciled himself with me to me.

But as I await such transformation, people are dying of COVID and droves languishing in prisons and starving or year starving. And so like the widow, I will not let up until things are made right. I do this work humbly, earnestly seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance on how to pursue liberation.

Yet I will never question whether God came to set the captives free. Unity in many ways is like shalom. Unity in many ways is not unlike shalom.

The Hebrew word for peace, which means where nothing is broken and nothing is missing. There's a rich wholeness in shalom. In our country with all its great promise and progress, much still remains broken and missing.

And therefore unity for now at least remains elusive. In closing as we showjourn together, let us be bold and courageous, not afraid of the pressure and the pain that often precedes change. Growth requires we get more than just a tad uncomfortable.

May these words from Indian author Arunhat Arunhat Arunhati Roy as she reflects on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic inspire us. In the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than to return to normality.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal.

I gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas,

our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we could walk through lightly with little baggage ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it.

Thank you for your time. Thank you. Angela, there was so much in what you had to share and unpacking the complexity of systemic racism and economic structures and their impact and so on.

I'm going to give you and David a chance to sort of interact about what you said. But let me take a few minutes before we get to talking about that. To talk about another thing, just sort of step back and talk about how we express our faith in the midst of political difference.

One of the things that David pointed out is that how sad it is that you'll have two groups of people who say the same creed and yet are in different places in terms of their view of America, their vision for America, the way in which they think about politics and so on and so forth. And it raises the question which is put in one way or another by lots of people, especially more secular people, that faith isn't really very useful or it's actually destructive. One of the problems that some people say that faith generates in our divided country is greater division because my faith tells me that I'm on God's side and therefore the person who disagrees with me politically has to be on the side of the devil.

And I'm wondering if David and here you are, both people of faith, people of strong faith, how do you respond to that sort of criticism that faith, I'll start with you, David, that faith is inimicable to peace or of no value for pursuing righteousness and goodness and justice in the culture. David, why don't you speak first and then Angela, you can. I mean, my answer to that is always which faith, which belief system, which people.

I mean, I think that it's not the case that faith is inimicable to peace. I think it's that people are. Was it Chesterton who said that original sin was perhaps the only empirically provable aspect of Christian theology? People have problems and we keep trying to locate the fact that we have problems and something else.

What's got to be religion? Well, we just had a 20th century that had two fundamentally atheistic regimes who created some of the worst atrocities that the world had ever seen when you're talking about Soviet communism, when you're talking about Mao's China, when you're talking about Nazi Germany, these were not these these were all regimes that had a view of the ultimate, the head of view of truth and a deeply rooted worldview that they were pursuing that wasn't connected to traditional religion in the same way that we think of, say, the wars of religion of the 17th century. So I think what we often have, we human beings locate our worldviews in something, whether we're locating it in scripture, you know, the Christian Bible, Quran, whether you're locating it in your own reason, whether you're locating it in a particular philosophy, we locate our worldview in something. And I always have the question that I have two questions that I ask.

Are you pursuing virtuous ends and in pursuing or and are you choosing virtuous means to pursue virtuous ends? Now, I have known a pile of atheists who in many ways pursue more virtuous ends than many Christians I know and do so through more virtuous means. So I don't think the virtue is confined to the religious realm. I also don't think virtue is outside of the religious realm.

Many of the most the finest people that I've ever known are people of deep and transcendent faith who pursue virtuous ends through virtuous means. So I'm I am much less interested in the argument is faith incompatible with unity. Well, I think there are some faiths that are incompatible with unity.

I think there are some faiths that are compatible with unity. What is it that we are trying to pursue and what means are we choosing to try to pursue that? So for attempting to pursue racial justice and racial reconciliation, I say that's a virtuous end that we're attempting to pursue. How do we pursue it? Well, the virtuous end does not relieve us of the obligation to choose virtuous means.

So I frequently as a Christian, I think of the versus the verse Micah 6a and the triple interlocking responsibilities of human beings in Micah 6a. What does the Lord require of you? Oh man, what is good? It is to act justly to love mercy or love kindness depending on the version and to walk humbly with the Lord your God. Each one this addresses both ends justice and means.

What mercy is a means. Mercy is also an end. Humility is a and how you walk walking with humility is a is part of the way in which you achieve those ends.

And so I think of those triple interlocking responsibilities all the time. And one of the things that I would say about the contemporary especially the white evangelical community right now is that it has so connected itself to Donald Trump and the person of Donald Trump and the Republican Party is that it often is focusing almost entirely now on ends, ending abortion, preserving religious liberty, and is willing to accept or at least partner with people who use unethical or immoral means to pursue those ends. Whether it's lying, whether it's casting legitimate democratic elections and doubt, whether it is you're a hypocrite for on the one hand condemning Bill Clinton while on the other hand defending a man who paid hush money to a porn star.

Hypocrisy lies authoritarianism. But for those lawless or those immoral means do not are not justified by the allegedly virtuous end. Okay.

And so that's when I when I asked about can people of faith is faith the problem? I don't think faith is the problem anymore than atheism was the problem with the Soviet Union. I want to know what are your ends and what are your means. And then we'll talk about what worldview you're using to justify those ends and means.

But that's what I'm much more interested in. Why does your faith put a check on your pursuit of certain means? Well, I mean, I can answer, I guess the original question of faith being inimical to an imical to whether that faith is consistent with, you know, pursuing just social ends. Go ahead.

And then also talk about your second part, however that would work. But yeah, I think about it both in terms of the individual and the collective piece in terms of my own faith walk. And so for me, I know just starting with the personal, which I think I started to discuss in the beginning.

For me, knowing first and foremost that I'm a child of God and I made an image of God and everyone else has made an image of God grounds me and in a in a in a core reality in terms of who I am and where I first place my identity. So my first identity is as a Christian. And so that in itself, I think gives me a a foundation.

We talked about the rock on which we stand. And so that rock then is what sustains me for the long haul of this justice work because I know I'm attached to something greater than myself. I know that the kingdom values and I think that you both embody the an end in a means that reflect as David just said, like a state, did you Justice Love Mercy while coming with our God? And so, you know, with with that personal faith that that allows me to to think about the fact that I stand in a lineage of states, like Hebrews 11 and 12, it's one of my favorite pastors in the Bible, where it goes through a lineage of people who never realized the fruits of their faith, but it's really another generation that realizes the fruits.

So it's really setting up this idea of our sense of time and God's sense of time being different and that if we are soldiers in the Lord's army that we are to just to be obedient and to follow the Lord's call and to embody the values that are in the Bible. So that's the personal grounding. I think in the collective, you know, the base, the first commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, to love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, I think really as it says, all of the law hangs on these.

And so to me, if you take that and you take the beatitudes, which starts out with blessed are the poor, blessed are the me, there's this way in which Christ is taking a stand in favor of those who are marginalized. And so that that orients my political vision toward inclusivity and our recognition of how power works. When when Jesus is speaking to people who are disempowered, whether that's the woman at the well, or that's the woman with the issue of blood, whether that's the woman caught in adultery, whether that's someone who's blind and needs healing, he has a particular kind of compassion for them and in his speaking into their particular experience as in many ways social outcasts.

When he's speaking to people that have power and wielded unjustly, the Pharisees, Herod, he calls Herod an a fox, which for Jewish, to call someone a fox and do it like that,

that's an unclean animal, that's a pretty steep insult. And so there are ways in which Christ is embodying, we know truth and love, he's truthing in love. And yet he's making these distinctions with regard to sin versus woundedness versus damage versus what leads us to be in the and to have the experiences we have.

And then how does it all hang together in the social order? And he's speaking into that. And so to me that helps me to shape my value system, such that when I come to the public square, certainly as a sociologist, I'm interested in data. I want to use what we can understand through empiricism to understand our world and to think about a system that is generally going to promote all people's flourishing.

At the same time, I'm able to discern between my options and certainly to keep a vision in mind that I think honors the abundance that Christ has called all of us to. And so when I look around and see the disparities in the country, and certainly we zoom out globally, we see disparities, it breaks my heart. I don't think it's a good thing that America has 5% of the population, but consumes 25% of the world.

I don't think it's a good thing that we have 5% of the population, we have 25% of the world's prison population. I think those are indicators that ought to point us to where the Lord's heart is and then to seek discernment about how the Holy Spirit would cause would lead us to right those wrongs. So my faith is braided in, and I'm certainly happy to work with people who share, as David said, that sense of a virtue within, using virtue with means.

But I also bring in some ecclesiastes which says there's a time for everything. And I think pacifism can be written into the Bible, but I don't think the Lord says that you can't defend yourself. I don't think that the Lord says there's never a call to use some form of force.

And so I think that to sort of kick certain means and ideas off the table, especially when there are these stark asymmetries of power is to not really grapple with the truth of the power systems that we're all embedded in. Angela, does your faith make you patient in the face of injustice? Or does it make you impatient in the face of injustice? Or does it do both somehow? You know, how does your faith, you know, steer you as you face the things that are not right? And you're trusting God in the midst of the things that are not right. And yet, so I won't say anymore, but does it make you impatient? Or does it make you patient? Or does it do both? And can you parse that for it? Sure.

I mean, I think both probably best captures it. I remember as a little girl, I was on the debate team and my first good interest in philosophy through my dad who would talk to me about Socrates. And really, it was an elaborate group to go doing chores on Saturday because I would say in the basement and talk to my dad about philosophy when my brother and my mom were out making leave.

But anyway, I guess I've always had an, I guess, developing my intellectual skills and my sense of right of wrong and how to do that work, how to litigate on behalf of those commercial life. And perhaps that comes from my own identity as as a woman and as a person of color who understood that the amount of melanin in my skin and my gender were going to often lead me with a credibility deficit. So there was always, I think, this desire to figure out how to overcome those supposed limitations.

But for me, you know, and so I'd say all that to say that my dad would often remind me as I got older, Angie, keep the fire in your belly. And I think that there's, I think the genites of my pastor, Jordan Rice, and Renaissance, had said that, you know, before Moses, you know, saw a burning bush, he first lit Moses on fire. Moses first watched the, you know, the Israelites, well, and Israelite, that actually motivated him to murder us at an Egyptian.

But he first was, was incensed that that was happening. So he was lit on fire. And then of course, we know he asked the plea because he's now going to be pursued.

But I think that that is, that's Jesus. I think Jesus, that gives you a burden. He gives you a sense of something that you just can't let go.

It sticks with you. So my journey from policy to sociology certainly reflects that I burden for my people of understanding. How is it that a people who have been the backbone of this country, literally doing the backbreaking work, as well as the wealth on which this country is the wealth and generated so much wealth for this country still struggled to have its due.

And so I do think that, you know, that that energy makes me very impatient because I realized that I sit as a privileged person among disprivileged people, that I can navigate racism in a particular way because I'm highly educated because I'm not from middle class or a number of resources I can bring to bear that many people who are similarly skilled but don't have the same opportunities will never get. And that's because of racism. And it doesn't mean that life will don't work hard.

Don't conflate the two. It's just that many black people work hard. They just don't get to see returns.

So that is certainly something that gives me that sense of impatience. But I'm patient because, you know, the Lord says, you know, my timing is, it's not yours. If my ways and my thoughts are higher than yours, the heavens are the earth.

The Lord says that, you know, that we are that He's a light into our feet and a light into our back. He's guiding each of our steps. And we are each call to run the reset before us.

And Christ is the author to finish up our faith. So God has given me this burden. And for Angie, it's Angie, stay in your lane.

Your call is to do this work. Each of us have a ministry, have a call. And I think this is my call.

And so as long as I stay in my lane, as my dad was to keep the fire in my belly and seek the spirit's guidance, that I can sustain myself. But certainly I have my moments of despair. Certainly, you know, there are these these reckoning times of reckoning where I do kind of wonder, Lord, how long, how long.

But I think that ultimately that that faith that faith is deep and enriched in those times, because I know that the Lord has promised never to do this for me. So I can have that sense of ultimate reality that in the end, in the end, no matter what my eyes see, I'm walking my faith and not my sight and that the work is already done in Jesus. And so because of that, right, even as you know, it's Paul and many of the people that are eventually martyred as we would noted acts, even unto death, even unto death, I know that if I run the race of the Lord's of performing, you know, it's finished.

So that that gives me a confidence, it gives me a boldness, it gives me a sense of direction, it sharpens my faith, it sustains me. But certainly I'm human, and there are moments when I do question God, and then I have to remember to get my humility and you know, in place and say, okay, Angie, you're not God, you've got to God's thing in your life. So.

Angie, I'm looking at the clock and I promise that we would give David a chance to kind of interact a little bit on the problem of systemic racism and so on. And so let's be sure we get to that. So we're going to get to that now.

And David, if you could, if you could respond, Angie is obviously laid out so many concerns about the nature of the economy and prison and the way things are done in our country and so on. How do you sort of address and think about the problem of systemic racism? That's a boy, that's a contentious phrase in our society, because we have to define our terms. Here's the way I think about it.

Because a lot of people hear the phrase systemic racism and it has academic definitions that they're not familiar with. And they're living in a sort of a, like they're living in a corporation that has equal opportunity hiring practices and they've been to the diversity training seminars and they, and they're saying is, wait, this system is saying don't be racist that I'm in, that I'm living in. So what are you talking about systemic racism? This is a very contentious phrase across the US.

And so I've tried to interact with people who are not already bought into this, the concept of systemic racism. And here's the way I, I try to lay it out. So for 345 years from 1619 to 1964, you had enforced by law and defended by violence often state violence, but often vigil anti violence as well, legalized subjugation of black Americans in this country, slavery moving through reconstruction into Jim Crow.



You do not undo the effects of 345 years of legalized discrimination defended by violence in 56 years of contentious change since the 19, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. You just don't. Okay.

Especially since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not any more than Brown v. Board in 1954 ended segregation in that moment, school segregation, it did not. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not end workplace discrimination. It did not any more than the Voting Rights Act ended discrimination and voting.

It just gave people the tools that they didn't have before these laws were passed to combat it. Okay. So if we can agree that 345 years of legally enforced, violently defended discrimination that the effects of that are going to be massive, okay, they're going to be complicated.

They're going to be deeply embedded into the fabric of our society. Okay. If we're going to agree on these things, okay, then what word we want to attach to that, whether it's systemic racism or whatever, let's just agree on on that.

Okay. The 345 years of is not undone by 56 years of contentious change. So that's step one, I think.

Then step two is, well, how do you undo the effects of 345 years? Well, that's really hard. That's really, really, really hard. And so we should be sponges of ideas, of thoughts, of discussion about how to deal with the effects of those 345 years.

So that's one, I think your initial decision should be to say, I am a sponge. Okay, I'm going to listen. I'm going to think.

I'm going to study. I'm going to read. I want to be a sponge.

Okay. But you can't stay a sponge. Now, the reason why I said be a sponge initially is because often misdirected activity can be negative.

It can be righteously directed and it can be counterproductive. So, I'm not going to sit here and come into this forum and say, here are points A through Z on how to deal with the 345 years. I'm a constitutional lawyer.

I tend to look at American society through the social compact represented in the Constitution. So what do I try to do? What I try to do is I try to restore or not just restore, but extend for the first time sometimes. The social compact as outlined in the Bill of Rights and the Civil War amendments to all Americans.

Okay. That seems to be a good, big step. So that means, for example, as Professor Sims was saying earlier talking about mass incarceration.

Wait a minute, if white Americans, suburban white Americans use drugs as much, if not

more, than black Americans, why are more black Americans in prison? Okay. Do we have a systemic problem with equal protection under the law? That's a good question. Why is there over representation? Why are more black Americans consistently met with police violence than white Americans, even when you control for in many of these studies, even when you control for the number of interactions you have with the police? This is that seem like also an equal protection issue.

When you begin to look into things like unreasonable searches and seizures, cruel and inhuman punishment, when you're talking about deprivation of life, liberty, and property without due process of law, you can start to begin to see legal doctrines that are implicated here. And I'm talking law because I'm a constitutional lawyer. What about no-knock raids are no-knock raids an unreasonable search and seizure, unless human life is absolutely at stake? I say yes.

What about policing for profit, like this practice where police look into community and where their primary purpose is not public safety, but their primary purpose is revenue generation, as is one of the DOJ reports on Ferguson, Missouri. Why do I bring up these things? Civil asset forfeiture, where the police now sees more money, more money, and goods from Americans than are stolen from Americans through burglaries. This is an actual reality in the United States.

So why do I bring up these policies? The reason why I bring up these policies is because they're rooted in a desire to extend the American social compact as outlined in the Constitution of the United States of America. And there are also things that people can put their mind around. I don't know how to fix everything, but I can take a step.

I can try to end qualified immunity, for example, which is this doctrine that says that agents of the state are able, and one of my favorite judges calls it, unqualified impunity, because what it means is that agents of the state are able to violate your civil rights, actually violate your civil rights, and then don't owe you any compensation at all for that. So all of these things are talking about elements of the social compact. So basically the way I look at it is, I say, we have to, if we're going to make substantial progress, there are people who are skeptical, skeptical that we have to bring in.

And we have to bring them in. And that's why I use the formulation of 345 years of legal discrimination is not ameliorated. The effects of it by 56 years of contentious change.

If you agree with me on that, can you agree with me on step one? Can you agree with me on step two? Can you agree with me on step three? Now we might disagree by the time we get to step four. We might start to disagree there, but can you get with me on one? Can you get with me on two? Can you get with me on three? And what we, I think we've found is that there are people who are willing to go there. One of the most surprising states in the union, for example, on dealing with mass incarceration is the state of Texas.

The state of Texas is one of the leaders on prison reform in the United States of America. That's not the number one state that people would think of, but a lot of people on both sides of the aisle, they said, let's start with a step one. And that step one is mass incarceration and prison reform.

Let's start with that. So that's sort of where I begin. And what I really try to do is avoid a lot of the academic words and terms that start setting people's ideological and partisan alarms off.

And just dive right into the years, the consequence, and is there a step we can do about it? Is there a second step we can do about it? Is there a third step we can do about it? Can I just ask David, oh, sorry, were you going to go, Charlie? I mean, all of that makes sense to me. Certainly, I teach classes on race. And so I try to formalize that process of helping us understand the history.

I guess, speaking about our different, maybe political leaning that don't want to say either of us are necessarily, you know, so committed to one that we aren't able to appreciate, you know, multiple approaches resolving our political disagreements. But I guess one of the things that I find myself sometimes struggling with regard to conservatives is this idea of limited government. And to me, maybe this is what you're step four and you're step five where people start to part ways is the things that I think are often, to use your point, even setting people's hair on fire or sort of third rails are regulation and redistribution.

I think that if you have a racialized market system that has created the disparities, I don't think that this sort of unending faith in the market, the market will self-correct, is really, it has really earned that level of faith. I'll put it that way, given its track record and what it actually has to capacity to do is just economics is that redistricting is not a value to some that really has human beings in mind and their well-being. Number two, if we want to think about the disparities that we see, it's not enough just to give people the tool that I think that I think it's a step in the right direction.

I definitely see your point about building from Common Ground. But I think we can't, as you said, the civil rights act of 1964 only gave people the tools and even then it did not correct for past harm. So for example, all of the people who've been passed over for promotions that should be making 20 or 30,000 dollars more if they hadn't been to scrimmies against the civil rights act did not restore those, did not give those people the promotions they are.

It just said from then on, we will not discriminate. So the, in other words, the playing field is uneven. So to me, if you don't have regulation, we know that discrimination has happened.

We could put the onus on the government, we could put the onus on the corporation to

say you have a history of discriminating. Essentially, with Section 5 voting rights act, for the time that it was in place, which is you have to be pre-clear in order to pass the voting law so that we knew you weren't discriminating because you have a history of discriminating. I think we can do the same thing and more arenas and certainly also restore the pre-clearance provision.

So to me, we need to regulate with our history in mind, with particular outcomes in mind. And we also need to redistribute. We know, for example, when the baby boomers bequease their income to the millennials and to Gen Z, the wealth gap is going to expand.

And we know that in the capitalist society, your wealth translates into multiple forms of power. So I don't see how we have adequate power sharing unless we get down to the core issues, maybe the downstream of what you're talking about. But I think that's where the unity breaks down.

Because until you really address these asymmetries of power, to me, we have not got it to the heart of what this fight is really about. Well, I've got a couple of responses to that first. Go ahead.

We've got a little just a little bit of time left. So this will be the final word. Go ahead.

Sure. Limited government is more your friend, I think, in this than a lot of people realize. Because that's been the entree into prison reform.

That's been the entree into bipartisan approaches to reform, police reform. That's been the entree into a lot of reform in a lot of the impetus towards criminal justice reform and dealing with these disparities. Because essentially, what's happened is a lot of people who had been conservatives who had been skeptical of government in every area except get a sweat, which one? Law and order.

Then a lot of people are able to say, wait a minute, skeptic of government. Why are you so trusting of it in its application of the sword to the citizen? Why are you so trusting of it in its ultimate application to the citizen in its coercive and often violent interactions with the citizen? Why are you trusting of it then? And what a lot of conservatives realize is, wait a minute. That's not a principled view that I had.

It was more sort of background cultural view. It's where I grew up. We backed the boys in blue and we had this sort of cultural affinity, part of coalitional politics.

They're part of our coalition. And so an awful lot of conservatives, it was appealing to the limited government side of their essentially awakening them to be consistent in their commitment to civil liberties that really began to get the ball rolling. So I think that a lot of the pre-existing skepticism of government is actually going to be quite effective going forward to say, why are you very distrustful of the government in economic regulation,

but you're very trusting of it when it comes to prison sentencing and police tactics? Why is that? And so I think bringing in that consistency has been very important to achieving real reform.

I think where you begin to have trouble is a lot of us, I'm not a Republican, I'm a man without a party at this point, is a lot of us though, who have a more conservative worldview, are skeptical of central planning, not a central economic planning, not so much because of, I'm sitting here saying, well, central economic planning is going to make my life worse. But from the standpoint of central economic planning has emisserated a lot of people throughout history. And central economic planning has been an instrument, not so much of redistribution, but improvisation and emissoration.

And what central economic planning doesn't, it doesn't deal with power imbalances, so much as create new power imbalances in the hands of the planners. And so I think that that's one of the obstacles here, who has the extra boutis and the virtue to reorder the world's largest economy in a way that's oriented towards justice. So that's the question that I ask, and I've never received a satisfactory answer to that.

And I say that to my right-wing friends who are now getting much more interested in central economic planning to ameliorate the plight of the white working class in the US. They've become much more enamored with industrial policy, for example. And I'm thinking, I know you're advocating for an industrial policy, but I also know you don't have an industrial policy that will deal with what our nation is dealing with.

And so that's a lot of this is, I don't see the plans and I'm very skeptical of the ability to plan to that level of complexity to deal with the kinds of issues that we're talking about in a way that's fair and just and doesn't recreate a new set of problems. Thank you both very much. I know questions have been pouring in from the students.

And I am, I have so many more things I wanted to ask you, but this has been great. And I'm going to let the students assess their questions rather than me asking more questions now. So we will go to them.

Okay. So both of you touched on this in the discussion already a lot. But the most uploaded question was, do you have any suggestions or strategies for overcoming and many of the animosity that underscores numerous divisions? Professor, do you want to go first? I was going to say, either of us can take that one.

I mean, one of us are like, hmm, let's have a little more time to think about it. I mean, I ended my, Marcia gets intending to be a bit provocative, which is that I think we need to give a bit more tolerant of the discomfort. And so I don't necessarily see discomfort as a bad thing or pain as a bad thing if it's in the service of getting somewhere that we know is worth it.

We know whether we're thinking about this in terms of our spiritual life, we're thinking about this just in terms of what we know from psychology, people can endure a lot of things that they know that there's a purpose for it. And so I think we need to get clear. I think Dave and I have both been kind of wrestling with, well, you know, we share a deep understanding of the history, but how do we wrestle with getting to the other side? And so we ended with David saying that, you know, you skeptical of central planning and I have perhaps a higher tolerance for thinking about the different mechanisms we might use to hold central planners.

If you want to call them central planners, I think I would use like a federal system whereby you still have ultimate authority in federal government. And we know that through the course of American history, the relative balance between state-fetter local government. So for many Republicans, you know, the Roosevelt administration was the sort of bulwark that they have been seeking to dismantle because they see the bureaucratic state as becoming big, you know, relative to state power.

But at the same time, states even with the expansion of the American welfare state, you know, still is nowhere near our peers in the OECD, the Oregon Institute, the Oregon Institute, I think about a cooperation development of the single end of O'odhamia, Australia, we're looking at freedom. You know, they do a better job of pairing capitalism with social safety nets so that you don't have such stark disparities between the richness of the core and the low power in those other ways. So I guess to me animosity is that if we're talking about acrimony and animosity and the essence of hatred, I think it's a surprise.

I don't think that that's a positive thing for today. But I would say that, you know, to be upset with each other and to be at our wit and into the struggle through those feelings, but yet as I think as David has also said, being really receptive to trying to get to know each other, understanding each other, certainly not wishing each other's death, you know, let's start. And I would say from there, you know, if we fundamentally understand that we, you know, I think, I think it's a part of the king that we're in this inescapable web of, he said that we're in this inescapable web of equality.

I think that's how we think about fighting. Perhaps Elon Musk and friends will find their way to the Moon or Mars, but the rest of us are probably going to fight it. Right? So we probably need to figure something out with regard to climate change or at least on behalf of our children's children's children.

So, you know, so that that sense of shared destiny, I think keeps us at the table to find this and hear it out. So I guess what I would say is, you know, one, let's let's distinguish between the type of discomfort we're feeling. Let's make sure we're guarding against, you know, deep-feed of hatred that leads to forms of violence that are unavoidable.

But three, let's keep in mind that I think as David said, as we're human beings and so we

are emotional creatures here. We've got to keep as many faculty see it most. We think we have various ways of experiencing the world.

And I think all of them need to be brought to bear. And I think that sometimes we're so quick to just jerk away from what's uncomfortable that we don't leave room for the growth. And so, you know, the first chapter of the game talks about letting perseverance have the perfect work so that you will be mature and complete once you've got things.

There's a way in which persevering your child expands your capacity. And I think in this country, we have an infinite initiative, individual and collective immaturity. I'm a part of a group called the Gathering and Pastor Bob Bingham is always reminding us of our need to increase our capacity to swim to our hardship and grow from it.

And I think in the sense that, you know, the thing is, you know, black people, non-white people, generally, but certainly particular versions of black people for indigenous people or Latinx, for Asian people, women have beat their burdens. And so I think in the meantime, they were talking about, you know, these long-term processes, we have to honor the fact that these burdens are not evenly shared. And so, as I talked about earlier, this urgency comes from a sense that people are suffering and dying.

And so, I don't mind the discomfort because I know that there are other people who are much more uncomfortable to the point of death. And so I think that we should be uncomfortable with that fact. And that should energize us to still come to the table to work this out and to not lose heart because too much is at stake.

So I would say, you know, let's grow up and figure it out and, you know, be uncomfortable, take our breaks and we need to come back and let's fight the good fight. You know, one of the things that I tell people to do is read the best expression of the opposing side's point of view. Learn about challenging ideas from their proponents and not their opponents.

So, for example, right now evangelical churches, and especially, you know, predominantly white evangelical churches are really arguing and talking a lot about critical race theory. But a lot of the people who are talking about critical race theory have not read critical race theory. They've read people who've critiqued critical race theory and now they think they know it.

Okay. So, one of the things that I say is read about and learn ideas from their proponents, not their opponents. Read the best expression of the opposing side's point of view.

And one of the things that happens when you take those approaches is it often, it will often dispel a lot of your own misconceptions about your opponent. Because a lot of the animosity, a lot of the hatred, and I agree with Professor Sims, 1 million percent, we

should not believe that the public square is supposed to be comfortable. Okay.

We should not believe that. We should in fact crave as people who seek truth. If our goal is to seek truth, we should, you know, head towards the discomfort.

Some of the most growth that I've ever had as a human being has come after profound discomfort. Well, I've learned that I've been wrong about things after profound discomfort. So it's not that we should shy away from uncomfortable conversations, but we should go into uncomfortable conversations with our eyes open about who we're talking to and who we're talking with.

And that's one of the things that I think is really important about reading the best expression of the opposing side's point of view. Because often what that is going to drain you of is of the notion that my opponent, who I may disagree with for reasons, A, B, C, D, and F, is not also evil. Now there are evil people.

We can't blind ourselves to that fact, but we have to realize that evidence of evil does not lie in disagreeing with me. That is not evidence of evil. There are evil people who might agree with me on some policies, for example.

But one of the things that reading the best expression of the opposing side's point of view does is that it not only fully educates us to that view, it also informs us about who their advocates are, truly who they truly are. And one of the things that I found is that is one of the best ways to cut through toxic animosity. Here's another one.

Fight for the rights of others you would like to exercise yourself. Fight for the rights of others you would like to exercise yourself. Do not only be concerned with the due process rights or the free speech rights or the free exercise of religion rights of you and your co-religionists and people in your political, you know, red team or blue team or whatever.

Don't do that. Fight for the, if I will tell you from personal experience, when you reach out and you defend somebody you disagree with who's having their rights violated, two things happen at once. One, you're going to, in the act of defending them, you're going to learn more about them.

And I spent a lot of time writing a defense of Colin Kaepernick's right to kneel. And what happened when I did that, even though I don't kneel for the national anthem, what happened when I did that? I began to understand a lot more about why people were kneeling. Okay, so you understand that number two, you form in many instances, not all, but many instances of bond to fellowship when you defend another person's rights.

Even if they're not going to agree with you, and even if you're going to be voting against each other or whatever, there is a bond to fellowship that occurs when you defend someone else's fundamental rights. It just happens, not every time, but most of the time



it happens. And it's one way towards not just tolerance across differences, but sometimes often even affection across differences.

So read the best expression, the posing side point of view, learn about challenging ideas from their proponents and not their opponents, and defend the rights of others that you would like to exercise yourself. Could you give us an example of the best expressions on the left and on the right? Where were you, Stiros? How much time have you got? Just give us one, but your top, your top. I mean, you know, there are certain publications that I, you know, I go to, certain writers that I go to quite a bit.

I mean, if you're talking about, you know, even though I'm conservative, one of my favorite publications is The Atlantic, which is More Center Left, one of my favorite people to read, who's in The New York Times about issues on race is Jamelle Bowie. When I'm reading about healthcare policy, one of the first people I go and read is as recline, who I disagree with on a lot of things, but he's somebody who is probably thought through healthcare policy in the United States more than, you know, anybody else that I can think of. I mean, I can go down a list of thinkers.

I don't have it right in front of me, but I can easily, I can do that. But what I would say is, if you're not reading regularly on the topics that really matter to you, people who might disagree with your political inclinations, there's a hole in your learning. Well, thank you both of you for those insights.

And this next question, again, is general. So please feel free to answer. It is this, how do we reconcile when we differ on whether important social phenomena even exist? And both sides seem certain.

So it's certain as to whether or not it exists. And some of the phenomena that are cited here in the parentheses are systemic racism and meritocracy. We don't mean to start this time, David, or do you want to continue with what you're having? However, I feel abustered for a while.

So, okay, I can take a first and look forward to hearing your response to. I mean, I think in many ways, David and I kind of covered this. I don't want to rehash too much territory.

I mean, I think the, I think one of the things that came up in this in this election certainly was what constitutes a fact. And so I think at some point, all of us sort of gave up on trying to fact check the current president because we knew he would just say what he needed to say to move on with whatever his agenda was. And I think that that itself is a fact.

I can't note how many public statements he has made that were blatantly false. So, so I mean, I think that, but to me, Donald Trump is indicative of a process that America has been in, which often is captured, I think, and I appreciate David's point about thinking

about how people's proponents framed them as opposed to their opponents. But I think one of the epithets I think thrown at the people like me often are the liberal elite that sit in the ivory tower and are untethered and not connected to the average person.

So I think the issue of thinking about how do we regard facts, I think is really this tension at the heart of our country's understanding of itself. But I think it goes back to what I was saying before, which is we're uncomfortable with certain facts. So, for example, the 1619 project has been a flashpoint.

This is a whole Hannah Jones piece on censoring enslaved Africans in the New York Times. And so Tom Cotton and a senator of Arkansas put forward a bill, which is, we knew it, and most people understood not to have any legs in Congress in the senator in the House. But it was a stake in the ground to say that this narrative is a naphma to what I believe about this country.

Our president has also put aside some notion of a patriotic education. The idea being that we don't agree on certain facts. I think David is right to mark on that 300-4-5-3 history.

But I think there are many people across the political spectrum, but I was a bit more conservative, who would deeply question some basic facts with regard to whatever we want to call it. The systemic racism or just the ways in which the system of racial hierarchy has created fundamental distortions in our social system, so if we don't address them, there is no meaningful unity. That's the impasse we're facing.

And so the question I pose is, well, what are we willing to do about it? And to me, the scale of need, certainly the things that David mentioned, are important components, but I think the scale of need in terms of resources means that it needs to be on all hands on deck. So the answer more precisely, I think that we have to, I think there's a bigger question about the role of empiricism and the role of science that we're grappling with. And so politics are just one among many arenas in which we're seeing this come to bear in touch with the stakes are so high for existential for our existence.

And then, so there was another part of that question, and maybe I missed the facts aren't shared, and then there's another part I'm remembering. I think the answer to the majority of it is simply whether or not, well, when we have situations in which there are social phenomena that are, the very existence is disputed, and both sides are very certain as the particular angles of whether or not there is being, how would we do? Yeah, well, let me turn over to David. I'll just finalize my comments by saying that, yeah, I think this is a broader question of what is the basis of our facts, what will we use? I'm an arbitrary blossom, we talked about our, you know, arbitrating between competing ideas.

And so the question is, when there is a point of disagreement, what are we both going to appeal to and going success? I think this is also the heart of what David and I have been

talking about all night, that there is no common arbiter. I think David's opening remarks from the fact that there's nothing holding us together, not even shared facts. And so I think until we, and I don't have an answer, I would just, sometimes naming the problem as half the solution, until we wrestle with what is going to be our common arbiter, and when what kind of vision we want in terms of inclusion.

I think if we could have some sense of where we're headed, the case is motivated through the pain. I think if we can be clear-eyed about what we bring with us, what's on our backs, whether we put it there or not, it thinks that helps us to grapple in the moment with, okay, what can we do now? What are the materials, social, symbolic, and other resources, spiritual resources we can bring to bear? And I think that, you know, our collective capacities can do the work. We're quite ingenious people.

We know that, you know, that the deprivation is the mother of invention. So I have faith in that capacity and certainly ultimate faith in my war. At the same time, I think that, you know, we really have to sit with that the substrate of our very understanding of who we are as people is something that has been eroded over the decades, and we're now really seeing the crystallization of that.

And we're finally waking up. You know, I'm just going to double down on something I said earlier about reading the best expression, the other side's view, unless you think that I think the other side is confined to the Atlantic, you know, a neoliberal publication or whatever. I read tons of Mother Jones and the nation and Jacobin and all kinds of radical read.

But I also, that's part of my job. Like a lot of you guys have other things you have to do. So you kind of have to pare it down a little bit.

But the here's the thing. We're working in an environment where people can silo off into a like-minded cocoon in the real world and online. Okay.

And when, and if there's one thing that, that I'm pretty darn sure of, it's that when you silo off, you generally don't get closer to the truth. Cass Unstein, in a brilliant 1999 paper, articulated a concept called the law of group polarization. And what it essentially says is that when people of like-minded gather, the common expression of their shared view tends to get more extreme.

So if you're constantly around people who agree with you, if you're constantly reading people who agree with you, you're going to tend to get more extremely committed to your point of view. And your point of view will probably become more extreme as well. Now, I'm not saying that, you know, moderation, I'm not talking about just that moderation is some sort of virtue all by itself.

I call myself a conservative, even though I'm more moderate on some issues, or you

wouldn't locate me within the conservative spectrum on some issues. But the, so I'm not saying everything's great at the center. But what I'm saying is that when you are in round and ensconced around like-minded people and reading like-minded publications exclusively, you're generally not getting closer to the truth.

Okay, you're generally getting more extremely dedicated to your point of view. And those are not the same thing. There was some interesting research done by the more in common project, which has been looking at American polarization and division at a much deeper level than Red versus Blue.

And what they found is the people who consume the most political media are the most wrong about their political opponents viewpoints. So in other words, the more political media you consume, the less accurate your assessment of the other side is. You're going to think that they're far more extreme than they really are.

And why is that? Well, especially if you're reading partisan press, the partisan press is not highlighting the best of the other side. It's engaging often in a practice called nutpicking, which is this great little made up word that just basically describes the business model of Twitter, which is find some blue check mark somewhere on the other side of the aisle who said something crazy, quote, retweet them and say, "Hey, look, this is what they're really like." In other words, you take negative actions on the part of your opponent and you say that's emblematic of the other side. And then if there's a negative action on your side, you say, "No, that's exceptional.

That's exceptional." So all the sins on your team are exceptional. All the sins on the other side are emblematic. And over time, what ends up happening is you become to identify your opponent through their worst actors.

And this is how we get to the idea that the other side is much more extreme than they really are. And the people who are the most correct were some of the people who are least engaged in politics. Why? Because they were getting their assessments of other human beings by these antiquated things called personal relationships.

And as they had personal relationships, they were new people in full. And so I completely, I mean, look, I live in the middle of red America. And right now I've heard, I've had it up to here with nonsense about dominion voting systems and total lunacy about hammer and scorecard and all of these other crazy conspiracy theories that are infecting the right right now about the election.

I have just had it. I mean, this stuff is ridiculous. And yet the ability to penetrate into that world and communicate in that world is very limited.

Why? Because they've closed off. They've closed off. And so when somebody has closed off, it is very difficult.

It is very difficult. As I was talking to, I was doing a Zoom event like this right before Thanksgiving with a bunch of students at a Christian college. And the question was raised, what do I do about my friends who are into QAnon? And I said, hmm, it might be too late to really say anything to them.

But you can try to inoculate others against their influence. What we have to learn is not everybody's persuadable, but there always are some people who are persuadable and aim for them, aim for them. And I think that you can make more headway than you might think.

Great. Thank you again for those profound responses. This is going to be the last question.

And perhaps it'll be one that's exciting to people. It's been uploaded in the time our program here. And I believe people would probably want both Professor Sims and David to respond to this.

And that is, is Trump more of a symptom of our discontinuity or a source of it? And of course, feel free to disagree with the presuppositions of the question, if you would like as well. Can I go first on that? He's a symptom that makes the disease worse. So like a hacking cough can break a rib.

That's Donald Trump. So Donald Trump would not lead a party that was already healthy. Donald Trump could not lead.

If the Republican party was healthy, it had a healthy culture. Donald Trump could not become a nominee of that party. If we had a healthy body politic, Donald Trump could not become President of the United States.

So there are a lot of pre-existing issues. If you look at negative polarization, negative polarization has been rising for two decades before Donald Trump. He couldn't become elected.

He couldn't be elected in the absence of negative polarization. He couldn't. It wouldn't be possible.

He was running with the highest disapproval rating of any president ever, any presidential candidate ever polled in the history of approval rating polling. And he happened to be have the good fortune to be running against person with the second highest disapproval rating in his history of polling. So the short answer is a healthy political culture does not generate Donald Trump, but Donald Trump has made the political culture even more unhealthy.

That's my view anyway. I agree with that. I think we should look at the history of Donald Trump to the extent that we somebody was coming out of bottom.

I don't mean to be spoken about it, but I feel like it's for a while. It's not like every two weeks there was a new book, whether it's Michael Bolton, not that we Bob Woodward, not that we don't want to understand what's happening, but just just reflecting on how much material there is to drop on. But the point is just to say that I think the key factor to think about what he was doing prior to his turn toward politics, at least in the ways that most of us came to know him.

And that is, he was the leader of the birther movement, a movement that was seeking to disqualify Barack Obama by virtue of saying he wasn't born in the United States. And that movement was highly racially inflected because we could look at the ad Donald Trump took out with regards to the Central Park Five and said that he was the only person in New York who felt that way at the time before people really had a political story. But we can see that how he thought about the world, from the way that he conducted his businesses, to how he interacted with public square, even before he was informal politics, and certainly his beating, the birther movement, which is how he was going to make a nationally burned self of the politician of part of his business.

And your apprentice certainly, um, indicates, you know, that, you know, you sort of, you know, what, what he stood for. And so I think, uh, just amplifying, I think the, you know, or adding that alongside, I think David's great point, which is that he's symptomatic and made things much worse. So that I think that part of what Donald Trump was able to do was, was to, to, um, and I think, uh, he didn't give a dog whistle.

In fact, he just spoke boldly and plainly, um, with, uh, and I think that was part of his charm, if you want to call it charm. Um, you know, where, you know, America, make America great again, and was sort of, you know, for most, for those of us who were not white elite men, um, it was for home. And then we had to ask the question of, well, who does that, who was that for? Um, and certainly it had to resonate with more than just white elite men.

Otherwise he would not have been elected. But what, what Donald Trump did, um, sort of offered to America was a return to people in their place, right? So what was the birther movement about? It was about a black man out of place. Um, and so sure America has been, that has been changing.

I think it is radically more inclusive. But, um, I think many people also saw Barack Obama as a sort of panacea, a sort of easy expiation of sin. Our original sin has, has been wiped clean because, you know, what we've elected our first black president.

Meanwhile, all of the statistics I just shared with you were not that much different under President Obama. Remember, he inherited the worst economy that we had, that's a great question. So we know that many people were struggling.

The foreclosure crisis that had height when President Obama took over. So, uh, so I

think, you know, Donald Trump in many ways, um, and we act for number two, just another point of fact, he did not win the popular vote. So the conversation we did not have is about our political system and the ways in which, um, the electoral college and other, um, you know, mechanisms to create, um, you know, at least in our present instantiation, ways that only certain states are sort of the battleground states while the rest of us just show up to vote because we want to vote down ballot and we certainly have to show up to get those votes in.

But we understand that, um, our state's not really in play as it were. And so we can debate another time, obviously, the merits of the electoral college and how we vote the president, but, but it is to say just, you know, he didn't win the popular vote, which is, you know, perhaps something just to remind you that the majority of the voting public do not pursue him. It's just that he won certain states.

But, um, but certainly, um, you know, that, that, you know, that he exists, um, is a downstream of, uh, I think, um, the racial backlash that has been brewing just the civil rights movement, um, uh, ravers. If we look at, um, what was done under Nixon, if you look at what was done under Reagan, um, in terms of the dog whistles that he used, the code language that he used, um, with regard to racism, with regard to appealing to the so-called white moderate, um, the, the, you know, leveraging what happened under Johnson when he voted for many of these breakthrough laws, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, or, or, or, if you can find them into, into law, the Voting Rights Act of 1964, the, um, uh, sorry, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, that they're housing act of 1968, these, these, these, there's a backlash that has ensued in the country, um, of two of the opening of the opportunity structure. So we should, we should always, that Abraham Kennedy talked about the progression of racism and racial progress.

We should always have these two dueling forces in mind that we are both the better angels of us are, are, are, are, are, are at work and, and I think the original said, and I think Edward David talked about her basically talked about how, you know, the, the better angels of us, um, you know, uh, appear to be winning, but we should never lose sight of the fact that our original sin and those, and the, and the more sinister parts of us are still with us. Um, and so I think, uh, that's the very sobering thing, but I think it also in many ways gives us our marching orders. I think half, half the battle is often defining the problem.

What are we fighting against? Um, why is this so intractable? Who benefits from this, right? Whenever you see poverty, don't act, well, why is there poverty? Well, somebody's benefiting from that poverty, right? Somebody's benefiting, it's not those people you're seeing you are poor, but somebody's benefiting, right? These are social systems, things are interconnected. And certainly we all have you, we all have agency, but the scale in which we see these distortions means that this is organized. It's just, it's just that, you

know, we're not necessarily, uh, we're that we're, it's just that we're not equal beneficiary.

It's a Donald Trump, really captured, I think the real grief is that America has with how the distribution of resources has been, have been, how resources have been met out over the last several decades. But rather than sit down and have the conversation we're having and let's grapple with the policies we need to do to right those wrongs, he played to people's fears and emotions and fed them sort of emotional, uh, you know, sort of emotional foul, but no real substance that would actually change the condition on the ground and tax them through people's quality of life. So certainly symptomatic.

Um, I think, I think we're resilient. I think we'll recover from this. And I think what I tried to set up at the end of my remarks is this idea that if we're willing to see COVID, the racial uprising, the Donald Trump election, as a sort of mirror, if we're willing to look at the mirror and to see the bloodied eye in the bruised mouth and we're saying, look, I've had enough.

I want to heal, then, then let's do that work. Let's heal. But let's not lose sight of the fact that I'm healing as a process.

And it's a, it's going to be a daily dogged commitment. And so I'm on for the fight. I hope that everyone on this call feels empowered to, as David said, do the reading, do the work, be a sponge, and then move your feet, um, you know, to show up in the, in the places, uh, for these dialogues as well as more the real work of pressuring those at the center of power to reflect the values that we espouse, um, and to find other ways of accessing power and civil society when there's a church or schools, wherever we find ourselves.

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[Music]

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