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Our Culture of Distrust | John Inazu & Jonathan Haidt

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The Veritas Forum

We live in a time when polarization and distrust are hindering us from relationship and moving forward together. How do we bridge these left/right & religious/secular divides? Jonathan Haidt, NYU Professor of Moral Psychology, Author of *Coddling of the American Mind* & John Inazu, Washington University Professor of Law & Religion, Author of *Confident Pluralism*, take to the stage at NYU. Moderated by Christine Emba - The Washington Post Please like, share, subscribe to and review this podcast!

Transcript

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 worldview 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 a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this involved.

Today we're here from social psychology. Jonathan Haidt, Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University, as well as John Anazu, Professor of Law & Religion at the Washington University in St. Louis. As they take to the stage at New York University, in a discussion titled "Our Culture of Distrust, How to Bridge the Left Right and Religious Secular Divides." John and I are each going to speak for about 10 minutes to give an overall framework for thinking about what's happening to our country, why we're coming apart, and that will set us up for discussion with Christine as to what, later on at some point, what we hope to get to, what could we do about it? I'm a social psychologist, and so what I'd like to do to begin our discussion, sort of take the big picture, I'd like you to imagine with me two challenges that our ancestors, in a sense, overcame.

So the first is hundreds of thousands of years ago. Human beings are primates, there's no doubting that, and we evolved to live in small groups that are constantly fighting with neighboring groups over territory and resources. That's human nature, that's what life was always like for millions of years, tens of millions of years of primate evolution.

And it's like that as we develop more tribal forms in the last 100, 150,000 years as we begin to get more demonstrative culture and more ritual, we develop religion. And it turns out, at least this is the argument I make in the righteous mind, that religion is the crucial, it's the killer app as it were, it's the crucial innovation that allows us to scale up from small, kin-based, you know, 100, 150 people groups at the most up to gigantic civilizations. When humans develop the ability to make something sacred, a rock, a tree, a river, a person, when we can make something sacred, and then we circle around that sacred thing, either literally circle around or just metaphorically we all worship it together.

We bind ourselves together in a way that creates trust, we can operate cohesively, and then we are undefeatable. And we take the territory, we wipe out the groups that aren't nearly as cohesive. So there's been a long period of evolution among humans for better religions, but better doesn't mean morally better, just means more effective at binding us together.

And many of you may not accept this perspective on religion, but at least this is what I'm bringing to the table here as a social psychologist who studies morality and who I'm Jewish by birth and heritage and ethnicity. I was always an atheist, but I really came to have a lot of respect for religion when I saw the role it plays in our society and the fact that in the modern day, religious communities still bring out the best in people. People who are part of religious community are more charitable, nicer, better citizens.

So I am actually a fan of religion, even though I'm not a believer. But to return with me now, many thousands of years ago, humanity manages to do this thing where we can live in large groups, but it's based actually on our tribe. And our ability to make something sacred, define our community in distinction to other communities.

So we're tribal creatures, and there's always been enormous amounts of violence and war between groups. So that's the first situation I want you to imagine. And I want you to see it not as just a horrible, awful thing, but as this complicated, interesting fact that cooperation and competition are flip sides of the same coin.

If we didn't have competition, if we didn't have war, we would not have cooperation, we would not be able to do things like all come together here with strangers. So that's the big picture background of human nature. All right, now let's fast forward to the 1780s.

And we have a group of men in North America on the east coast of North America. We can go back to the 1770s when these English men were throwing off the English king. They were not Americans, they were English citizens who were throwing off the English king and imagining a different way to live together.

Now obviously all kinds of contradictions in there as they cried out for freedom, wall, enslaving other human beings. But this was still something new under the sun to

imagine a way of living that was more egalitarian, at least that politically was not based on tribalism and feudalism. So there are only two really stable forms of human life around the world.

One is small groups of hunter-gatherers, that's the way humans always lived. And then when we go up from that, we have feudalism with kings and lords, and it's a recursive structure where you have one person over multiple nobles. Who are over multiple people, who are over multiple peasants.

That shows up all over the world. And then there's this other form called democracy, which is a, it's a, it's a, it's a, it's a, it's a, it's a, it's a, a reason here and there. It never lasted very long.

It's not easy. It's not something we're designed to do. It's not something that comes naturally to us.

But they thought they'd give it a try again, even though it had failed almost every time it had been tried. They thought let's try it again. And they were very good psychologists and very good historians.

And they knew that we are prone to faction. That was James Madison's big word, faction, prone to factionalism. And so they designed this elaborate mechanism, knowing full well that previous experiments in democracy had failed.

Because at some point one group is against another, and they hate the other group so much, they don't care about the common good. So, factionism is what tends to destroy democracy. And that's why King is so effective.

He just says, no, this is the way it's going to be. King's in feudalism, very stable. Democracy, very unstable.

But they say, let's give it a try and let's try to arrange things to calm the passions. And, you know, in a small democracy it's going to go up in flames very quickly. But America is so big, so big from, you know, Maine to Georgia, whatever it was at the time.

It's so big, and there's a quote from Madison where he says, that someone, you know, a demagogues, someone may start a fire in one place, but it'll take so long for the news to spread. And by then things will cool down and, you know, the fire won't spread to other states. Well, that was when it took weeks for news to get from one place to another.

And in a whole bunch of ways, the founding fathers created a democracy based on certain assumptions about human nature in human society, most of which are no longer true. And I think what has happened to us over the last 20 or 30 years is that a lot of the forces that were pulling us together in the 20th century have weakened. So the centripetal force is pulling us inward.

If you have a secular, multi-ethnic, multiracial, liberal democracy, it tends to dissolve. You need forces pulling it together like a common enemy, the Soviet Union, the Nazis, whatever it was. As we've lost the things pulling us together, we have increasing forces blowing us apart.

And I have an article coming on the Atlantic next Tuesday arguing that social media is like the nuclear bomb of democracy, that it just blows us apart. And I actually have my doubts as to whether democracy can survive with social media in its present forms. So that's my very depressing big picture opening for how we are a species designed for tribalism, not democracy.

We had a good run of it. We had really great founders or intelligent founders who thought about and gave us a structure that worked to some extent. And I think that we are now outside the design specifications for democracy.

Not that there's no hope, but that if we don't do something about it, there's no hope. John, over to you. Well, with that introduction, I'm going to complicate it more, and then we can hopefully turn to some perspective solutions.

But I want to say first, it's great to be with both of you. I mean, long and my work from both of you. I want to talk about three more contemporary challenges that I think only augment the issues that Jonathan just highlighted.

And I'm going to talk about the transcendence divide, the end of white Christian America, and the forgetting of dissent. So first, the transcendence divide. What I mean by that is the growing number of people in this country who reject any kind of transcendence.

So this is don't confuse us with the category of the nuns, N-O-N-E-S, the spiritually unaffiliated, because that category includes a lot of people who still believe in God. But there is a growing and now politically significant demographic that reject transcendence altogether. So what does that do for us as a country? Well, that complicates some of the categories.

In the 1990s, as we were working to figure out how to get along with each other, the issue of pluralism was much in the news. And pluralism at the time was religious pluralism. It was how do Christians, Muslims, and Jews get together.

That's a really hard question to answer. But it's even harder today when we add this category of a rejection of transcendence because it deprives us of some linguistic resources, some common threads across religion. It also deprives us of the ability to have a kind of civic religion of any sort.

So the Supreme Court for many years has worked mildly to try to keep a kind of public prayer that is increasingly moving toward what they call non-sectarian prayer. If you can

make God as vanilla as possible, then maybe you can have a prayer in public that encompasses everyone or most people. But when you introduce a politically significant demographic of non-believers, even the most non-sectarian prayer is not going to do it.

And now that the court and other political actors are struggling with this kind of phenomenon, we see in the news the hostility around thoughts and prayers, for example, or whether forgiveness belongs in public discourse or public actions. And these are, I think, all symptoms of the sociological phenomenon of an increase in the number of non-believers in this country. Now I want to be quick to say this is not a particular shout out for religion or a critique of non-religion.

I know plenty of individual Christians who are terrible people, and I know plenty of lovely atheists. So this is not, but as categories, politically and demographically, this is doing something to our country. And I say this as a Christian who believes that God through Jesus has restored the created order and that it affects everyone.

So that has consequences for how much we can do in terms of finding common ground. My friend, Stanley Harrowass, is fond of saying one of the dumbest things a Christian can say is, "I believe Jesus rose from the dead, but that's just my personal opinion." So I mean, if you really believe this stuff, it's going to have consequences, and that's going to limit, it's going to complicate some of the efforts toward a kind of unity amidst pluralism. So the transcendence divide is one of the challenges.

The second challenge, the end of white Christian America, I take that category from the name of a book by Robert Jones. I think that actually the helpfully descriptive label is the end of white Protestant America. And what I mean by that is a sense of loss combined with nostalgia that looks back to an error when there was a white Protestant consensus that drove a lot of American culture, particularly in the middle class.

This was not all of bad things. Some of that unity allowed a kind of institution building that is much more complicated today, but as we all know, it also came with a lot of costs, including the suppressing of difference and the leaving out of voices. And so with a greater increased recognition today of the actual difference around us and the recognition that institutionally, what was formerly white Protestant America is changing not to be replaced by anything obvious at the moment is another challenge to the issues of pluralism.

And I say this as a white Protestant or at least half of one, so I'm half white, not half Protestant. And I was raised largely in white Protestant institutions and then my relational networks are in those institutions. So in many ways, very fond of those institutions, I'm also half Japanese and my grandparents were incarcerated during World War II for being Japanese and my father was born in the prison camps.

And so there is not much of me that wants to go back to an earlier nostalgic era. I'm just

fine in 2019, even if it feels a little less coherent, I'm not in jail and I kind of like that. And a lot of, I think, non-white people would be glad for where we are today versus an earlier era.

So that's the second challenge though, is the end of white Protestant America, what that means for institutions, what that means for a kind of fear and anxiety among some, but not all white Protestants, and what that means for our increasing, are increased diversity in this country. And then the third thing is the lack or forgetfulness of the significance of dissent. So Jonathan mentioned Madison's notion of factions.

Madison understood that factions were not good things, but they were necessary things and they weren't going away. So Madison and Federalist 10, and in the framing, much of the Constitution was saying, what do we do given the reality of difference, and how can we recognize the importance of difference in dissent? So some of my core academic work is around the right of assembly in the First Amendment. And when the framers were looking at the right of assembly, they were originally considering whether assembly should be for purposes of the common good, and that language was actually in the draft of the First Amendment.

And they said, no, that's not right, because we actually want to encourage citizens to assemble for purposes other than the common good, for their own purposes, for purposes that might descend from the common good or majoritarian norms. And so the significance of promoting both legal and cultural avenues for dissent is extremely important in this country. Perhaps most significant when we're talking about political or overwhelmingly majoritarian forms of cultural consensus that we allow spaces for people to dissent from those.

And I say this as a military veteran who, like many veterans, wore the uniform and saluted the flag so that others would not have to. I was in the Pentagon the morning of 9/11 when the plane hit, and I care deeply about our service members and the commitment to patriotism. And yet I very much want to encourage dissent, including political dissent.

And I very much worry when increasingly our government actors in the regulation of civil society and in the regulation of protest spaces ignore the importance of dissent. And then importantly, our private actors, social media platforms and big tech companies, also ignore the significance of dissent. So those three things are worrisome to me, sort of building upon what Jonathan shared with us.

And I think part of the way ahead to jump to where we might go has got to be recognizing what our differences actually are, recognizing that they're not going away, naming them authentically. And then possibly, maybe not even aiming for the common good, which at least right now might not be attainable, but can we find areas of common ground, even when we disagree on what the common good is? Well, so that was a lot to

start with. I'll also say that I'm really excited to be here, and I'm still experiencing a slight bit of whiplash from the fact that this is a gathering in which the first introduction was to pull out your phones and log on to a website.

And then the second was to go to other tables and talk to people in real life. I like that mix. I'm hoping we can keep it for the rest of the night.

But actually, I'm going to start by picking a little bit at both of your statements. And so maybe I'll start with you, Jonathan. So you mentioned, you talked actually a lot about the importance of religion, but more as, you know, kind of a social tool, a glue, not necessarily the content of religion, but the fact that it exists.

But then from John, we're hearing a lot about this idea of transcendence, that there's something unique to religion or within religion that matters and that's missing. You've written about the concept of sort of a wisdom, a shared wisdom. Is that related to maybe the transcendence that John talked about, or how does that interact? Thank you for that question.

Because I'll start with what I would have said until I heard John speak, which is channeling. There's a wonderful book called *American Grace* by Robert Putnam and David Campbell. And that really informed a lot of my thinking about religion.

As I said, I'm an atheist, the sort of person who used to, you know, I was the sort of person who should have become a new atheist and been very hostile to religion, but I was already studying morality by that time. And in *American Grace*, they go through the research on what is showing that religious Americans are better citizens and better in many ways than non-religious Americans. And they go through what is it? Is it the belief in God? No, because I crunch all the numbers about, you know, what kind of Christian are you, what kind of Hindu are you.

What they conclude is exactly what Emile Durkheim thought long ago, which is it's ultimately the community. It's just being part of a community that endures over time and that talks about, well, this is me adding on, and that talks about morals, ethics, values, what's good, what's not good. So you could have a community of, you know, Ford Mustang owners, but that's not going to do it because they're not really talking about any kind of virtues.

So the short answer is, no, that belief stuff doesn't really matter. All that matters that you're part of a community and that that community is in some way organized around some notion of virtue. That's what sociologically is most important.

But what I would add now, having heard John talk, is, and we were talking about this at dinner a little bit, just beforehand, that there is such a posity of moral language now in our common life because we don't have that shared Protestant framework. And, you

know, I'll just note briefly, I grew up, my Jewish parents were typical middle class Jews assimilating to a wasp way of life but certainly allowed to be Jewish as much as they want. And that was fine.

And that was like the great American assimilationist thing. My wife is Korean. Her parents came here in the 60s.

Same thing. We all sort of aspired to this American way. And so I'm a great fan of assimilation.

I think it's helpful to have some kind of experience. It's helpful to have some dominant morality because if you don't have a dominant morality, what do you have? Anomie, normlessness, chaos, the day after the Tower of Babel when we cannot understand each other's language. So to hear John talk about, you know, well, you know, it used to be that we, as long as you say, "God, plain vanilla." Like, I was fine with that growing up Jewish.

And I'm, you know, I think it's good to have some of those veneers of religion. But then I see your point now that you have atheists who say, "No, no God at all." And now I see it as like one of the final threads ripped. Like now there's nothing we can talk about to have some sort of a common overarching moral language.

So I don't know where we are. So I made you more pessimistic. Right.

Which was, I didn't think was possible, but yes. This is going well. But the darkness before the light will get there.

So following on that, actually, and yes, I'll address this to you, John, there's, there is this question of, you know, religion as something that bonds as something that does give us an ethical and moral language to speak to each other. And that is clearly useful. Clearly adds something to our common good.

But then there's so many examples I think that you can think of, even just this continuing contrast of white protestant America to everything else, where religion is used as a tool of division. I mean, there's a very long history of that, where religion is used to divide, where certain beliefs, if you dissent from them, that dissent is not tolerated. So how do you kind of match up those two values? You do want a religion or some moral plane that everyone can agree on, and yet the dissent and some amount of factionalism remains necessary? What's the balance here? Yeah, I mean, two things that come to mind when you're talking.

One is, and part of maybe a reason for optimism is we, I don't think we want to look back on our history and say it's all bad. It's all lost. I mean, there are a lot of horrible things that have happened in this country.

There's also a lot of good. And so, I mean, sometimes we think back to 1789, and we

say, how hard was it for a bunch of white guys to figure out how to get along with each other? But it was really hard, right? Other parts of the world, they were killing each other over their religious differences. So it was no small thing that amidst deep religious difference, they figured out how to live together.

And then actually, gradually, the positive story of religious freedom in this country is successive integration of other religions. Well, you know, first it was the Baptist wondering whether they were going to be tolerated by the Congregationalists, and then it became Jews and Catholics and Mormons, and today Islam is the big question, right? Well, Islam successfully integrate into the American experiment, and will Americans who are here of other faiths welcome American Muslims. But this is not the first time we've had these questions.

And I think it's really important to point to some of the successes in this country. The other thing, though, and this is something that Jonathan said at dinner, that the importance of humility and self-awareness in one's own religious practices, and so I can speak only from my own tradition as a Christian, but it seems like there's a lot in the Bible about humility, and there's a lot that manifests in American Christianity that is not very humble, that might begin with sort of an acceptance of complicity and a reason for lament when American Christianity has done bad things to other people, and instead of sort of that lament and repentance, which seems very biblical to me, from some segments of American Christianity, we instead have a doubling down of the moral highway, right, or the culture wars, and so a kind of humility from all of us, but I would say certainly for Christians would be a good first step to get us back to a positive case ahead. I have heard rumor has it that Jesus was a pretty friendly guy and loved to talk to strangers, just throwing that out there, but actually pressing you a little bit further on that.

Can you give an example, or can you talk a little bit more about where that tipping point is, you know, your reason for optimism, you say, is that in the past, people were able to bridge those religious divides, and that was a good thing, but it seems like what both of our introductions told us today is that that is no longer happening, so what is the shift here, what has been that tipping factor, is it social media, and what about social media? Well first is a factual question on religious divides. First, is it the case that religion in America has been used to divide people, not in the 19th century, but in the last 50 years, has religion been used to divide people? And then the second question is drawing on James Hunter, some of you may know here at the University of Virginia, and his book Culture War, what I took from that is there used to be differences between Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, those were the splits, but sometime beginning in the 60s and 70s it became the orthodox or more conservative wing of the three religions were now united against the more aggressive relativistic wings of the three religions, so that it isn't religion dividing, it's the divide over the existence of give a divinely revealed or religious truth. So is religion a divisive force in America or between divisions? I think it's

complicated for some of the reasons you're pointing out, but we certainly have even very recent examples where religious divisions have been more divisive than unifying.

And then back to 2012 when Romney was the Republican nominee, and I was looking to some Christian conservatives thinking he's kind of your guy, right, if you want, but they were, the Mormon thing was too much for them, right, or even some of the anti-Catholic bias from Protestants, even within, I mean there are some segments of American Protestantism that are still deeply anti-Catholic, and so there are pockets of this where the divide I think continues. Well look, but the trend, I mean, you know, my sense of the Romney issue from the outside is we didn't think much about Mormons, we learned about Romney, we learned a bit about Mormonism, and now it's much more acceptable. So you sure, I'm sure there were some that didn't accept it, but like, isn't aren't we like making rapid progress on just accepting and integrating Mormonism now? I'm not such a running ratchet, it probably depends on where you are and sort of the spectrum, maybe even where you live geographically in the country.

It's not clear to me though that we have this unification across religions, and when we do, I think it tends to be a little bit too much of a kumbaya, let's pretend we don't actually have differences, and when we get to what the real differences are, it's not necessarily a unifier. Now there are some common resources, I think something like an notion of charity, for example, or hope might be grounded more specifically in religions across traditions. So my observation as a journalist who has been in some ways sadly tasked with watching the political landscape over the past five or so years is that much of the religious cooperation or non-cooperation that we're seeing seems to actually be related to religion not being looked to as a source of moral truth or shared ethical language, but more is just another way to identify yourself.

So I'm an evangelical, which doesn't necessarily mean anything about the Bible, but just that you talk to other evangelicals and also hate liberals or something. And there are, I think, different forces in our day-to-day landscape that are making it much easier to identify, to disparage those of other identities and to share those feelings very loudly. Social media is one.

I think perhaps our more polarized media landscape is another, but how do you bridge those divides? I mean if religion is no longer working in that case, if it's being set aside for other identities, where do you go next? Well, an essential part of our tribalism is that we're really good at forming teams for whatever the conflict is at hand. And so there's a Bedouin proverb that I quote a lot, "me against my brother, me and my brother against our cousin, me, my brother and our cousin against the stranger or against the world." And you see this in all kinds of movies. There's a fight among the band of brothers of the superheroes, but then in the end they have to face somebody else and they come together.

And so while there were certainly divides between Protestants and Christians and within that used to happen, but my sense, and maybe it's because I'm too deep into the partisan warfare in the politics, is that everything is gradually being subsumed by this one giant left-right divide. And so even as you put it, you know, we're evangelicals, but we all hate the liberals, I mean just that sort of thing would be that that's the overarching war going on. And again, that was James Hunter's point in culture war, is that this is becoming the one giant dimension.

And I think what we're seeing in our country now is a manifestation of that. The more you hate the other side, the more you're willing to believe anything that makes them look bad. So fake news has been spreading in part because of technological innovations, but also just as much I think.

If you see those graphs of how much people hate the other side, it was actually fairly stable in the 80s and 90s. On average, we disliked the other side. We didn't despise them.

And then in the early 21st century, the graphs of hatred go way, way, way up. And so when you hate the other side, all the Russians have to do. They don't even have to make stories up.

It turns out the Russians didn't need the bots. All they did was put things out, and we were the bots. So this one giant divide I think is poisoning and subsuming everything else, including to some extent religious identities, perhaps.

And what we're left with is a grasping to find what are those common ground narratives that we can all adhere to. And so I'm thinking it's often our greatest sports moments and our greatest tragedies that are left to unite us. And a society cannot function with those interstitial moments.

I mean, after 9/11, this country was very unified for a couple of weeks. Washington, D.C. was a different place for a few weeks. Usually when the Olympics come on, we all start seeing more flags around.

But that's way too sporadic to sustain a kind of communal sense of common ground. And if 9/11 happened tomorrow, or if a nuclear bomb were to go off in a major American city, how long do you think would be unified for? So here's the question. Yeah, I don't.

I think a few minutes. You go, you check on Twitter and you'd find out that it's the other side's fault. Right.

Well, and with the advent of deep fakes now that are going to complicate social media even more, we're going to see that. To your point about the rapidity which with information travels, this does not bode well for what's coming, I think. Well, we thought that this was going to get less depressing, but apparently not.

Almost at rock bottom. Almost at rock bottom. Let's not get all the way to rock bottom, actually.

Let's take a side here. So things are bad. What do we do? What do we do next? I mean, this conversation is supposed to be about bridging divides.

Is it possible to bridge divides like this? I mean, you have divides kind of that are, yes, you know, theological, political, philosophical disagreements. And then you have divides like one that's perhaps caused by a deep fake video of a nuclear bomb where one side may in fact live in an entirely alternate reality from the other. How do you bridge a divide like that? Well, so we're here at a university where NYU is a major research university where scholars, your students, most of you.

And I think we're committed to the idea that if we think hard about this, if we do research in the relevant ways with good standards of evidence, we can at least diagnose the problem correctly. And that you have to do that before you can take action or solve problems. In general, this is a problem with democracy.

In general, something happens. We're angry and passionate about it and we enact laws that kind of make sense but then often backfire. That's the way democracy usually works.

And this problem is so deep, I think we need to really do this right. And to do it right, we actually need fora. We need settings in which expert scholars, politicians, people who know what's going on in Congress and elsewhere can work in private.

I don't think we can have public conversations anymore in this country about controversial issues, but in which we try to diagnose what's going on. And there's a lot of that happening actually. There are a lot of centers for the study of democracy.

There is a lot of good scholarship happening that's actually very encouraging. And so I would just start this part of the conversation off by breaking it up into two parts. There's what are the systemic changes we can make because we are part of a gigantic, complicated system which some parameters have changed and it's now malfunctioning.

So what do we change to get it back? So I'll start us off with that. And then we also, I think we'll want to talk about what can we do as individual, as real human beings who have conversations. So I'll just throw out a few of the things I've been studying.

So one big part of this is social media. And one of the most important things we can do on social media is we've got to stop allowing people to create accounts where they don't even have to show that they're a real human being. That to create an account that can influence others and influence democracy, you should at least show some sort of proof of identity, if not to Facebook because we don't trust Facebook, but to some third party entity that at least checks because at present, you can just make an account.

And then you can issue death threats, rape threats, you can do whatever you want, nobody knows who you are. And so I think we've got to end the anonymity that allows trolling and Russian trolls and manipulatives. So there's a lot we can do for social media to make it less toxic and reduce some of the poison.

There's a lot we can do. There's a lot of great research on electoral reform that will restore both the integrity of the elections and especially our trust in the system. If we don't trust that our elections are honest, then we're going to really, then we might actually begin having violence.

Let's also keep in mind, hardly anyone has been killed. I mean, for all that we're going through here, there's been almost no violence. I mean, you can point to, there's been some beatings and there've been some events where there was some violence, but hardly anyone's been killed.

So let's keep this in mind, that it's not quite as dire as it, in 1968, there was more than one bomb per week going off in this country as part of the political movements. But electoral reform, social media reform, congressional reform, we've got to do away with closed party primaries. That's the worst single aspect of our system because in order to get into Congress or anywhere else, it doesn't matter what the general election is, it's almost all our districts are one party.

So all that matters is you win in the primary and only 5% of people vote. So that's the single worst part of it, I would say. John? Just to add maybe a couple of the personal practices we can be thinking about.

One is we need to get away from programs and into relationships. So one of my worries about higher ed is when higher ed professionals see this landscape, they respond with things like diversity day or other things that are programs. They might possibly read to a relationship, but they usually don't.

They often lead to cynicism. And so how can we build structures that facilitate relationships over time where people can begin with not the hard questions of difference, but the easier questions of common ground. And so this is maybe a long-winded way of saying work on social skills, right? This is a great time of your life to be doing that.

Another thing as a practical matter is, and Miss Dovetales with what Jonathan was saying is, the social media battle is in some ways not going to be winnable. You all, very smart people are calculating algorithms to make sure you click on the right things and make sure you respond to different incentives. And if you think that your own willpower is going to be able to overcome that, good luck with that.

So I think one remedy, and this is where I do think faith and religious practice come back

into play, is what do many religious traditions say about these things? Take a break, take a Sabbath from it. Take 24 hours a week to get offline completely. Take, if your job allows it, take a week a year to get offline completely.

I've done that the last four years, and it's been amazingly life-giving. And then I say, why did I ever, why do I ever get back online? So other ways you can step aside from that, to force yourself to have real in-person meals with people that are not just sort of instrumental to get through them as fast as you can, but are designed to facilitate conversations, or when you host events, build in time after the events for people to linger. These are the kinds of things that will allow more genuine relationships to manifest, but we've got to get, we're not going to be able to solve this online.

So asking, not for myself, but for a friend, you have written in the past about three virtues, humility, patience or two of them that help cultivate relationships and bridge divides in person. So what do you do in situations, how would you apply those in a situation where there is divide and it's not working? So I'm thinking of this, say someone is holding a dinner, and you have someone at this dinner who is just completely opposed to you. The disagreement that you have, maybe it's on the death penalty, maybe it's on abortion, maybe it's just on politics, which is not really a real thing, but people really take it to heart.

And you're just on opposite sides, there's no meeting in the middle. Like what level of humility and patience will overcome that? What do you do? Yeah, I mean, so first hopefully, if you're talking about abortion or the death penalty, hopefully it's not your first dinner together, right? I mean, hopefully... That's the third. Study or last.

Over and start. Late in the night. Is there a relationship of trust that provides the context to have harder questions? That's part of it.

And then are we willing and good faith to ask follow-up questions? What I think of humility and patience is to give the benefit of the doubt to somebody. I mean, one of the great things about teaching law is you teach law students to make the best possible argument of the other side. So can you construct, even in a real life conversation over dinner, can you put yourself in the shoes of the opposite side and say, what are the best possible arguments for this side? Can I engage with those charitably and not straw-manish in a way that... And then if I don't understand what someone else is saying, can I say, tell me more? Fill me in on that phrase that sounded offensive to me or that position that seemed uninformed.

And when there's space for that dialogue, then maybe you can make some progress, at least on figuring out what the differences actually are. I think sometimes we caricature differences without realizing what the nuance actually is. Okay, so the law professor is telling you how to construct a better argument that will get through a little more.

Now the social psychologist will tell you how to manipulate people so that you actually get your way. That's what I want. So first, go read Dale Carnegie, "How to Win Friends and Influence People." I'm totally serious.

It's one of the best books ever written. It's one of the most important books ever written. A lot of employers are now realizing that when they hire Gen Z students in particular, they are unable to deal with conflicts.

They go straight to HR. They're fragile. So your generation, most of your Gen Z, your generation is getting the reputation for having poor social skills and it's widely attributed to the fact that you've had, who knows, 60% less, 90% fewer interactions, real interactions.

You've mostly been interacting online. And so if you want superpowers that will make you super employable and make you much happier and keep you out of constant conflicts, read Dale Carnegie. It's so simple.

I'll give you lesson number one, the most important lesson. Just start by acknowledging something about the other side. Well actually, I'm sorry.

Lesson one is find some common ground. Talk about sports, talk about not the weather. That doesn't bring you together.

But talk about first some sort of social connection, someone you know in common. So just set the ground for the relationship to work. Then here's the really powerful one.

So suppose you're on the left, you're talking to someone on the right rather than saying, how can you support Trump? Don't you conservatives think the character, whatever. If you start in that you're guaranteed, guaranteed to create a reaction. Whereas if you say, you know, a lot of people on my side think that Trump is wrong on everything, but I gotta say, I kinda think he was right on China or something, whatever it is.

Find one thing, one thing. And right away you're saying, I'm not here to get you. I'm not totally inflexible.

I'm flexible. I actually am willing to say that your guy was right. You know, it's magic.

It's absolute magic what acknowledgement does. It changes the whole nature of the relationship. So you can call it manipulative if you want, but especially if it's in the service of, you know, we're coming into this conversation.

It's unlikely to work. And I'm gonna take a chance and try something different because I think maybe I can make this work. So read Dale Carnegie.

The other thing is my colleagues and I created a program called OpenMind. If you go to openmindplatform.org, it's designed to be used in groups. You can use it as an

individual.

It's free. But especially if you're in any, oh, in your discussion groups, if you're gonna do this coffee thing, if all of you are the two of you in a group, like go to OpenMind, it takes about 90 minutes to do the five modules, but you learn a lot. You learn psychology along the way.

But you learn a lot of these skills. Skills for how do you start a discussion so that it actually has a sort of a give and take rather than a pounding and a counter pounding. One other, maybe I'm not gonna call it a trick, a skill.

To add to that is do the hard work of trying to figure out what your context is and in and for the discussion. So what is the perspective that the other person is bringing? I was, when I got to teach at WashU for the first time, I was working with a colleague on some issues in the St. Louis public schools. For six months, we're working together on this project and then we were having breakfast one day and she looked across the table and she said, "You know, I don't get you.

You're one of those religious people, but you care about poor people." And I thought, "Okay, well, this actually is helpful context because I need to zoom out and say, your perspective of religious people is a little monolithic and we can complicate it. But if I had just assumed that she knew who I was or all of the nuance that I thought I brought to the table, or another example, if you're in a conversation about race and in the first sentence you start dropping white supremacy, if people in the room haven't been exposed to that term, you've alienated an audience that you're trying to persuade. So if you can back in the terminology, if you can have conversations, and all of that is contingent on knowing who's around the table or who's part of the discussion.

Thank you so much for coming out. Thank you everyone for showing up. So our, oh by the way, I saw Mariam and the president of Mosaic, student of color interfaith coalition, come through.

So our table had a whole bunch of discussions, but one question that was that all we were really thinking about was whether this change in this common good, does that come from an individual level or community level, or does it come from the institutions, and if it, let's say it came from the individuals, how much control do they really have? We're just getting some, asking for some clarification on your question. You talked about the common good. What do you mean by that? Like this unity and this idea of kind of bringing and like ending all these divides, like where is that really coming from? Who's initiating that? Is the power to do that coming from institutions? I've got it, yeah.

Yeah, okay. Yeah, so I think first of all, I'm not sure that unity should be the goal. Unless you're a fascist, fascism is literally about making us all into one.

Democracy is not fascism. Right, yeah, so we agree on that for sure. That's bad.

But, so not necessarily unity, but how do we work across difference? And Christine, when she talked about the ideas from my book of tolerance, humility, and patience, she called them virtues. I actually don't call them virtues in my book. I call them aspirations.

And the reason for that is I think virtues require practices and habits that people form over time within institutions. And it's not clear to me today we have those institutions on a widespread scale. So I think in answer to your question, we need those institutions.

We need people participating in institutions who can learn and practice how to be tolerant, patient, and humble. Universities could be some of those institutions, and maybe some of them are already and then on an individual level, we've got to do that in our relationships with one another. But it's going to take institutions to instill those practices and habits, I think.

So if tolerance, humility, and patience aren't virtues, I don't know what are, so I'll go ahead and call them virtues. Yes, they're virtues. Virtues that flourish in certain institutional settings, and this might get us back to, I think what's behind your question.

I don't think any of us would say, why can't we just heal these divides and end them? Rather, I think we're all, I mean, as a journalist, law professor, social psychologist, like, I think we all recognize that as individuals we're incredibly flawed, biased, we do motivated reasoning. It's really hard to find the truth. And so we've been set up with a legal system that has, that's called confrontation.

What's it called? It's a coach of the French one, or is this called? Adversarial. Thank you. We have an adversarial legal system.

And under, under, when it's working well, you have division, but it's within bounds. And when it's not working well, what you do is you pay someone and they kill the witnesses. That's what happens in a lot of countries.

That's out of bounds. In the same way, in my field, in social psychology, when you want to talk about something difficult or controversial, people should be able to raise counter, counter theories or say, well, you know, okay, you interpret the data that way, what about this way? But if you do that, you could be called racist sex or homophobic, so we just keep quiet. And then it doesn't work.

So what we need is divisions, but not divisions so far out of bounds or so passionate or so aggressive or intimidating that the benefits of division, the benefits of faction even, are lost. And journalism, I mean, if you, you know, we're now able to, like, the case at Harvard a couple weeks ago. Journalists are supposed to, if there's an accusation of something, journalists are supposed to go and hear from the person.

And some students at Harvard protested because the Harvard Crimson, they sent, the reporters asked ICE for a comment. I forget what the backstory was, but this got a lot of national attention. So I think all of our fields, we can only be excellent when we have division and conflict with civility, with ground rules.

And that's where I think I'm alarmed because we're so far beyond those normal operating ranges. I think part of ground rules is also recognizing the purposes and boundaries of the institutions within which you find yourself. So when an institution or a group can name its purpose, that actually sets some boundaries about what is meaningful disagreement and what is not.

I don't think the Jewish student group needs to have a bunch of people saying why they shouldn't be Jewish within the group. They should be able to say this is our purpose, this is the boundaries of our conversation. And then once we know who we are and what our purpose is, we can then, across difference, engage with other groups that aren't like us.

But when we're not clear on what the rules of the game are within institutions and then across institutions, we don't, we aren't able to name that disagreement with any kind of clarity. So you both talked though about these virtues or aspirations and actually now going to some of the questions that we received from the app. One of the highest voted questions was simply this, how does one become humble? How do you become more loving? Because this is an individual problem that each of us needs to work on.

And so actually John, you talked about your Christian faith. I mean, is there something in Christianity? Is there something that religious tradition has to say to that? Or what advice would you give there? I mean, Jesus, right, was wash people's feet and feet, feet is singular. A lot of people's feet and died and did a lot of very humble sorts of things.

So yeah, there are exemplars of humility and lots of people from Christian and other faiths and of no faiths who have walked life on this earth in very humble and powerful ways. So looking to exemplars, I also think failure creates humility in us. And so to take risks that are going to let you fail.

I mean, a lot of, to the extent that I have humility, it's a lot of it comes from having failed and a lot of things in life. And then just being more grateful for the things that haven't failed yet. Then that's beautiful.

Mine will be a lot less beautiful. But it was very humble. It's working.

How can I outdo him now? So I think it helps to, but thinking about what is your purpose, like the Jewish student group, like, I always have a sense of what is your purpose? Why am I doing this? Why are we doing this? What game am I playing? That's very important to keep in mind. And a game that's always running in the background, especially for younger people, is what do people think of me? I want them to think well of me. And I

will do and say the things that will raise my prestige, raise my esteem.

And now most of you have been raised where your esteem is exactly calculated and there's a number that everybody can see on the screen. So I think that makes it hard to be humble and it makes people more superficial and more likely to strive. But what game are you playing? What do you really want to do? If you think, well, what I really want to do is I want to learn or I want to understand the world, then things change.

And then you see people, not as your adversaries, but as people can help you. And so I want to actually do a little exercise that I think is really fun. It comes from a TED talk by Katherine Schulz.

And so if you've seen it, don't give out the answer here. But what she asks is, I want you to all think about what does it feel like to be wrong? Think about that feeling and then call it out. Just call it out.

What words come to mind? What does it feel like to be wrong? [audience member speaking] Annoying, bad. What else? Awkward. Awkward.

[audience member speaking] Embarrassing, ashamed. Okay. That's what it feels like to be wrong? No.

That's what it feels like in the moment when you discover that you're wrong. But until that moment, being wrong feels exactly like being right. [audience laughing] So we are all wrong about hundreds of things right now, and we have no clue.

And the only way you can find that out is by talking to people who think differently. And if you talk to people who think like you, you will never find it out. You will just dig yourself deeper into a hole.

And so little exercises like this, I heard a lot of you go, "Mmm, oh yeah, mmm." You know, if you all get it, you all understand it. And I think in a Christian audience, if many of you are Christian, I think it would be even more resonant. So I think, you know, this only really hit home to me in my 50s.

When I was younger, I was argumentative and arrogant and all those sorts of things. But I think, and it's in part that I'm not on a team anymore, not on the left or the right. I'm trying to understand what's going on with us.

So think about what game you're playing and realize that there are a lot of games sucking you in that will make you arrogant and boastful. So kind of piggybacking on that is another question. I think the second most highly ranked question in the Q&A actually.

You talk about choosing the game that you're playing and figuring out the values you want to pursue. But where do morals and values come from? Where do you figure out

what game you're supposed to be playing? And this I think is a question for you actually. Where would a community discover these values or get these truths if not from religion? I mean, you identify as an atheist yet.

You're taking a stance here. So where does it come from? So it's very difficult to have conversations like this about just like in general. Like in general, what game are you playing? Like, no, that makes no sense.

I think we have to see society as created, as composed of a bunch of different institutions. There's family, university, charitable activities, sports leagues, there's all sorts of things. And each one has its own kind of excellence.

And so here I think if you've studied Aristotle or his notion of telos, what's the purpose or function of something, it's very important I think for us to strengthen these separate domains. And one thing that social media has done to us is it's knocked down the walls so that in any domain you're going to get people bringing in concerns from the public square. They're going to be whatever fight they're fighting out in the public square and the broader political society is going to bring it into a doctor's office.

And so they certainly bring it into a psychology class or a business class. And so I think you can't just decide what game you're playing like in general, but look like, okay, right now this isn't exactly the student game because you're not in a class, but you came here to learn, presumably. So this is part of the university, it's part of your general undergraduate education game.

And so if you look at, you know, if you look at each opportunity you have, is it a chance to shred some things, lose some things and gain others, that's part of the university game or the personal growth, maybe you see as the personal growth game. So I guess you have to be reflective about what game you want to play in this context and then a different context that might be a different game. I just add to that, everybody is playing the game all the time.

In a non-bijorative sense you're always playing the game. So there's no view from nowhere where you're just hanging out and watching things. There's no totally stable place where you're not being changed in one way or another.

So to recognize that all of us are playing these games all the time. And it's not a question of whether you play, but it's what game are you going to play? That's right. And something strange happened over the last 10 or 15 years in which you were all embedded in a matrix that basically encourages you to all play a game that you didn't choose to play, you only choose to play it because everybody else is playing it.

And that's why many of you got social media in middle school. None of your parents wanted you to have it, none of your teachers wanted you to have it. Everybody gave in

because everybody else was doing it.

And this is, I think, one of the worst games possible for young people, especially for pre-teens. And so just to note here, we've now adopted the conversation, the lexicon of games, but it really seems like what we're talking about is actually just values or actual truths about how we understand life. It's not necessarily a student game or a conversational game.

It's like the truth that we're searching for, the tailos, the one good thing that we want to be doing. How do you, John, maybe this is for you, how would you determine that and how do you bridge divides when people have different values? Well, I think part of the answer is I want to hold on to the game description because game is an activity, right, and values is a thing. And part of how we determine these things is by a constant activity that is informing us and practices.

So in some ways, we live into these values. There's an old sense, there's kind of an old sort of fundamentalist Christian sense that you can just adhere to a set of propositions and that determines what your values and faiths are. And that's just not right.

I mean, people are formed by the lived practices in which they engage, or they're moving them in one direction or another. And so part of figuring out what your values are is what are you doing? You're going either to move toward something or away from it in the games that you're playing. And so it's getting, it's, it's suiting up and playing the game, not just pretending like you're on the sidelines to kill a metaphor.

Well, I would have that games have goals. And so I give talks on the value viewpoint diverse. And the Jewish tradition is fantastic on that.

And the central, one of the central acts of Judaism is interpreting the Bible and arguing about it. And that's what Talmudic scholars do. There's all kinds of quotes I don't have them at hand, but it's like by the very act of this debate, the law becomes clarified and the truth comes out.

And so the game of Talmudic scholarship is, you know, you say, well, you know, Rabbi, you know, Rabbi so-and-so said this and Rabbi so-and-so said that. And, you know, I side with him and then your opponent, the other person said, well, no, I look at this quote. I think he's right.

And it could just be a game where it's zero sum and one person wins one loses. But actually, if it's a community that has good norms, they're not just trying to show off. Then the whole community over time has a better understanding of the law.

So it's different from a zero sum game. Or it's a game, games have multiple goals, one of which is to have fun. I don't know.

It's mess. All right, we're taking this too far. But I do think actually when you're talking about texts and interpretation of texts that to Christine's question, where do some of these values come from? Sometimes they come from written texts.

Sometimes they come from traditions and interpretations. Sometimes they come from authority structures. Sometimes they come from experience.

And the challenge of pluralism, diversity, and religious diversity is we are all parts of traditions that have different emphases and different weights on some of those aspects that inform our values. And that's challenging. Okay, good.

So if I can just keep going, because this is a great example of how the truth is going to come out from our interaction here. And so what my original research and psychology is on is it was how I began to see in graduate school that when I would read ethnographies about Pacific Island cultures or Amazonian cultures, I would see the same logic of purifying pollution that I saw in the book of Leviticus. And so a lot of societies care a lot about the nature of the food you eat and how you purify it, not for biological contaminants, but for spiritual contaminants.

And so when I saw that so many cultures have some of the same ideas, but they're not exactly the same, I developed a theory that is now called moral foundations theory that it's like we have five or six different taste buds of our moral sense. And so if we have, we all have in us a sense of fairness. And so religions don't invent fairness and make us care about it because they said so.

Rather, we all have a sense of reciprocity, fairness, proportionality. We have all this stuff in us. And I would say religions organize it and tell you when to apply it.

And so religions can help us to channel these deep inner feelings that are, I think, product revolution and apply them to certain cases. And should you see racial inequality as a matter of unfairness? Well, that takes some religious, religious framing can make even slavery seem legitimate. Or religious framing can make it seem like an abomination.

And the civil rights movement was fought out, I think, very much within a sense. And within parts of it were fought out within with questions on both sides. So I would say that religion does not create morality, but it does channel and shape and help us apply it.

As do other traditions as well, because your example of their points to the fact that certain terms and values are themselves content lists until they're informed by traditions and other information that gives them content. So fairness in the abstract doesn't tell us much. But it's not just equality, justice, these kinds of words that we often throw about like we know what they mean, but they're really informed by a whole lot of other influences that go into them.

Yes, except that three and four year olds have a pretty good sense of possession, property and fairness. So it comes out pretty early. So taking a little bit of attention from this one, but not that much of attention to actually the number one question in this list of Q&As that we got was, how does race play into this religious divide? And to that I would combine it with another question that appeared, which was, is it possible to bridge divides between people who deny that you deserve basic human rights? Is it even our obligation to bridge those divides? Well, first you have to look at the framing of any question because a lot of what we try to do is win a debate before we have to take part in it just by framing it.

And so framing it in that way, you know, obviously there's only one answer. Of course not what a monster, why would you, but my question would be, who, I think it's a kind of a rhetorical trick that I see used a lot, that someone on the other side denies my existence or denies that I deserve basic human rights. And so there may be such people, but they're very, very few and far between and they're hard to meet.

And so I would ask that the person be formally at the question. And so, you know, if it's somebody who doesn't think that gay people should have the right to marry, and if you're gay, I can see you'd certainly disagree or be offended by that. But does that person really deny that you exist or does that person deny that you should have basic human rights? There was a debate about whether marriage versus civil unions was appropriate, and that was a good discussion that we had and it's been resolved.

And so I guess I would want the question reframed or explained. You'd have to give you an example of someone who really denies that you should have basic human rights. It's like you're a piece of property and if I want to just throw you off a bridge, I can, because you have no rights.

Like if there are such people, yeah, then that happens in some countries. I don't know if it's common in America. So I'm just guessing here, but I think this is actually maybe a topic that we touched on earlier in our conversation before this event.

But the example of, say, white supremacy or white nationalists, which unfortunately that is becoming more of a common group in the United States over the past several years. How do you bridge a divide like that? Like, can you even, should you? What is the avenue that you would take that is humble or tolerant or patient towards someone like that? Or should you even try it? First of all, I would say these virtues or aspirations of tolerance, humility and patience are tricky because they can be manipulated often by people on power. So think about the person who says to somebody who's protesting for civil rights, just be more patient.

Give it time, right? That's a manipulation of the term and the service of power. So I think when you have a power differential, think carefully about how those words and rhetoric are being deployed. But then can you, I guess the question becomes can you separate

the person from the ideas that the person holds? And I think actually most of the time the answer is yes.

This is where I agree with Jonathan. At the end of the day, there are very few people who, and actually as a Christian, if I say everyone's created in the image of God, then my answer has to be yes for everybody. Although in reality that's going to be hard to do.

Can you separate the ideas from the person who holds them? And if you can, then there's something you can engage with and learn from the person. If you're really at the point where you can't, you see them as inseparable, then I think it becomes very difficult to pursue a dialogue or relationship. So first I have to ask, so this is being videotaped, right? And is the videotape going to be put on the web? Okay.

So then I can't do the provocative answer that I would have done. I'll just have to do a much more plain vanilla one. Oh, come on.

No, seriously. It's very serious about this. There is no way I can say the things that I would want to say.

And this is true across my teaching. I used to be a very provocative teacher. I, at UVA, would bring people through all kinds of difficult situations.

I cannot do that now. In every bathroom at NYU, there are signs telling you how to report me if I offend you. So I can't, most of you are wonderful, but I can't trust that every single person on the Internet will not react that way.

So I'll try it in a very more roundabout way. I would have been so good too. You can tell us afterwards when it's not on tape.

Well, let's, no, so I'll just do it this way. I think behind that question is the assumption that a white supremacist is such a monster that we should, that we can't interact with them as we would another person. That's a reasonable thing to think, but we have a very clear answer to your question.

How can we do it? And that's Darryl Davis. Darryl Davis is an African-American man. He was a blues pianist, I believe, played with all the greats in the 60s and 70s.

And he decided, I forget when he started, but he decided to befriend Ku Klux Klan members and talk them out of their hoods. And he did just what Dale Carnegie said. He would always talk to them first about music or Christianity.

And I think had he not been a Christian, I don't think he could have done this. But because he was a devout Christian, he was able to see the humanity in other humans, talk to them about shared interests, religion or music generally, get them to see that he's a human being, and then get them to give up their hoods. So I think that's one

answer, and I think that means the answer is yes, it's possible.

Let me throw in another piece of the puzzle here, though, which is that it's very easy for us to have this conversation sitting here at NYU. It's a lot harder out there. I mean, if you went to parts of St. Louis and said, let's talk about our pluralism and diversity.

The response would be, let's talk about safety for my kids walking to school or getting food on the table. And so I do think that, and then the challenges, we disagree about the policy prescriptions to solve those problems. So there's a chicken and the egg problem here, but I don't think that, I don't think we want to undersell the difficulty of trying to navigate conversation around our deepest differences, when in fact we have tremendous just social disparities that prevent people from even being able to have the conversation, just because the hierarchy of needs is different than what ours are tonight.

So we're running a little bit short on time, so I'll ask one final question, which is related to this policy question, and this is also a popular question submitted from the audience. But what is the role then of government in helping us bridge these divides and helping us try to unify in making moral, religious or other disagreements less divisive? Is there one? Okay, one thing that I've learned from being in a business school and then from traveling widely is that there are certain systems that are responsive to inputs and information that have feedback loops that get things that tailor things to changing situations. And businesses that do that succeed, businesses that don't disappear.

Government agencies never do that, they never disappear, they treat you terribly, they don't care about you, they're incredibly incompetent because they're not able to bring in information and make trade-offs. And so if we were to have a government office of community or government program for bridging divisions, I think it would probably not work very well. I think government's job should be to be the best at government that it can.

And that means government should be incredibly devoted to rooting out corruption, electoral manipulation, I cannot believe that the Supreme Court validated gerrymandering, what an insult to democracy and basic fair process. So I would much rather the government focus on cleaning up its act and ultimately the hardest thing of all getting Congress to actually work, Congress is completely messed up. I would have them focus there and if we could get government working, I think there's all kinds of nonprofits, citizens groups, there's a group we were talking about before called Better Angels that's doing a wonderful job helping people understand each other.

I think government getting into relationships and social engineering is likely to just be terrible. Government should just focus on being good at government. I think another aspiration for government is to model expressively some of the ideas and virtues we're talking about.

So whatever your political party, what President Bush did after 9/11, what President Obama did after the Charleston shootings, acting presidential, acting on behalf of the government, acting on behalf of a nation, showing compassion, showing maturity and leadership, that's important. It's important for, I think about my kids trying to look for role models, it's important for our kids, it's important for our country. And when we lack that in certain parts of government, it's very hard to have the rest of us rally differently.

Thank you, so let me change what I said to add on to what John just said, which is, well government should be focused on being good at government. Leadership, leadership has a crucial role to play as an example, and especially I'm a big fan of having pairs from the two parties say things. I wish that President Obama and Bush would go on the road more and show that they can, despite their many, many differences that they love this country and they want to show that, you know what? Normal, the normal bounds of politics are that we disagree, but we actually can like each other.

Liking each other. That's the, that's the high that we were looking for, I think, after that. Depressive, dip in the middle.

We stuck the landing. So, thank you so much for your time with that, I think I'm going to hand it back to Elsie to close us out. If you like this and you want to hear more, like, share, review, and subscribe to this podcast.

And from all of us here at the Veritas Forum, thank you.

(gentle music)