

THE AMERICAN QUESTION



DIRECTOR'S OUTLINE

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Guy Seemann, Host of The American Question



Working on Barack Obama's campaign in 2008, Guy Seemann felt great about the future of America.

In an effort to put his political skills to better use, while also connecting with his roots, he moved to Israel for a fresh start.

In the waning months of Hillary Clinton's 2016 bid for the presidency, he was called from Israel to Pennsylvania to assist with turnout.

Upon arrival, he felt a massive shift in the attitudes of the electorate, wiping away the optimism he held.



After losing the election, Guy set out on a journey through swing counties in Michigan and Pennsylvania to better understand what had happened to his native country.

Going beyond politics, with the help of experts in history, sociology and economics, Guy discovered the root causes of our societal divisions and how together, we can move forward.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Karen



Karen is the founder of [UniteWomen.org](https://www.unitewomen.org).

She is on a personal and professional mission to end inequality for women.

Living in the suburbs of Detroit, Karen doesn't understand how people could ever support Donald Trump.



Participating in the Women's March, the Detroit Social Justice Choir, and the local Democratic party, she is deeply involved in her community and committed to making it better for women both locally and nationally.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Tim



Tim is an entrepreneur, the son of an evangelical preacher, living in Detroit.

Laid off from corporate America after the 2008 financial crisis, he realized that he could take his skills and build his own dream.

Focusing on staffing via mobile apps, he is determined to help small business bring jobs into the future.

Even though Tim suffered through this process, he never considered others in America who were truly suffering upon the election of Donald Trump.

Engaging with small businesses in both urban and rural areas, he seeks to understand how to maneuver the various cultural and societal differences between these areas.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

“Uncle Sam,” Iraqi Refugee



Fleeing ISIS in Iraq as a Christian, “Uncle Sam” gave an anonymous interview in 2016, concerned for his families safety.

With the help of Elena, a fellow American immigrant from Russia, she provides him, his wife and newborn child with temporary housing in Detroit as they find their footing in America.

Despite the fact that they must learn English from scratch, pay back their immigration expenses and start a new life, he and his family came to America so they wouldn't live in fear.

Now an American resident in 2020, we see his total evolution — speaking fluent english, living in his own home, and working full-time as a contractor.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Elana



A Russian immigrant who came to the United States by happenstance after the collapse of the USSR, she believes Trump is ruining America.

Coming to the United States with nothing but the goodness of strangers, she now runs a private home hospice business and is active in helping other immigrants attain their American dream.



In 2016, Elana takes in “Uncle Sam,” the Iraqi Immigrant, to live in the basement of her 10,000 square foot mansion.

Giving him his first job and helping him find his first home, she directly witnesses the modern American immigration process in comparison to her own experience.



She also represents when community works together to accept newcomers.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Roland



Roland lives in Erie, PA, where he works for General Electric in locomotive manufacturing.

Though this is his 9-5 job, he also co-owns a salon with his wife and does videography on the side.

As an African American who grew up in gang culture in Pittsburgh, he has worked hard to get out of a bad situation and create a new life for his family in Erie.

Deeply religious, his family decided not to vote in the 2016 election, because "two evils are still evil." As a disenfranchised people, he felt the divide between himself and friends widening through social media — friends posting things offensive to African Americans.



Roland feels that "hurt people hurt people," and tries to extend an olive branch to better understand his community.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Joe



Joe is a nearly 70 year old gym owner in Erie, PA.

Training world lifting champions, and keeping clients in the gym to nearly 100 years old, he is devoted to mental and physical fitness.

Joe feels that the welfare state has created laziness, and much of the population has forgotten the importance of self-reliance.

All in on Donald Trump, he sees a president who calls things like they are, making the economy better for people like Joe.

He also sees Trump as driving out the fraudulent waste that people dependent on the system have been absorbing.

He resents being considered racist by some, as he has members of his family who are minorities.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Kyle



Kyle is a 32 year old retired soldier, a veteran of the Afghanistan war. In 2016, he was focused on getting involved locally in politics.

By 2020, he has abandoned that goal and now is a private contractor overseas for the U.S. Department of State.

Now, he is a homeowner who has recently married and had his first child with his wife. Going back and forth between the middle east and Erie, Kyle believes that Trump is a danger to American greatness.

Demoting the values system that Kyle was raised with, he also must reconcile defending the United States and its interests under Trump's presidency.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

John



John is a conservative pharmacist born and raised in rural Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

He left his hometown in the 1960s to attend Temple University for college.

But unlike many young people today, he returned to Hazleton to run his small business and be involved in civic groups like the Elks Club.

As manufacturing declined and jobs went away, John has seen the town change for the worse throughout his lifetime.

Latin immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Puerto Rico came because it was cheap to live in Hazleton, and with them, came crime and gangs.



John supported Donald Trump because he understood their plight with both jobs and crime, resentful of those who say he is uneducated.

After all, he made it through pharmacy school.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Elaine



Elaine Maddon, the cousin of Hazleton's hometown hero, the MLB's Joe Maddon, runs the Hazleton Integration Project that Joe funds.

The program focuses on integrating the new Hispanic population, providing after school programs and social services to this community.

Remembering what it was like for her grandmother as an Italian immigrant in the 1950s, Elaine sees the changes in Hazleton as a repetition of history.



She feels that people like John choose not to remember this history, and has decided to engage them so they can become productive members of the community.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cast Overview

Annie



Annie is a radio host and community activist in Hazleton who migrated from New Jersey for a cheaper way of life.

Immigrating to the United States as a child, she has worked hard to create a good life for her family.

Concerned about racism in Hazleton and the lack of high paying jobs, Annie works with the Chamber of Commerce, Hazleton Integration Project and other entities, to raise awareness of issues within the hispanic community.

She also recognizes how resentment has been created towards her community, as many existing residents feel they don't get the same services.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Transcription Outline



The following outline references timecodes from the 2018 Rough Assembly of *The American Question*. This 48 minute, talking heads assembly was compiled from interviews with our featured characters from 2016 and 2017.

This provided a framework for topics to explore with specialized experts and follow-up interviews to complete the filming process.

Moments without a timecode reference material that will be strung together through voiceover and interviews with Guy Seemann throughout the filming process.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Order of Civilizations



Yale Professor [Amy Chua](#), Author, [Day of Empire](#)

- Throughout history, societies have evolved to be governed by an agreed set of values, ethics and laws. These collectively held concepts are what form nations and empires. As time has progressed, these ideals have evolved with advancements in economics, technology and civil rights.
- Though there may be ideological differences within the society to attain these ideals, one thing remains the same — the society must be held together by the same glue, a shared set of values, for the nation, or empire, to survive.
- Amy Chua, author of Day of Empire, (00:26:00) “I think the most interesting hyperpower is actually the great Mongol Empire. The Mongols were nomads. They were actually illiterate. Even their leaders or cons were illiterate. They had no technology. They had no science, no engineering. They didn't even have the technology to bake bread. They had no writing system, and yet they came to conquer an empire that was actually larger than the Roman Empire. It extended all the way to Moscow.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Order of Civilizations



- Chua continues, “How did the Mongols do this? It was through this strategic tolerance, not modern human rights tolerance, obviously, but what they did is they recruited people from all of their conquered peoples. They didn't have technology themselves, but they tapped into all these Chinese engineers who did have the science and engineer to build these immense catapults and massive war machines.”
- Chua concludes, “The Mongols would conquer a territory and instead of killing the people, they would be tolerant and let those people come into the empire and recruit their best and brightest. In that way, they just kept building the empire until it was larger and larger. The problem is there was absolutely nothing to hold the Mongol Empire together, no glue whatsoever. It was sheer military force. That's because they didn't have a Mongol cultural identity. What happened is when they started to lose that power and their internal rebellions, it fell apart so quickly.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Introducing Guy Seemann



Guy Seemann, Host of The American Question

Guy Seemann will serve as a physical and visual manifestation of the viewer for the film. As Guy discovers new information, linking complex ideas and topics together, the audience will understand through his understanding like a “host.”

- Guy looks out over the desert, observing historical ruins in an isolated part of Israel. Here, we see physical remains of empires that have crossed this land over Millenia.
- Though history is written, what occurs in the past is left only to page and recollection. We do not experience the past unless we lived in it. These landmarks, and the artifacts that have been recovered from them, are the only physical manifestation of what has come before.
- When Guy grew up in the United States, like all children, he was taught history in school, learning about ancient societies, wars and divisions. But growing up in the United States, he didn't see what children in Italy, China or Israel could see — the physical reminders of the past.
- Moving to Israel as an adult, after following his passions in politics and various startups, this fascination with society and how it was constructed was renewed.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

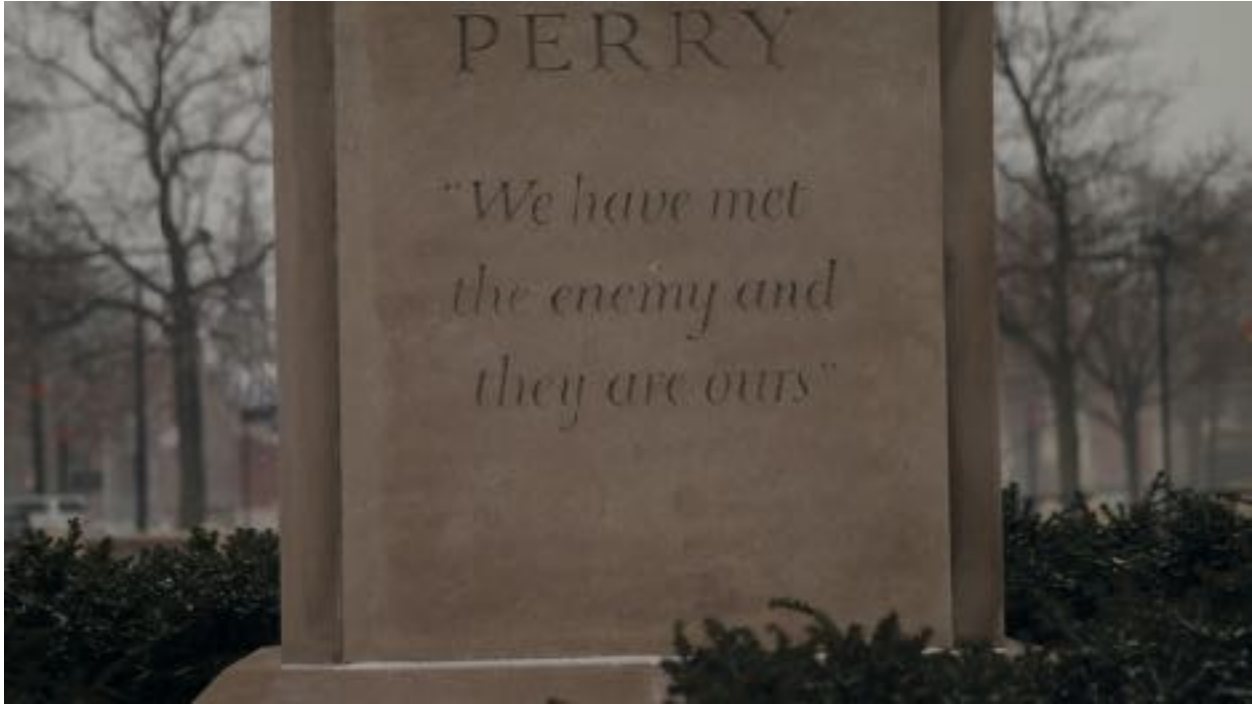
Introducing Guy Seemann

- Here in Israel, the intersection of civilizations that had fallen throughout time, Guy could see and better understand the larger arc of history.
- Through experiencing the repercussions of those past societies — divisions within Israel and the various entities that stake claim to it — Guy now understood something that most Americans could not — where we fit in the scope of time.
- Returning to America for the first time in 8 years during the 2016 election, Guy discovered a much different country than the one he left in 2008. Communities were polarized, and disagreements in ideology made enemies.
- Guy began to wonder, what new thing has happened to America to make everything change this way so quickly?
- To answer the question, he set off on a road trip through Pennsylvania and Michigan, meeting ordinary people in 50/50 split ideological counties, to identify an answer.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Glue That Binds Us



If society is governed by a shared set of values, how does that cultural glue form and evolve over time? In America, this is defined by "The American Dream."

- Amy Chua, author of *Day of Empires*, states (00:28:00), "When you think about a country like the United States, you really see that it's very hard for a democratic hyperpower to have any glue or cultural glue. We really didn't have this problem for many centuries because really the country was just dominated by a very large white majority. There was a lot of unhappiness, a lot of tribalism, if you will, but the only thing is those people were powerless. You didn't hear the Native Americans. You didn't hear the Asians. You didn't hear the African-Americans."
- Chua continues, "What feels terrible today? Why does everybody hate each other? What is going to be the glue that holds together a country that is now so diverse?"

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Glue That Binds Us



[Isabel V. Sawhill](#), Senior Fellow – Economic Studies, Brookings Institute

- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, states (00:17:00), “I think that one of the things to recognize about America is that we really do care about what we call the American dream. It sounds like a cliché, but it has had a unifying value for most Americans. They like to think we are distinctive because anybody can make it in America if they work hard and they play by the rules. In particular, they support three values. One is the value of family, the second is the value of education, and the third is the value of work.”
- Sawhill continues, “Our research at Brookings has shown that, in fact, if you do just three things. Graduate from high school, at least. Ideally, you need some technical training these days. Secondly, work full-time, and third be in a committed relationship such as marriage before you have children that if you do all those three things and in that order, only 2% of people fall into poverty, and almost three-quarters of them will achieve the dream, will have at least a middle class income or higher. So there's really some truth to those underlying values, and they are widely held and that gives me some hope.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Glue That Binds Us



- Sawhill continues (00:19:00), “Now on the other side, I'd have to point out that when we look at the data on what's been happening to the American dream historically, the picture isn't quite as rosy. As Raj Chetty and his colleagues at Harvard have shown if you were born around 1940 your chances of moving up the ladder and getting beyond where your parents were was about 90%. In other words, almost everyone in that generation born around 1940 was going to experience upward mobility relative to their parents.”
- Sawhill concludes, “But if you were born in 1980 only about half of you will do better than your parents. And that proportion of people who do better than their parents has been on a steady downward trend for at least 50 years now. So the American dream is still an aspiration, but its reality has been called into question.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Glue That Binds Us



- Guy decided to go to Pennsylvania and Michigan because in doing research, he found that the areas of largest economic, social and political traumas, were found in these places.
- Additionally, in the 2016 election, the states flipped from Democratic to Republican, and he wanted to identify how these factors worked together — especially with the dialogues surrounding urban vs. rural America.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Nations of America



[Colin Woodard](#), Author, [American Nations](#)

We often hear about Urban vs. Rural as the divide within America, but this actually is a bad way to look at it. During its founding, diverse settlers with varied backgrounds impacted each region and its culture today.

- Colin Woodard, author of *American Nations*, (interview 00:08:30), states, “A lot of people try to understand our political divides in terms of a rural versus urban divide or the coasts against fly-over country. But the real divides, if you actually look back into our history, our geographic and regional or sectional.”
- Woodard continues, "The regional cultures I've identified, most of them correspond to a separate colonial enterprise, a separate cluster of colonies along either the Eastern or South-Western rims of what's now the United States. And these were entirely different projects done by people with completely different religious, ethnographic, political characteristics. They didn't think that they were going to be part of the same country. They were creating rival projects.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Nations of America

- Woodard notes, “The differences between the early Puritans who settled Massachusetts and the generation of leaders who made the Tidewater country of the Chesapeake or Virginia and Maryland what they are, were people drawn from absolute enemy camps of English society at the time. The Puritans were against the King for parliament in the English civil war, skeptical of aristocracy and wanting to design society so that you would have each little town be a Republic unto itself, and that no individual could ever rise up and become a Duke or a Count.”



- He continues, (00:10:30), “It's those kind of differences that play out that create the tectonic plates in what's now the United States, because we're a federation, a cumbersome federation of entirely different cultures, where their own, original intents and characteristics and ideas about what freedom is, and what liberty means and what the United States should be.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Nations of America

- Woodard concludes (00:12:30), “Many of the swing States in United States politics are places that are riven between these regional cultures. There were several that crossed what became a state, and had it divided into tiers between groups of people who didn't get along and didn't see eye to eye...And that ends up with extremely fraught electoral environments, where the winner of a state gets all the points towards being president.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

What Are American Values?



If we are comprised of rival nations, how can we share a common values system? Values is a loaded term, because values mean different things to different people. However, to hold the glue of society together, a commonly held set of characteristics must be agreed upon.

- According to Colin Woodard, author of *American Nations*, (00:05:15), “Our country, our continent hasn’t had a major civil conflict for 150 years. But that doesn’t mean that there aren’t fissures in our country...the difference being that we don’t know about them. Americans don’t know their history, or the history they’ve received is really not very accurate or helpful. And despite all that, the existence of these fissures and the past is indeed shaping current events and conflict.”
- According to Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, (00:04:30) “I think everyone knows we've become enormously polarized. Political party is almost becoming a new form of identity for Americans. If you're a Republican, you don't trust Democrats. And if you're a Democrat, you don't trust Republicans. And it used to be that we had differences about policy, but we did respect the members of the opposing party as individuals, and we had some areas where there was agreement and room for negotiation. That's increasingly not the case.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

What Are American Values?



[Yascha Mounk](#), Author, [The People vs. Democracy](#)

- Yascha Mounk, author of *The People vs. Democracy*, states (00:06:45) “To make a multiethnic democracy work over time, I do think it's important that people feel that they have something in common. In that sense, a strong national identity can actually inspire real solidarity.
- Mounk continues, “If I'm sitting here in Washington DC and somebody who may have a different religion, who may look different from me is harmed in a terrible natural disaster in Los Angeles, let's say. Our common national identity means that I will feel special solidarity for them, that I may be more willing to donate for them to sustain political institutions that are going to help them. And that is a very important element of patriotism, of nationalism. The important thing for it is to include all of the people who are actually living in our country.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

What Are American Values?

- Amy Chua, author of Day of Empire, states (00:04:30) “every single hyperpower in history had one remarkable thing in common, and that is every single hyperpower in history was remarkably tolerant, open and pluralistic on its rise to global dominance. Conversely, and equally striking, every time these hyperpower decline, that decline coincided with a turn towards intolerance and xenophobia and bigotry and a very close minded mindset.”



- Guy asked ordinary people in the heart of these rival cultures, Pennsylvania and Michigan, what these core values were that made America great to begin with (Rough Edit 00:00:00 - 00:01:51).
- Generally, they all agreed with the same sorts of keywords and phrases.
- Guy wondered, if these random strangers in Pennsylvania and Michigan had a common answer, then why does America feel more and more close minded?

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

What Are American Values?

- Amy Chua, author of *Day of Empires*, (00:20:00) “What’s fascinating about the United States is that unlike any other country in world history, we really are uniquely diverse and always have been. I know a lot of people say, "Oh, it's just invented by ... It was just founded by white males," which was true, who did exterminate the Native Americans. Actually, even during the founding era, America was incredibly diverse.”
- Chua continued, "It was a polyglot society with people from all different religious backgrounds who couldn't understand each other, French, Dutch, Danish, Germans, English, Irish, Greeks, Italians. From the beginning, it was really the constitution that was the glue for this country. It wasn't easy. It wasn't immediate, but over a process of assimilation and also upward mobility, the United States kept assimilating generation after generation. Eventually, it wasn't just Catholics from Maryland or Germans or Italians, but we were all Americans, often Italian-Americans or Irish-Americans, but very patriotic historically with the constitution holding us together.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

What Are American Values?



- Colin Woodard, author of *American Nations*, states (00:22:00) “It’s fair to say that Pennsylvania is one of the iconic swing-states, in that it is riven by these deep cultural fissures.”
- He continues, (00:14:00), “If you zoom in on it, it was settled originally by those three camps and particularly by the early Quakers came to found the area around Philadelphia and the settlements around Delaware Bay and what's now Delaware in Southern New Jersey. And they were tolerant. They had an idea that humans were inherently good, right? That they had an inner light.”
- He notes, “This is not shared by the early Puritans who founded New England. The Calvinist idea is that humans are inherently wicked and you've got to keep an eye on them or they'll run astray. Puritans had none of that. And because of that, they were very open to people from all kinds of places and religious backgrounds emigrating to their colonies at a time when there were very strict ideas about who could come and settle in New England.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

What Are American Values?



- Woodard states, “And the result of that is that this stretch of Pennsylvania, including the hearth of one of the regional cultures around Delaware Bay, was a place that was always about having many living side by side, retaining their cultural characteristics with no grand master culture over them. You didn't need to assimilate, because there was nothing to assimilate into. That America in this version of America was to be a mosaic of different cultures living side by side.”
- He concludes, (00:20:00), "The idea of being Pennsylvanian ... You don't hear all that often. People talk about being from Philly. People talk about being from Pittsburgh or the mountains. You don't hear people talk about being Pennsylvanian the way you might hear people talk about being a Vermonter or a South Carolinian, because that it's a fractured and contested identity at the statewide level.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

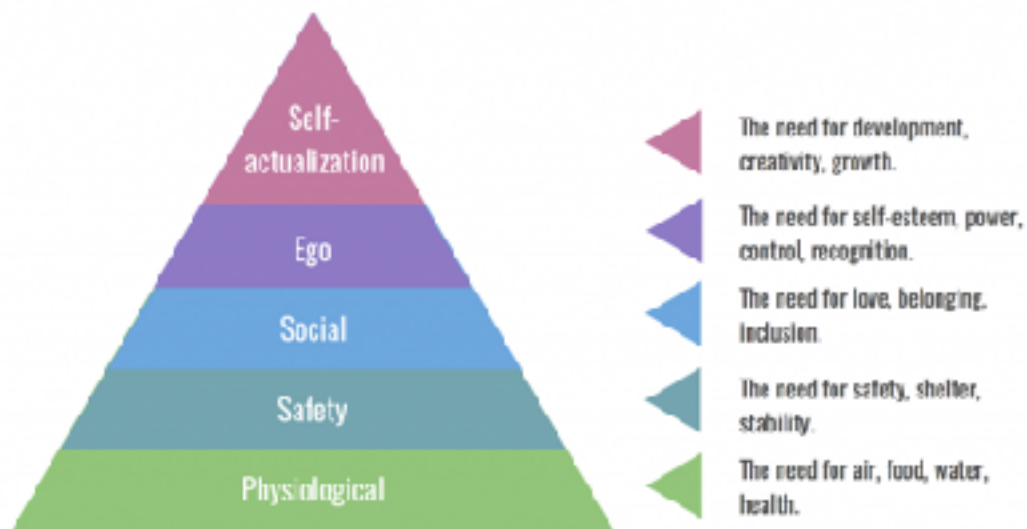
Pillar: American Values, Hard Work & The American Dream



“Pillars” are interludes throughout the film, summations from our host, Guy Seemann, that will aide the audience in digesting the information that they have heard from our tangential subjects and experts.

This permits the density of information to become palatable for the audience, giving us moments to summarize, guide and connect each dot in a multilayered hierarchy of issues — similarly to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Pillar: American Values, Hard Work & The American Dream **written by Guy Seemann**

Hard Work and The American Dream we think of today, the two car garage, white picket fence and two and a half children, was set in motion by the “greatest generation.” However, advancements in technology (specifically how we work, communicate and build communities), the full blown effects of globalization and media have broken the singular vision Americans once had of The American Dream.

The concept of hard work and the American dream were mainly coined and created by Benjamin Franklin. They weren't necessary defined in the founding documents as were other values in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights. They began with the concept of working hard will allow you to reach the American dream, which of course, has changed ever so slightly in tangible terms. Yet in philosophical terms, the American dream is the ability to have enough liberty and access to opportunity that anyone, no matter who they are, has the ability to reach the goals and ambitions they dream about.

Those definitions for our parents' generation were typically defined as the ability to afford and obtain the two car garage and white picket fence. It was to find a good job out of college or if you didn't go to college during your young twenties and rise through the ranks. Put food on the table for your family and make sure your kids got a good education. All of this on the backset of the government providing a clear and free path with no obstacles to achieve that goal.

To get there, our parents and grandparents stressed the notion of hard work in achieving anything of worth. Do whatever it takes to put that food on the table, work extra hours, stick to the job you hate because stable family life was paramount. Hard work means you may have to be uncomfortable (remember the word uncomfortable as it will be a major player in the changing definition of hard work), you may not enjoy what you do and give up on certain dreams that don't contribute to family stability. It meant do what needs to be done no matter the consequences. It was an almost war like mentality where honor, loyalty and pride were dominant.

But things have changed. Technology, depleting access to opportunity in certain parts of the country, a fractured, unethical financial system and a shift in business priorities from resource based manufacturing to other industries have changed the perception of hard work and the American dream.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



At the base of these hierarchy of needs, we utilize Maslow's hierarchy. To believe in a common values system that is fashioned around The American Dream, it begins with the economic status of America's citizens.

- Amy Chua, author of *Day of Empire*, states (01:06:00), “There's a great irony because America's cosmopolitan coastal elites, the intellectuals, the people that I work with at Yale University, people in New York City, San Francisco, they don't tend to think of themselves as tribal, but they are actually incredibly tribal and exclusionary. It's actually really hard to be a cosmopolitan elite. First of all, if you are somebody that is too poor to have traveled outside the United States, it's hard to be a cosmopolitan elite.”
- She continues, “One dangerous phenomenon that I've studied for about 20 years is in lots of developing countries, there's often a really resented wealthy minority that is viewed as controlling everything. For example, the Chinese in Indonesia are only 3% of the population, but they're viewed as controlling the media and all the banks and everything. The majority, the poor majority really resents that tiny minority. Often when you have elections, there'll be a backlash against that rich majority.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics

- Chua concludes, “What we're seeing in the United States for the first time really is the emergence of a resented minority that is starting to be viewed as an outsider minority. This is the group that is often misleadingly called coastal elites. Coastal elites, they're not all coastal, some live in Chicago or Dallas, but the idea is coastal elites refers to people who live on the coast or major cities or work in top universities who basically all share the same cosmopolitan values.”



- David Azzerad, Heritage Foundation Fellow, states (01:48:30), “The left's greatest source of power is that they control all of the major elite institutions that bestow praise and blame in America. And that if you want to be honored by the New York Times, by the MacArthur's Genius Foundation to go to the Kennedy Center, you need to mouth the pieties of the left...we have the Bradley Prizes. I mean they're good, but they're no match for the MacArthur Genius. So you basically have three realms in America. You have the right, the left, and then the mainstream. But the mainstream is the left. Is the New York Times a leftist newspaper? It's the newspaper of record. In reality, of course it is...They are always permitted to conceal their partisanship under the guise of neutrality and non-partisanship.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics

- Azzerad concludes (01:05:00), “So I want to be clear, we need elites. I would consider myself a populist but with two caveats. One is I don't romanticize the virtue of the people. I don't think they're without flaws or shortcomings. And second, I don't want to get rid of elites. We need elites to run a complex, advanced, modern economy. I just would want elites that are not as contemptuous of their fellow Americans as the elites we now have. I would want elites that are more patriotic than the elites we now have. That's all I'm asking for.”



- According to Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, (00:06:00) “The working class in general in America, not just the white working class, but they are the largest segment — They've not been doing well. They've been falling behind economically. This is to some extent the result of trade and technology that's been destroying jobs.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



- Sawhill continues, “We all know about de-industrialization, the fact that many smaller communities around America have found their economic base severely eroded. People are moving away. The remaining community institutions are faltering. And so we have an increasing divide, not just between rich and poor, between the well-educated and the not so well educated, but also by geography, by place between people who are in the cities, especially, on either coast and those in the middle of America called a flyover country.”

Various tangential subjects, some of which you have read about in the Character Overviews, live in this place called flyover country.

They each represent different things to the viewer. Their separate pursuits of the American Dream, and their relationship with it, impact the way they view themselves and their communities.

All of the following statements from the subjects are general summations, not actual quotes from the subject as derived from the film’s 48 minute rough assembly.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



Roland Slade, General Electric factory worker & entrepreneur, Erie, PA

- Roland has lived in Erie, PA for 22 years, where he works at General Electric, co-owns an ethnic hair salon with his wife and he also is a videographer.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



- Though Roland loves his job, he believes that when you own something, it means more. He can't give GE to his kids or grandkids.
- For Roland, the American dream is entrepreneurship — about creating. (00:03:20)
- Roland believes that through hard work, you can climb out of a bad economic situation to get where he is today (00:05:35)



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



Pranjal, High School Student, Hazleton, PA

- Pranjal, the 17 year old son of an immigrant family, believes that the universal symbol of success isn't happiness. It's how much money you make (00:05:50).
- Growing up in Hazelton, PA, Pranjal wants to escape because "it is hell." He wants a job in computer engineering, but he also knows that he has to move somewhere else because he won't find opportunity in Hazelton (00:06:45)



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



[Carol Graham](#), Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institute

- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute (00:33:30), states “with all of the declines in manufacturing and other economic activity in these smaller rural places, the people with the wherewithal to leave, leave. They go to where the jobs are. People in the US have historically done that.”
- Carol continues (00:35:00), “Part of the reason for locational mobility has to do with the widening gap between returns to different skills. So, to move to San Francisco or Los Angeles to work in the arts, film production, tech sectors, you have to have the wherewithal to move far away if you're in a declining rural place, but you also have the skills to not just get there, but live there and get the right kind of job. So there is a big selection bias in terms of who moves and who stays.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



- Amy Chua, author of Day of Empires, states (01:09:00), “I think the tendency among coastal elites is to get their back up and to say, oh, these are a bunch of racists and focus on they're just xenophobic. I think it's important to confront the difficult questions. For somebody growing up in a small town that actually experiences absolutely zero benefit from more trade with China or more trade with Latin America, it's completely understandable that they don't want those policies and that will make them very susceptible to somebody that says, you know what? It's time to make America great again. It's time to put America first.”
- Chua continues (01:10:00), “Even if you don't agree with those policies and you believe that they're going to lead to America's downfall, I think the way to fix that is not to just call everybody who believes that a bunch of racist ignoramuses, but to try to understand where they're coming from and to maybe think of policies that can appeal to those people that are losing out from free markets and globalization and open immigration policies and try to build from a point of understanding rather than name calling.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



Ken, Mechanic, Erie, PA

- Ken is a lifelong mechanic in Erie, PA. He says “a lot of laborers want labor jobs, not technical jobs. When the jobs go away, you can’t retrain people with a high school diploma to go work in a hospital. Maybe they liked what they did and don’t want to be retrained.” (00:07:20)
- Guy wonders, why wouldn’t you move if your job goes away?
- Ken argues once you have something for a long time, it’s hard to change — and that’s when people give up. When you work somewhere for 30 years and it closes, you can’t teach an old dog new tricks. (00:07:54)

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



John, Factory Worker, Erie, PA

- John Byers, a factory worker in Erie, was raised with Depression Era parenting. His grandparents were hard workers, multiple jobs with five kids. He looks at them and thinks that if they could do it, so can he. If John were to lose his job, he would relocate — he wouldn't want to retrain because he life would become uncomfortable (00:14:30)
- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, states (00:31:00), "I think it's really hard to compare generations. Clearly there are differences. Since I'm of an older generation myself I've seen that. I've seen a younger generation that is not willing to do some of the things that I saw my generation doing, or my parent's generation doing. It's a little bit difficult to know why. I think some of it is just the nostalgia of the older generation, and a misreading of the reality, but it may also be that as we become more affluent as a society, people can get a little choosier about what they're willing to do, or not do."

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Economics



- Sawhill continues (00:28:00), “So if you're an older worker, let's say over the age of 50 arbitrarily, you may feel like going back to school and getting retrained is not something that's very appealing. You may even feel it's a little bit demeaning. You may be feeling pretty good about what you already know. There had been some evidence that for that group retraining isn't a great option. I think it should still be offered to people like that, but not all of them are going to want to do it.
- Sawhill concludes (00:31:30) “I think that we have become somewhat more individualistic in our orientations. I think that if you'd been talking to my father, for example, he would have said, and I asked him this question when he was over 90 I said, "If you had your life to live over what would you have done differently?" And he said to me, "That's a stupid question. I didn't have any choice about what I was going to do. I needed to support you, and your mother, and your siblings. And I had to earn a good living to do that. And so I didn't have a lot of other choices.”
- John Keegan, a pharmacist in Hazelton, argues this is precisely the problem — opportunity. The jobs are \$15 / hour jobs, not \$25 / hour jobs. While people are working, that's not creating opportunity (00:09:25).

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Opportunity Gap



Increasingly, society is being sorted by the opportunity through geography. This physical manifestation of an economic divide is creating broader cultural divides, tapping into the fissures from the multiple nations of America.

- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute, states (00:36:30): “Increasingly, there's also a cultural divide between the coasts and the heartland. I've mentioned over the conversation the difference in the diversity of not just racial composition and population, but also economic activity, access to the arts, access to education and all these other things between the coastal US and the middle of the US.”
- Graham continues, “They could be to two different countries now. So there's also almost a cultural barrier to moving. And so what we find is the people with the most skills leave and the people that don't have the skills to leave, stay.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Opportunity Gap



[Oren Cass](#), Senior Fellow, [Manhattan Institute](#)

- Speaking with Oren Cass, Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, (00:00:15) “If you look historically back to, say, the middle of the 20th century, what you find is that the American business community was focused much more on making investment and in growing businesses that employed a lot of workers domestically and that earned money by finding new and more productive ways to use workers.

- “What's happened since then over, say, the last 50 years is there's been a market decline in investment, whether you look at that as a share of profits, as a share of gross domestic product.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Opportunity Gap



- Cass continues, “Businesses invest a lot less than they used to and tend instead to return a lot of money to shareholders. And businesses also tend to focus a lot more on finding ways to generate profit by not using American workers, whether that's how do we get profit up by just cutting costs? How do we get profit up by merging? How do we get profit up by offshoring? And, in a lot of cases, if we are going to need a lot of workers here in the country, then then we'd better go to Washington and lobby to be allowed to bring in more workers from overseas. And there are certainly a lot of reasons for that shift, but the result of it has been a really worsening of the situation for the typical worker who has seen stagnating wages, less stability. And really it's become very difficult for someone with less than a college degree to be able to support a family (00:02:30).”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Opportunity Gap

- According to Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, (00:07:30), “De-industrialization is the fact that we are losing manufacturing jobs. We are becoming increasingly a more service oriented economy. About 70% of our national income is now earned in services, not in manufacturing.”



- Sawhill continues, “What people have not realized is what's causing this, and the major factor is technological change, the artificial intelligence revolution, the coming of the robots, mechanization, et cetera. Some of it is due to trade, but that's probably not the most important factor here. That means that whatever kind of trade deal we might make with China, or any other country, we're going to continue to lose manufacturing jobs and to therefore de-industrialize.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Opportunity Gap

- Sawhill continues, (00:43:00) “I am seeing that 85% of income and jobs are coming from the private sector, and the private sector has a role to play here if they don't want to see a further erosion of our democracy.”



[Isabel V. Sawhill](#), Senior Fellow – Economic Studies, Brookings Institute

- “And interestingly enough, just fairly recently, the Business Roundtable, which includes almost 200 of the CEOs of the largest corporations in America, have come together and issued a statement in which they've said, "We are re-defining the purposes of a corporation to be more stakeholder oriented, and less shareholder oriented."
- Sawhill concludes, “In other words, instead of just focusing on how much you're going to make in quarterly earnings, and how many dividends you can pay to your shareholders, they're going to focus more on workers, on suppliers, on customers, on communities, and they've made a public statement to that effect. Now we'll see what it means in practice, but I think that's quite a significant shift.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Poor in a Rich Land



If economic investment from businesses — and government — is lacking in areas that have become depressed, how does that impact the psychology of its citizens?

- According to Carol Graham, Brookings Institution, (00:11:00), “I’ve started thinking a lot about why is it that poverty is so difficult in the United States? What is it that’s so difficult about being poor in a rich land? It’s also very much due to this very strongly perceived belief that there’s the American dream, and that if you work hard, you get ahead. If you fall behind, you’re poor because it’s your fault. You didn’t work hard enough. And this sort of held, this held for a long time, and it was particularly the mantra or the strongly held belief of the blue, white collar working class.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Poor in a Rich Land

- Graham continues, “You didn't want the government for support, you had a stable job and a stable family, and that's how it was. And for many, many years, if you were a manufacturing worker, a miner, many other blue collar jobs, and if you were white, you had privileged access to those jobs, you got a high school education, and you had a stable, respected middle class life.”



- Graham states, “The two words stability and respect are very important, because you had a stable job, you were respected because you worked hard and you had a good life because you worked hard. And all of the other people that fell behind, fell behind because it was their fault. They were minorities, they were immigrants, whatever it might be, but if they weren't making it, it had to be their fault.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Poor in a Rich Land



[Carol Graham](#), Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institute

- Graham concludes, “And the irony of that is that when the stable, blue collar jobs went away, when technology, in some trades, took over manufacturing, mining and all these other jobs, those jobs went away and the people that worked in them didn't have a lot of coping and multitasking skills because the trajectory had been your dad worked in the car factory, you finished high school or got some sort of technical education and you had a stable job. When that went away, there wasn't much else there and these communities often emptied out.” (00:15:00)

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Poor in a Rich Land



Yale Professor [Amy Chua](#), Author, [Day of Empire](#)

- Amy Chua, author of Day of Empire (01:15:00) states, “I think what we all need right now is a shift away from a very individualistic I’m hurting mentality to a much more civic community building larger perspective. I think we all need to think a little bit beyond ourselves.”
- Chua concludes, “In some ways, that’s what the American project was about. When the founders said all men are created equal and we’re going to have all these principles, we’re going to be a city on a hill, they were trying to build a new social experiment where lots of people by pursuing their individual rights could also achieve a society where there would be more freedom and more prosperity, but there would also be unity and something holding the country together.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Part II: American Values, Hard Work and The American Dream written by Guy Seemann



High paying jobs of \$25-\$40 an hour in manufacturing have diminished to \$12-\$15. The financial crisis of 2007/08 proved that the way in which business leaders are making decisions are purely in the pursuit of intense greed, disavowing any personal responsibility when there is failure and self-interest. This leads to a shift in decision making which greatly affects the worker. Innovation is shifting to other industries (health, cyber, tech, energy) and workers are not shifting with them as their parents did. New ethnic groups are moving in and taking those low paying jobs no matter the cost (notice how these ethnic groups have adopted the same mentality of hard work as the parents of the people complaining).

All the while, you can now use technology to see the opportunity and luxury you don't have access to through technology. You can now witness the hedge fund manager buying boats, going on 6 vacations a year, buying an iPad, iPhone and car for each kid and having multiple homes with a fence much larger than those of the white picket kind. These change amount to a perfect storm which affects the perceived realities of many Americans which inevitably leads them to place full blame (while only a partial percentage of the blame is valid) on other groups which then causes those frustrated Americans to interpret reality based on a partially false reality.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Part II: American Values, Hard Work and The American Dream written by Guy Seemann

The common responses were generally as such:

- 1) They were nervous that during the transition they would upset their level of [comfort](#) (remember that one aspect of hard work and its true value was that the hard working American was ready to do anything, including going through a period where comfort was sacrificed, to achieve the American dream). So the cognitive dissonance between what they say is hard work (which is the old definition of the WW2 vets aka their parents) to what their actions/decisions of what hard work means are different.
- 2) That they shouldn't have to change jobs in order to make an American Dream living. Again, strangely enough their parents who they idealize moved wherever necessary and worked insane hours.

They believe the folks in the cities and coasts are not working hard but getting all the financial glory and they were not working as hard (data proves this quite wrong unless you take a more complex look at what it means to work hard to actually PRODUCE something which moves society forward vs just working long hours for a larger pay check). Many would argue that the financial sector is working long hours but not producing anything except money for itself without bringing added value to the world around it where as an individual working at a factory producing rugs makes rugs and creates something for the world.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration



As The American Dream falters, economics no longer supporting this vision of what is supposed to be, the natural reaction of people is to find someone to blame. Today, this scapegoat is the current batch of American immigrants.

- Oren Cass, Manhattan Institute, states (00:36:30), “The economic challenge of immigration is that, if you think about it in terms of the labor market, you're introducing a lot of new competition. And, if you're introducing immigrants into a part of the labor market where there's high demand for their skills, where salaries are high, for instance, in various technology jobs, that can be a good thing. That can be something that actually contributes to economic growth, that creates lots of new other jobs in other places.”
- Cass continues, “But, if you believe that one of the real problems that we have in our society right now is a lack of economic opportunity for less educated workers, then adding a whole bunch of additional workers to that segment of the workforce just doesn't make a lot of sense. And what you end up doing is giving a lot more power to employers to set the terms and conditions of employment, to offer lower wages, to treat workers less well. And you also create a set of incentives that tells employers, you know what? You can just go ahead and build businesses that rely on lots of unskilled workers because you'll have access to plenty.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration



[Yuval Levin](#), Director, Social, Cultural, and Constitutional Studies, American Enterprise Institute

- Yuval Levin, Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, states (00:25:30), “I think one of the great strengths of America has always been that it is open to outsiders and that it is open to outsiders adopting our way of life, our ideas and coming to play an important part in our society. I approached that question as an immigrant myself, and I think that it is important to see that there is still quite a lot of assimilation and integration happening in our society, and to see that we've struggled with this in the past.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration

- Levin continues, “In past eras of very high levels of immigration, and we have very high levels of immigration now, Americans have always struggled with the question of, “How can these new immigrants become Americans over time? It’s always seemed in the moment as though there was not enough integration happening, as though we had ethnic blocks that were going to remain forever distinct from American society. Over time, and that really means over generations, people have integrated and found their way into the larger whole of American life and, by a generation or two later, they’re defined as part of the mainstream. We think again of new immigrants as though they won’t ever be able to integrate and assimilate. I think we’re in that place now.”



[David Azerrad](#), former Heritage Foundation fellow

- David Azerrad, former Heritage Foundation fellow states (00:18:00), I would disagree that we have been, throughout our history, a multicultural country. We've been multiethnic, multiracial, multi-religious. And we were, I'd say, bi-cultural up until the Civil War. I mean, there was an enormous schism, a profound disagreement over the question of slavery, which led to the fracturing of the country.”cImmigration

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration



- Azerrad continues, “But America's success came not from promoting cultural Balkanization and encouraging immigrants to retreat into their ghettos, cling to their native languages, and not assimilate. Rather, I think our success came from our assimilationist monoculture.”
- Azerrad concludes, “Now, to me, a strong civic culture can accommodate a lot of diversity. It can accommodate racial, religious, ethnic diversity. It can accommodate some geographic diversity. I think it is not a good idea for any country, especially not a country of our size, to become multicultural. Because the question then becomes, well, what binds us all together? Now the multiculturalists will say, "Well, multiculturalism is the glue that binds us all together." But multiculturalism ends up being a pretty weak sauce. And what you find ends up lying behind it is a very strong attachment to other cultures, and you end up having a Balkanized country. So my view is human beings do not have a very distinguished track record of getting along with people who don't look like them, don't worship the same God that they do, and have different habits.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration

- Amy Chua, author of *Day of Empire*, states (01:16:30), “I’m the daughter of immigrants so I couldn’t be more pro-immigration, but I will say that there’s a dangerous move that a lot of progressives are making. That is they are making it almost impossible to have a difficult conversation about immigration. It’s almost like if you just say maybe we should think about having some restrictions or how can we secure the border or what number of people should be allowed in, if you even start to ask those questions, then you’re instantly branded, oh, you’re xenophobic. You’re Islamophobic. I think that’s unfortunate.”



- Chua continues, “I think that it is dislocating for a lot of people in America to see America changing so fast. I think there is a real debate that we have to have about how much immigration and at what speed any country can tolerate. How can we bring in immigrants, which I favor, but also make sure that they are accustomed to US values, that they have a chance to assimilate? Not entirely, not in a way that gives up their identity, but in a way that allows the country to be stable and for people to have mutual acceptance.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration



- John Keegan, pharmacist in Hazelton, PA, has lived there since 1964. It was quieter then, you could leave your doors open. (00:15:10)
- Garrett, a 17 year old growing up in Hazelton, remembers when everyone knew your name and your family. It was a general nice place to live. In recent years, the general area has seen a population shift towards people of Hispanic and Latin American descent. It's a cultural shock for people of Caucasian descent (00:15:49).



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration



- John Keegan continues (00:16:01), most Spanish people came to Hazelton looking for a better life, but they also brought gangs with them. There is MS13, the latin kings, and to his knowledge, all of the gangs are hispanic.
- Elaine Madden, who works for the Hazelton Integration Project (00:16:36), says the city is growing and crime has grown, but it was the same thing as growing up. There were Italian, polish, Slovak and other immigrants in the 1940s and 1950s. To her, it is easy to blame the immigrant.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration

- Yuval Levin, American Enterprise Institute states (00:28:00), “Well, I do think that there is a pattern in American life where each generation, as it comes of age, imagines that it has invented the world and that everything that's happening now is unique and distinct to itself, and there's not much to be learned from history. That's certainly true in the way we think about immigration.”



- Levin continues, “I think knowing better the story of American immigration politics in the 19 teens and '20s would help us understand the situation today, which is in some ways quite similar, but I think that's actually true about our politics generally. That politics, because our society is generational, our political life always involves one generation that is in charge and in power. Another that is older and retiring, another is younger, and rising and the tensions between them are always a big part of what's happening in American life at any given time.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration

- Maximo (00:17:25), a taxi driver in Hazelton, says there is a Facebook page that talks about ‘the worst of Hazelton.’ This is ‘hell,’ ‘the worst place to live,’ ‘we have been invaded by Latinos.’ For these people who have lived in Hazelton forever, it will always be their home.



- John Keegan, pharmacist (00:18:10), says when immigrants come to America, they are taking the talent away from their own country — their future lawyers, doctors, nurses. Instead of immigrating, they have to fight against their own oppressive governments in lieu of coming to America.
- Elaine, Hazelton Integration Project (00:18:35) continues, what is happening with this new generation is exactly what was happening when we were growing up, when my Italian grandparents came here. When they arrived, they only spoke Italian. When I see people that don't speak english, it makes me feel at home. Unless you are an American Indian, you came from somewhere else — I don't know why all of a sudden, that's a bad thing.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration

- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute (00:30:45), “There's also a historical part of that story which is that when manufacturing started to fade, when it became more challenged by trade, the same firms that moved from the cities to the suburbs over time started locating in more rural places, particularly in the south, with less education, with less other industries. You think about the Walmart towns or whatever where there's nothing in these towns but, say, Walmart, or maybe a manufacturing firm. The population's less educated, they have less coping skills, there's low population density.”



- Graham continues, “When big firms pull out of those places, they're by no means the kinds of resources that a big city has. And a part of the big cities resources are just having a concentration of people, all kinds of people, diversity, but also big cities tend to have a university, some center of knowledge, arts, all sorts of other things that hold communities together and can be used to revive communities in a way that small towns don't.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Immigration

- Graham concludes, “Think about New Orleans after Katrina. A city destroyed. And yet, what turned it around? It was the chefs coming back and investing in their town and starting a new restaurant. It was the music, it was all these other things. New Orleans is not a wealthy place for poor people. I mean, there are wealthy people in Orleans, but there are jobs, there's vibrancy, you don't have the same kind of collective despair that you have in these rural heartland places.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past



To reclaim The American Dream, citizens often think back with nostalgia to a time when things were “better,” constantly trying to reach back to the past to bring forth a more tribalistic future.

- Garrett Kost, 17-year-old in Hazelton (00:19:20), says a lot of Caucasian people in this area are resistant to change and new groups of people coming in. And they always have been, looking at the 1920s, when multiple instances of people didn't trust people due to their ethnic descent.
- Yuval Levin, American Enterprise Institute states, (00:29:00), “I think we're reaching that period where the baby boomers are going to be replaced by their children and grandchildren in positions of leadership in our institutions across American life and generational tensions are going to turn out to be enormously important to how our society operates. Understanding that is going to matter a lot if you're trying to analyze and understand the state of American institutions, and the dominance of the baby boomers over our political and cultural self-understanding is going to be a very important factor in grasping what's wrong and right in American life in the 21st century.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past

- Levin continues, “If you were born at the height of the baby boom, in 1950 let's say, then you were a child in the 1950s, you imagine that time is as a simple time when everything worked and families were strong.”



- “You were a teenager in the 1960s and you imagine that time as exciting and glorious. The music was great. The world was changing. You were entering adult life in the 1970s, so it seemed very stressful, like nothing was quite working, and maybe you weren't going to be able to change the world.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past

- “In the '80s you were building a family and you were worried more about dentist's bills than you were about changing the world, By the '90s you were in charge and the world was yours and it seemed enormously promising.”



- “But you entered the 21st century seeing things over the hill a little bit, wondering if your children were going to have the same kinds of opportunities you could have, and whether the promise of America was lost.”



- Levin concludes, “That’s what American life looks like if you were born in 1950, and that is how our entire culture views the last 70 years of American life.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past



Annie, Hazelton, Pennsylvania

- Annie, a Hispanic radio host in Hazleton (00:20:00), believes that white people were discriminated against in small towns. The economy hasn't been good for them. When your pockets suffer, you hate everyone and everything. When you don't have the means to provide for your children, you need a scapegoat.
- Elaine, Hazelton Integration Project, continues (00:20:52), most of the people in Hazelton look like me — senior citizens. Our children aren't coming back here. We would be a dying old town without immigrants.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past



Maximo, Hazelton, Pennsylvania

- Maximo continues (00:21:22), when jobs started popping up in Hazelton, word of mouth spread throughout the region that Latinos could find jobs in Hazelton. It scared the existing residents, saying phrases like “we are being invaded — we have lost our town.” Even though the hispanic residents brought back the population, it wasn’t the population they wanted to see.
- Annie continues (00:21:40), it was a ghost town — but the Latino, we have become the force that brings the work in this town.
- Yuval Levin, American Enterprise Institute fellow, continues (00:30:30), “All of us see America through the eyes of the baby boomers to an incredible degree, and what it means is that we don't think about the future very much. Our elections are not about 2030, they're about 1980, and that is an enormous problem for our politics that obviously will get resolved over time, but just how that happens it won't be easy, it won't be simple.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past



- Amy Chua, author of *Day of Empire*, continues (00:21:30), “What's happened in the last 15 years is something unprecedented, and it's a terrible problem for the United States.”
- Chua continues (00:23:30), “Christians feel threatened. You see this in the political sphere also. There's a war on the Bible. We have to make this a Christian country again. With President Trump in the White House, women feel threatened. With the MeToo Movement, men feel threatened. Asians, Latinos, gay, straight, today every group in America feels threatened. It's when groups feel threatened that they retreat into tribalism.”
- Chua concludes, “That's when they become more insular, more defensive, more us versus them. That's one thing we're seeing today that makes it really hard for people to get along. We're at a point where many Americans view people who voted for the other side, not just as people that they disagree with and want to argue with, but as un-American, evil enemies, and that's a really dangerous situation when you feel that way about half the country. That's a recipe for civil war if we don't make a correction.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past

- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute states (00:38:30), “I think when you have rapid economic changes, more technology, more globalization, major shifts, it's disruptive of people's lives and their attitudes don't shift as quickly as the economy is shifting under their feet. And so we objectively face a better future as Americans, but we're having trouble adjusting to the change.”



- Sawhill continues, “I think change is always unsettling, and for some people more than others. I think it's easier for well-educated people to adjust to change than for less educated people to do so. And some of the older traditions gave people a sense of security, and a sense of belonging, and knowing what their role in life was, and these changes require that we all rethink who we are.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Forward to Time Past

- Amy Chua, author of *Age of Empires* (01:21:00), writes “Some people do think that we have suddenly exceeded the bounds of our tolerance, that is we've let in too many people of different backgrounds and different religions that we're not going to be able to have the glue to hold this country together anymore. Similar to the way the ancient Persians had no glue to hold their empire or similar to the way that the Romans at a certain point when they let in all the Germans, they lost the ability to hold that empire together.”
- Chua continues (01:21:30), “I am an optimist. I don't think that's the case because I think that our national identity is special that, again, we have this ethnically and religiously neutral identity that is actually very capacious and that people who come here actually are ... Immigrants tend to be some of the most patriotic people. They come here because their own countries are so terrible. You'll see that if you pull people, a lot of immigrants are the ones that are the biggest fans of democracy and the American dream.”
- INSERT IRAQI IMMIGRANT FAMILY FROM 2016: We interviewed “Uncle Sam,” the head of an Iraqi family in Detroit who came to America — fleeing ISIS. They perceived that America had strong values, and was the land of freedom and acceptance. When they came, they were surprised that such ideas were a matter of debate.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Nostalgic Nightmares



Perhaps we are nostalgic for the wrong things. Once upon a time, companies invested in their communities, both during the good times and bad.

With the advent of globalization, the very definition of “community” has changed for international conglomerations. This has impacted the relationship between trust of institutions, and in turn, people.

- Colin Woodard, author of *American Nations*, states (00:18:00), “Go on the south of the Midland stream in Pennsylvania, you have a completely different culture, founded what I call ‘Greater Appalachia’... One of the settlement groups that the Quakers welcomed were Scots-Irish and other peoples from the war-ravaged borderlands of Britain...It was a warrior culture, created an environment of near constant danger and upheaval, where you couldn't count on any authority. And that, when authority arrived, it was usually in the form of a bunch of cavalymen on horses trying to mow down your family ... that there weren't ... There were no police, so to speak, to call. You needed to protect your kith and kin yourself.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Nostalgic Nightmares



[Colin Woodard](#), Author, [American Nations](#)

- Woodard continues, “So, it was a culture that did, and still does, prize individual liberty and autonomy, with great skepticism of public institutions and that government or any other authority figures will be coming to do good. Right? "I'm from the government. I'm here to help you," would get the largest laugh within Greater Appalachian-culture, because of this emphasis that freedom is about maximizing personal freedom and autonomy from other encumbrances.”
- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute states (00:42:30), “In my book, one of the things I show is that there has been a tremendous decline in trust, trust in our institutions, especially, in the federal government, but also decline in trust in each other.”
- GUY COMMENTARY: Through listening to our subjects discuss the American dream, economics and immigration, we found that one topic triangulates all three of these ideas — perceptions of The Welfare State.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Welfare State



Joe, Gym Owner, Erie, PA

- Joe, a gym owner in Erie, (00:23:10) says that people don't want to work because of access cards, welfare, etc. You don't have to get a job because you might be getting a thousand a month — and that's all you need.
- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, states (00:13:00), "The people I interviewed had strong feelings about social welfare programs such as food stamps and welfare. They didn't like the idea of people being on public assistance."
- Sawhill concludes, "They were very proud themselves. They wanted to be self-sufficient, so they wanted to earn their way. They wanted good jobs at decent wages. They did not want to be dependent on government assistance, and they resented people who were. Now it turns out, in fact, from the objective evidence, we know that there are far more so-called white working class people on public assistance than there are minority groups. That's just the objective fact, but the perception that's out there is that there are certain groups of Americans such as immigrants, or racial minorities who are taking advantage of the system."

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Welfare State



- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute, states (00:41:00), “The same people that are anti-immigrant and anti-welfare typically live in more homogeneously white places in decline...(00:41:30) And the change bothers people, and they tend to be in declining communities because migrants aren't stupid, they move to the most vibrant communities if they're able to. And so the same sort of anti-migration sentiments and trends tend to associate with primarily white voters who distrust the government because of the narrative that you work hard, you get ahead. The American dream. You don't need the government. People who are on welfare are losers, right? They're the minorities and the immigrants. You're the working white guy and you have the stable job, the stable family, and the respect.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Welfare State

- Graham concludes, (00:44:00) “So, the universal programs we have, social security and Medicare, are run almost like a private system. They're administered often by semi private providers. You get a Medicare card when you turn 65. Social Security just comes as a check in the mail, no questions asked. If you need cash assistance for needy families, food stamps, other things, the bureaucracies that administer these programs are incredibly inefficient, and they're stigmatizing.”



- Garrett, Hazleton teenager (00:23:40), says that “they” rely on social welfare — on the system — and multiple families have access cards that even his own white family couldn’t afford. Unlike the hispanics, his caucasian family is hard working ever since they first got a job. He feels bad because he knows there are families that are hard working, and he also knows people of Latin descent can be hard working, but other families he knows could also be getting the assistance. But, there’s a personal guilt in taking it — being self sufficient. His feels his family is being robbed.
- Maximo, a Hazleton bus driver (00:25:10), speaks about a single mom who may be on food stamps with kids. But if she goes to work, she would lose those benefits and be paid less than what she’s getting now — with new daycare costs that Amazon warehouses do not pay for. The worker ends up making nothing.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Welfare State

- Joe, a gym owner in Erie (00:26:20), says the winners in America are getting punished. We raise the taxes on rich.

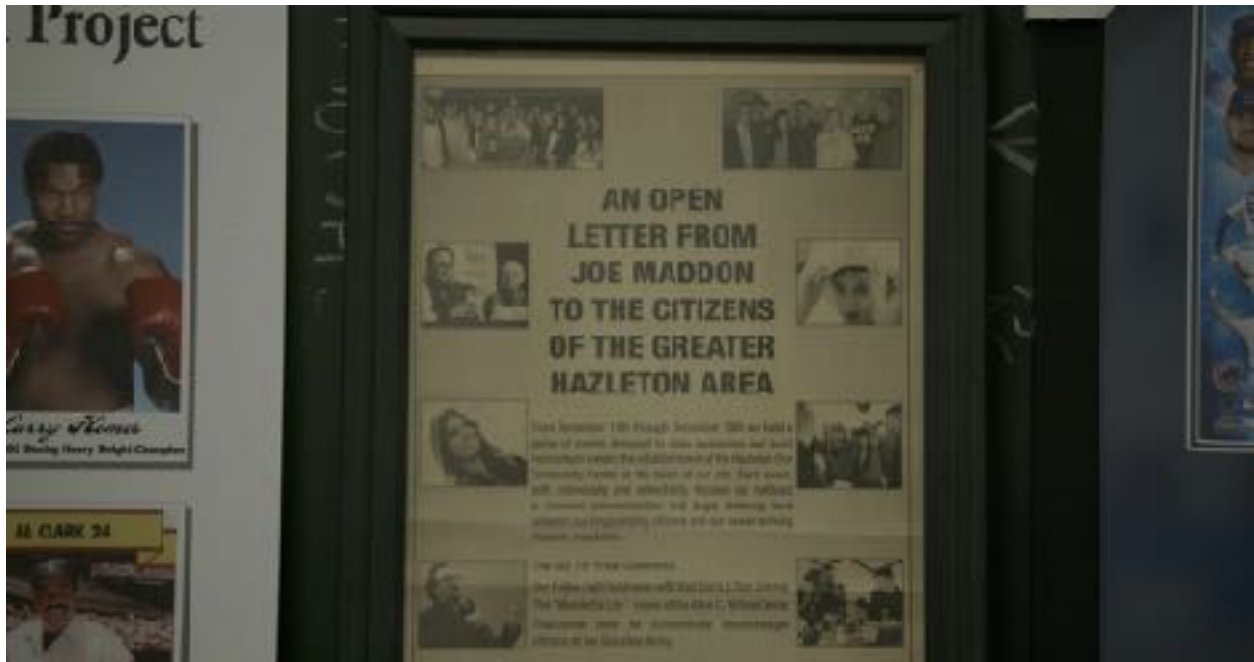


- John, a pharmacist in Hazleton (00:26:30), says we people with multiple access cards, medical assistance cards, we visually see — it's not a myth story — driving around in expensive cars. It's fraud, and probably not the majority — 5% paints the 95% of people badly. When you see that, it's like a murder. It frightens the whole community.
- Amy Chua, author of Age of Empires (01:30:30), states “On the right, the intolerance is much more glaring. I think it's easy to call it out and it's terrifying. You see openly white nationalist movements just holding conference and hotels in Washington DC, being covered by the Atlantic in a way that you would never have seen just five years ago. We've always had white nationalism and racism, but there's a blatancy that I think is new today where people say, "Yeah, we are worried about white genocide," and it's not just a fringe group. It's lots of people who have gone underground.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Welfare State

- Chua continues (01:31:00), “One thing that's dangerous about progressives growing more and more intolerant and judgmental of somebody who let's just say uses a different word, didn't know that he was supposed to say Latinx instead of Latino, and suddenly it's instantly called out.”



- Chua concludes, “I think the danger of that is that you can tend to drive people who formerly thought of themselves as progressive liberals. They get frustrated at being called racist and bigot all the time, and it drives them underground, and that's what's really scary because when you go underground, there are toxic spaces there where there was real genuine racism and bigotry. That's a danger when you send people that would normally be in the middle into the extremes of both parties.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Foundational Fringe



When everyone in society is driven to the edges, stigmatized to segments of right and wrong, no singular shared ground — the fringe elements of society become the foundation that guide it.

- Annie, a radio host (00:27:19), says America is divided because racism has existed since the start of this country. When your pocket suffers, you need a scapegoat.”
- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute, states (00:44:30), “You're poor and you need support so you get special stamps that you have to take to the grocery store and you can only use them for certain things.”
- Graham continues, “That’s hardly pulling people into society; it's stigmatizing them. Earned Income Tax Credit is probably the most successful public support program we have for low income people that doesn't stigmatize them and it sort of tops up their salaries if they're working full time, as long as they're working. That doesn't do much with a single mother for two or three sick kids that lost her job, her bad quality, low skilled job, unstable job at McDonald's or the mall, and can't work because she has a sick kid.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Foundational Fringe



- Graham concludes, “And so then, most other people on our welfare programs are stigmatized. And so, they're seen both by the public that needs them as stigmatizing, and certainly by people who don't want to be on them as stigmatizing, and it's sort of a mark of failure if you're on these programs.”



- David Azzerrad, former Heritage Foundation fellow, states (00:07:30), "So I think progressives are trying to rewrite history, in the sense of their presentation of American history is a tale of horrors and all of the marginalized, depressed stigmatized groups that have suffered at the hand of America. Now, they do retell a somewhat progressive story. I guess America comes out somewhat good in this regard, that it does progress over time, although more and more, the left is... Paradoxically enough, they no longer believe in progress.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Foundational Fringe

- Azzerrad continues (00:08:00), “I mean, I find the term progressive to not suit the left very well because they deny progress. They are not comfortable admitting that on race relations, we've made enormous progress. They want to keep up a state of constant hysteria, that America is this close away from having the Ku Klux Klan takeover. I'd call it the Southern Poverty Law Center view of America. America is infected with racism. There are all these virulent white supremacist groups, and we need to be forever vigilant. And far for me to deny that racism still doesn't exist.”



[David Azerrad](#), former Heritage Foundation fellow

- Azzerad concludes, “But, I mean, it is undeniable that over the course of American history, and especially since the '60s, America has made a concerted, pronounced and very successful effort to stamp out racism. The left is uncomfortable acknowledging that because they think it leads to a sense of complacency, and that it'll make people conservative. So, oddly enough, their retelling of history is not very progressive, and they seem to have abandoned their faith in progress.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Foundational Fringe

- A passenger in Maximo's van (00:27:55) says a lot of people out there on food stamps don't want to make it on their own; "me personally, I want to work, I could go on food stamps, but my mom told me that I've gotta earn it."
- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute, states (01:02:30), "The differences in optimism across African Americans and whites, which are the biggest, with Hispanics somewhere in the middle, closer to African Americans, the differences in optimism are greatest for the poor groups, and in the poor groups, groups that are particularly deprived, like prime age people out of the labor force, there we find white prime age men out of the labor force are the least optimistic and most desperate and poor blacks, males, out of the labor force, the gap between their wellbeing levels and the poor whites is the greatest."



- Graham continues (01:05:30), "I think for a lot of people that were hit hard by the housing crisis and lost everything, yet the sort of rich part of the distribution did fine and recovered from the financial crisis, I think that was one big change in terms of perceptions of how fair our society is."

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

The Foundational Fringe



- Graham concludes, “I think for groups that have always perceived that society wasn't necessarily just or unequal, like African Americans and Hispanics who historically faced discrimination, it didn't change their views because they already thought it was an unequal society with an unequal distribution. I think the big change was for those cohorts that I mentioned before who had privileged access to the American dream, believed in it hook line and sinker and all the sudden, the floor came out from under.”
- Joe, the gym owner in Erie (00:28:30), says that he has children he raised right. He raised them to get a job. His tax money pays for welfare, and they shouldn't have to take that.
- Annie, a radio host (00:29:00), says there was never justice for all, there was only justice for them — we have to fight these battles, and that's what we have been doing since America was founded.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cognitive Dissonance



We tend to think that our ideological opposites have nothing in common with us, but often, this is due to cognitive dissonance than actual reality.

- Amy Chua, author of *Age of Empires* (01:33:00) writes “Ironically, there's a lot of commonality between our two extremes, the extreme left and the extreme right. On the extreme right, you'll hear people saying we are a white nationalist country and we should be.”
- Chua continues, “On the extreme left, you'll hear people saying this was a white nationalist country and we need to get rid of it. In both cases, the voices are very exclusionary. It's like all those people, they should be canceled.”
- Chua concludes, “On the right, it's like get rid of all the immigrants and minorities. On the far left, it's like get rid of all those white racists. That kind of intolerance on both sides is really the antithesis of the kind of openness and tolerance and pluralism that I think really represents the United States at its greatest and also was the secret to history's greatest hyperpowers.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cognitive Dissonance



- John, a retiree in Erie (00:29:35), says that it wasn't always like this because we had more jobs. It used to be we didn't have resumes — you'd walk in and be hired.
- Elaine, a community organizer in Hazleton (00:29:50), says that you might blame other people when the jobs dry up. We might need to find a new way forward.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cognitive Dissonance

- Erinn Reed, a young entrepreneur in Chicago (00:30:00), says it goes all the way back to economics. If the opportunities aren't there and we have to make concessions, we don't make the best decisions. Those things are reality when you have to put the lights on.



- John, a retiree in Erie (00:30:20), says the value system in America has no value anymore. A friend that has tried to get in the building for a year and a half can't get in because homeless people get on the list first. In America, you can't get ahead unless you have a problem — we always hurt people to help people.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cognitive Dissonance



- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute, states (00:48:00), “I think your human psychology, when you think about this whole issue of racial economics and whether it's blaming immigrants or blaming minorities coming in, and your town is dying, people in general are loss averse. So losing matters much more negatively to people's wellbeing than gaining does.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cognitive Dissonance



- Graham concludes, “And so, if you're not just losing your main source of income, but you're also losing your identity, your narrative, as a respected worker in a community that's also failing, that tends to bring out a lot of anxiety. And it's anxiety that could be channeled positively or negatively.”
- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, states (00:03:30), “I've been quite impressed with the work of Arlie Hochschild, who's a professor at Berkeley, and wrote a book called Strangers In Their Own Land. She has a metaphor about the American dream that I like a lot. She says, imagine a group of people standing in line and trying to get to the top of a mountain, the mountain being achieving the dream, and it's a struggle. And they are constantly seeing other people cutting in line and they don't like that.”
- Sawhill continues, “The other people being immigrants, being women, being racial minorities, groups that they don't have a lot of familiarity with. And she tried out this metaphor on some of her interviewees and they all said, “Yes, you've got it.” And so this is all about the fact that not only are we becoming more unequal in economic terms, but we are becoming culturally divided as well.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Cognitive Dissonance

- Carol Graham, Brookings Institute, states (00:50:30), “You're not just losing money, you're losing your sense of who you are. It's changing. Versus, back to the kind of movers and stayers and selection bias points, people who tend to move out and are willing to go move to a city are obviously willing to go live with a lot of other people that don't live like them. Right?”



- Graham concludes, “The people who stay, have selected to stay and they like the communities where they are. It's sort of all they have. Even those communities aren't really viable anymore. So you get more of a, not just a economic dimension across these different places, between cities and the dying out communities, but you get a cultural division.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION
Pillar II: Community vs. Self Interest
written by Guy Seemann

We believe that most of human progress has been achieved through the concept of community. This concept is applicable to the core building blocks of any society. For example: entrepreneurship, economics, community renewal and development, religious society and of course, politics are all reliant on ‘enough people coming together’ to negotiate, fight, argue, debate but in the end compromise on a path forward. Boards of Directors have to vote on a vision, religious communities have to choose a path as society and morality evolve, neighborhood boards need to decide whether to allow new construction or not and people have to vote for their elected leaders.

How do these communities come to a decision? They negotiate on the basis that the person sitting across the table shares a common value system. That at the core of that person’s being are the principles to which everyone at the table shares. If that feeling is not there, then the goal of progress becomes infinitely more difficult because they are not starting at the same point. They are going to analyze the world differently; ideas and thoughts differently and even hear the same sentence in a different manner. You start to see them as an enemy not as someone, at the very least, with similar values at the core of their decision making.

Instead of attempting to find a creative compromise that keeps the character of the beautiful landscape and keeping apt buildings off the land, their community decided to shift towards radical self-interest to retain their piece of mind. When approached with a compromise from the governor’s office, they remained ensconced in their desire to establish a “not in my backyard” policy, not understanding how they are standing against their own principles which they claim to fight for.

If this division starts to occur in a community whether we are talking about the size of the United States, a neighborhood or the chief shareholders of Uber then people start to section off into their own schools of thought, their own bubbles and finally they collapse solely into themselves in the search for progress and the odds of finding a constructive path forward remains bleak. You now see the person sitting across the table as an enemy who is diametrically opposed to your own survival and principles.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Pillar II: Community vs. Self Interest

Radical self-interest takes over when you believe you are surrounded by enemies and henceforth decision-making is done with an eat or be eaten mentality. Decisions being made in this vein will create catastrophic problems that start first in the family unit and shimmy its way up to national government and multi-national corporate board room. While self-interest is a core tenant of the human psyche and necessary for success, radical self-interest without balance can remove the foundations that society is based on.

The radical nature started rearing its ugly head again in the early nineties leading to the 2008-2009 financial crisis and radical political division exacerbated by technology. Historically, this is not a new phenomena. In the 1820s, supporters of Andrew Jackson were known as Jacksonians, during the 1910s, Woodrow Wilson used the economic and immigration woes to inflame society.

What were the ramifications of going down those paths?

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present



Citizens tend to see the 2016 election as some kind of a misnomer. But in reality, as we have explored the evolution of the American Dream, Economics, and the scapegoating of immigrants and social services — elections are an expression, or manifestation, of American Values. These issues came to a head during 2016.

- Colin Woodard, novelist, states (01:30:00), “I think the big picture narratives of the United States nationhood, and purpose, and belonging, are really essential because, well, it's an artificial creation. The United States has been around for well more than two centuries now, it's shaped the world in many, many ways. And I think, it would be a difficult entity to dismantle and there would be enormous dangers in doing so to ourselves and to the outside world.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present

- Woodard continues, “The regional cultures, in some ways, have been strengths and that it created a very dynamic culture that has done many amazing things. And part of that is because we have all these different traditions and values and they're constantly in a genuine struggle, a marketplace of ideas kind of battle. So that leads to a lot of creativity and innovation that you wouldn't have in nation states that have a broad consensus where all the big questions are already decided, that you don't have that same level of creativity. But to hold us together, yes, we need those common stories. We need the story of who and what we're supposed to be as a nation because people need that ideas of belonging.”



- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (00:24:30) “In politics, we're always tempted to ask questions of either or to make sure that each part of it fits some easy partisan narrative. So it's tempting to think that either populists are dangerous and everybody who voted for them is crazy or people had good reason to vote for them and so perhaps they are actually going to help us improve our country. That's overly simple in my mind. Populists are very dangerous, they don't deliver on their promises and yet there's understandable reason why so many citizens in the United States and in many other countries around the world have started to vote for populist politicians.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present

- Isabel Sawhill, Brookings Institute (00:55:00), “I think when you don't trust other people, and when you think they are maybe out to get you, or defraud you in some way it spills over. Actually, we see this in the data as well to your trust in institutions including your own community, and you're less likely to come together collectively to try to achieve any particular goal because if you can't trust people then you don't want to form a partnership with them to get something done.”



- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (01:11:00), “We know that for all of its many flaws and injustices, the American Republic has flourished and has worked incredibly well for 250 years. So that makes attempting to forget how daunting the odds must've seemed to the Founding Fathers looking back over 2,000, 3,000 years of human history and attempt at building every now and again, democratic governments and all of them failing, all self-governing republics from Athens to Rome, to the city States of medieval Italy not working out. And so they were very conscious of the possibility, even likelihood, that the Republic they were putting together would fail.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present

- Mounk continues (01:13:00), “And that's why they built this very sophisticated series of institutions for balance of powers, for separation of powers, the rule of law. And this gives us the tool to defend ourselves against any demagogue who is trying to whip up the majority of the people to oppress everybody else. But it only gives us the tool because as a Founding Fathers also understood a constitution needs to become a living reality and it only becomes a living reality if the people who are entrusted with high office, the people who we elect as congressmen, the people who we elect as senators, the people who are on the Supreme Court, the person who occupies the presidency actually has a commitment to the maintenance of these democratic institutions.”



[Peter Levine](#), Associate Dean, Tufts University School of Citizenship & Public Affairs

- Peter Levine, professor at Tufts, states (00:33:00), “I think at the personal ethical level, leaders need and they've always needed and we always need to reinforce virtues like self-limitation and humility and empathy. These are values that some leaders have always had and some leaders have definitely not had. At a different level, I think we need to worry about the structures that create leadership and bring leaders up. So you know, the founders, there were very bad things about the way that their role in society. They were, for example, they had plantations with slave people on them, but there were some good things they were very connected to and dependent on their immediate geographical communities and their reputations.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present

- Levine continues, “So if you were one of the founders and you went off to Washington and you stole money, it hurt your family and your family's reputation and you couldn't just duck that. What we have in the 21st century this big, faceless, multinational corporations filling the same economic role that farmers filled in the late 19th century. And they have the advantage that they can evade responsibility...”
- Colin Woodard, novelist, states (00:51:30), “Well, the trick for the United States has always been the fact that the reality is, that we're divided. We're a balkanized federation, made up of these entirely different legacy regional cultures.”



- Woodard continues, "Some of them do not agree on fundamental things at all, and there's no way that they'll ever achieve consensus. That's our weak point. It's a potential structural vulnerability that we all need to always be watching out for. The trick was that in the early Republic everybody knew this, that there was nothing holding these separate cultures, or at that time sort of sovereign states, together.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present

- Woodard concludes, “Nobody knew what the United States was in the 1820s or the 1830s you know, is this a treaty like the treaty of Maastricht that created the European Union? Is this a NATO like military Alliance that defeated our enemies that now is consolidating other shared institutions? Is it a nation state? Like Germany seems to be talking about maybe becoming? Is it a civic nation like the French and French rationalism are making it out to be? Nobody knew for sure, and an answer had to be created.”



- Peter Levine, Tufts University professor states (00:41:00), “And so they imagine a system where you could, some of those would run for office and their fellow landowners would pick the ones who are most responsible. They'd go off and they do a good job and if they get a bad job, it would embarrass their families, make it more difficult for their daughters to get married and so on.”
- Levine continues, “That way of thinking was very smart, worked and is completely inapplicable to a society in which billionaires get produced by corporate investment and don't have one particular domicile or community and don't owe anybody locally their success.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION
2016 Election: The Past as Present



- Amy Chua, novelist, states (01:07:00), “One dangerous phenomenon that I've studied for about 20 years is in lots of developing countries, there's often a really resented wealthy minority that is viewed as controlling everything. For example, the Chinese in Indonesia are only 3% of the population, but they're viewed as controlling the media and all the banks and everything. The majority, the poor majority really resents that tiny minority. Often when you have elections, there'll be a backlash against that rich majority.”
- Yuval Levin, American Enterprise Institute fellow, states (01:05:15), “People who run for Congress, people who run for president see themselves as actors in the larger theater of our political culture more than they see themselves as taking key institutional positions in our government. They act as outsiders. They stand on top of Congress as though it were a stage and they yell about politics, and they yell about Congress too. Our presidents do this too.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Past as Present

- Colin Woodard, novelist, states (01:21:00), “As a nation, the reason that we end up being focused on the president and personalities is that the president is the only figure that we all vote for across the United States. I mean, the only one, that's it. And the president controls the administration and it's the only thing that you can have a common national conversation about.”



- Woodard continues (01:21:30), “So now that all conversations are starting to become decoupled from geography, where you can have a podcast or something that's delivered by the internet, where it needs to be understood all over the place. If you're going to be talking about politics, that just ends up driving the conversation towards... If you want to have a mass conversation, driving the conversation towards topics that are a common denominator everywhere and that gives you the presidency.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event



Subjects and experts discuss the events of the 2016 election cycle and how it has impacted them and society around us.

- Peter Levine, professor at Tufts University states (00:04:30), “We live in a time now when our leaders are unusually elderly in America. The president is in his mid-70s, the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House are both in their 70s, people are running for office to replace President Trump are in their 70s to a large degree. This is very unusual. It's not normally how things work in our politics and I think again, it has to do with the dominance of the baby boomers over our way of thinking and it's not all bad, but it keeps us from thinking about the future in ways that can become very problematic for American political life.”
- Tim, an entrepreneur in Detroit, states (00:31:51) that Donald Trump was a charismatic entertainer who can fix things. As much Tim and the media thought Trump was a joke at first, Tim never thought about about people who are struggling. That was the problem.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event

- Colin Woodard, novelist, states (01:48:50), “In times when things are going good, the differences between the regions don't seem quite as critical. If the country's in crisis, then you start to see the centripetal forces get a lot more strength. If there was more equitable results in the way our economy was operating, I'd think that we would probably not be quite as concerned as the medium term stability and survival of the federation. I think the two go together.”
- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (00:25:00), “The most important is simply that they feel that their political system is not delivering for them. This is certainly true on the economic dimension. In United States, for example, from 1945 to 1960 the living standard of an average American doubled. From 1960 to 1985, the living standard of an average American doubled again. Since 1985, it's essentially been flat, it's been stagnant. And that has changed how people think about politics.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event

- Mounk continues, “We used to give politicians in Washington the benefit of a doubt saying, “I don't love those people, I don't think they're great paragons of moral virtue, but something seems to be working here so let's let them do their thing. They seem to be sticking to their end of the deal.” Today, I think a lot of people are saying, “I've worked really hard all my life, I don't have much to show for it, I think my kids are going to do even worse so let's try something new. Let's send somebody in who will smash some things up. How bad could things get?”



- Oren Cass, Manhattan Institute, states (00:25:30), “The economic path we've pursued has been to say, as long as everyone's material living standard is rising, as long as everyone can consume more stuff this year than they did last year, then everybody should be happy. And, for the record, we're doing quite well on that. Everyone's material living standard is, in fact, rising, notwithstanding all of the terrible news. If you just ask how much stuff do people have, what is the quality of the stuff, it keeps going up just about everywhere on the income distribution.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event



- Cass continues (00:27:00), “There's nothing to stop us from continuing to move in the direction of a country where more and more of the income and wealth is more and more concentrated in a few places and everyone else relies on taxes and redistribution. And, in fact, we have, to a large degree, a political system that says, that's exactly what you should vote for and you should trust that you'll be happy with what you get. And one of the ways to understand what's happening in America and all the confusion right now is that voters are saying, no. In fact, that does not make us happy. And that's not what we want. And you have a lot of folks who are doing very well who are frankly confused by this.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event



Garrett, Hazelton, PA

- Garrett (00:32:30), a teenager in Hazelton, initially thought that Donald Trump was spouting off ideas for popularity. But the more he spoke, the more he realized there was truth behind what Donald Trump said.
- Joe (00:32:50), a gym owner in Erie, states that Cokie Roberts and other people like her in the media knew that Hillary Clinton was corrupt and they still supported her. The Never Trump people said the same thing. Guy asked, why did they do it? Joe says you can't fix stupid.
- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (00:43:00), "I think one of the big problems that political parties have in the United States and in many other countries around the world at the moment is that they tend to look down on their traditional voters that they wouldn't want to go and have a beer with them."

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event

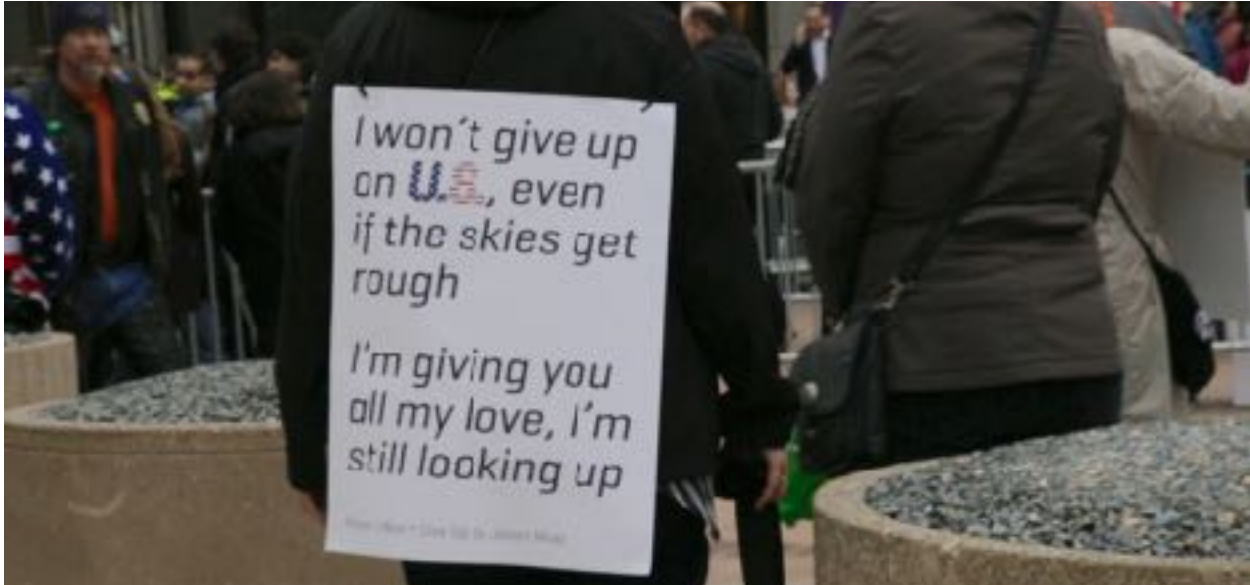
- Mounk continues, “That actually, if a lot of Americans told them the honest opinion about all kinds of issues, they would say, “Well, you must be a terrible human being and why don't you go and get a graduate degree to learn how to talk about this stuff in a way that we find acceptable.” And that's not a sustainable state of affairs in a democracy. It's not a decent way of thinking of your fellow citizens, and it's certainly not a way for political parties or political candidates to sustain the support of their traditional electorate.”



- Garrett (00:33:25) grew up as a Democrat, along with many people in the area. His family switched parties recently to become Republicans.
- John (00:33:40) a pharmacist in Hazleton, says that the values they have, they have always had — but the government was always trying to infringe on those values — and they were rebelling against that infringement through election in 2016.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: The Event



- David Azzerad, former Heritage Foundation fellow, states (00:56:43) “I think most Americans are not particularly ideological, partisan affiliations in certain cases are quite loose. I think there are still a lot of liberals, a lot of reasonable democrats, but there is a core component of hard zealots on the left who are intolerant, pushing an agenda on the rest of the country. The reasonable liberals are not doing a very good job at standing up to them, and I should add, nor are conservatives.”
- Azzerad continues (00:55:30), “And yet the left, when they win, display no magnanimity. There's no charity in their victories. Look at what happened after Obergefell. They won very rapidly upon that one. They didn't even pause to do a victory laugh. Right away they did two things.”
- Azzerad concludes, “One, they started persecuting the bakers, the florists, the photographers, the Christian small business owners, who, by the way, were serving gays and hiring gays, and simply said, "I don not want to be compelled to participate in a gay marriage. Go find another photographer, florist or baker." And they were not left alone. They were sued and they were persecuted. Then the other thing that the left did is they moved to the transgender agenda very rapidly. And so I would tell you

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

that until the right develops a more confrontational approach to dealing with the hard left, things are not going to get any better.”

2016 Election: The Event



Roland, Erie, PA

- Roland (00:33:50) and his wife didn't vote in the election. As Christians, they felt that voting for the lesser of two evils is still evil. As a black person, a disenfranchised person, he felt that he couldn't vote for Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. Trump said that industry would come back, and since it had gone away in Erie, that appealed to people who lived there. The voters were willing to overlook Trump's morals to get that industry back.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: Identity Politics



As Americans continue to sort themselves into narrower groups, the identities of individual Americans have become defined by our personal politics.

- Yuval Levin, American Enterprise Institute fellow, states (00:22:00), “I think the two parties were trying to answer the question, “What does it mean to be an American and what can unify our country?” On the right we ended up with a candidate in Donald Trump who made the argument that in order to tear down walls inside our country, we have to build up walls around our country and try to have what ultimately was an exclusionary definition of unity in America.”
- Levin continues (00:23:00), “It's ultimately though, a unity that lends itself to arguments that are rooted in identity politics because the differences that define us as human beings, differences of gender and sex, differences of ethnicity and race, are also real differences. If we define our politics by those lines, then that struggle for unity also becomes divisive.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: Identity Politics



Pranjal and Friends in Hazelton, PA

- Pranjal (00:35:22) says that in the future, if we have a candidate in the future who says the same slanderous things that Trump does, perhaps if it benefited him economically, Pranjal would support that candidate.
- Consuela, a community organizer in Detroit (00:36:30), says that she doesn't feel community anymore. There's a particular class of people that believe that we have to get back to the 1950s where things were perfect; they had security and everyone had their place. But, not minorities like herself.
- Peter Levine, professor at Tufts University states (00:16:15), "Civic identity can connect us across difference and it can also divide us. I mean one of the ways that civic engagement works is that it's about joining affinity groups and expressing commitment to that group, a subgroup of the society as a whole. So you join a group

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

for your religious, ethnic ideological identity. And that's not wrong or bad. It's a form of liberty. It can exacerbate disagreements.

2016 Election: Identity Politics

- Levine continues, "So you can have a high level of civic engagement in the community and that reflects its conflict, right? So if people are really mobilized and highly engaged as liberals and as conservatives, then they're also divided."



- Levine concludes, "Civic engagement also can be a way of uniting people because they can come together. So if you look at a city where people are deliberating and problem solving across the whole city, then that's also civically engaged. So you could have two cities, one where everybody's really engaged around defeating each other and another way they're all really engaged around cooperating and they would both be civically engaged if you just measure it in terms of how much they're involved."

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: Identity Politics



- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (00:47:00), “I do think we start to have a problem when our politics is deeply polarized along identity groups and when most politicians are doubling down on that rather than trying to counter steer.”
- “I think there's an element of that in the Democratic Party today that is starting to think of itself as the party of African Americans and Latinos and LGBTQ people and perhaps Jews and Muslims. And I also think it is a problem in the Republican Party.”
- “There is a form of white identity politics in which leaders of the Republican Party are deliberately trying to say we are antagonizing various out-groups, various minority groups in order to earn the loyalty and the support of white voters or a subsection of white voters.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

2016 Election: Identity Politics

- Mounk continues, (00:48:00) “Now, interestingly, I think both of these strategies are based on what I think of as the most dangerous idea in American politics. The most dangerous idea in American politics today is the idea of adverse arising or an inevitable demographic majority for Democrats that because the share of white people in the country is declining and they tend to vote for Republican Party because the share of minorities in the country is rising and they tend to vote for the Democratic Party, the Democrats will have a natural majority tomorrow or 10 years from now, or 50 years from now, whenever you think that moment comes.”



- Mounk concludes, “This idea is so dangerous because it does drive a Republican Party into a form of white identity politics into ways of trying to antagonize minorities and mobilizing white voters. But it's also dangerous because it makes the Democratic Party double down on certain form of tribalist politics that assume that

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

they will always retain the support of these members of ethnic or religious minorities no matter what kind of politics they pursue.”

2016 Election: Identity Politics



Erinn, Educator and Entrepreneur, Detroit, MI

- Erinn (00:37:20), an entrepreneur in Detroit, says that the more resources you have, you're able to develop yourself. But when you don't have resources, self preservation becomes the first law of nature.
- Pranjal (00:37:58), says that when words aren't the main thing in the spotlight anymore, did Donald actually mean what he said — or did someone tell him to do it to win?
- Yuval Levin, American Enterprise Institute fellow, states (01:06:00), “The blurring of the line between entertainment and politics has meant that the incentives that now confront our politicians don't point toward responsible exercises of power, and

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

members of Congress don't want the power. They don't want the responsibility. They want the platform.”

2016 Election: Identity Politics



[Yuval Levin](#), Director, Social, Cultural, and Constitutional Studies, American Enterprise Institute

- Levin concludes, “For that to change, we need to have a conversation in our politics about what the purpose of these institutions really is, and that would be a profound improvement over the last 25 years of American political life where the incentives that have shaped our politicians have pointed in the direction of less and less responsibility.”
- Erinn (00:38:20) says that our country can’t continue in this way. In history, we can look back and see that there are examples when societies fell apart in such times of division.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Social Media is the Media



With the advent of technology, the rise of personalized social media has created a new sort of challenge that has never before been presented in society. This is exacerbating our existing regional and cultural fissures between American Nations.

- Pranjal (00:38:41), teenager in Hazelton, says America is divided in every way possible. Everything you could ask him about.
- Roland (00:39:11) says we don't feel connected to our own brother. We are disconnected to everyone. Values that everyone once had, now we are drawing a line, and feeding the social media news monster that lives in us. We pick a side now. If we stay in a bubble, and say we only share what we believe, we look at a sector of society as the problem.
- Kyle (00:40:26), a retired soldier, says that social media is dividing us. Engaging us in the wrong way — whatever jives with our emotions, that is what we connect with.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Tim (00:41:05) says that we now get our values from television and the internet. If you don't have family, where will you get those ideas?
- John, a pharmacist in Hazelton (00:41:30), says that the news is injecting commentary and opinion into the news. He just wants the facts to be reported.

Social Media is the Media

- Yascha Mounk, novelist states (00:30:00), "If you spend a lot of time on social media, one thing you obviously want to be aware of is the fact that some of information you will come across might be made up and might be made up deliberately by people with a bad agenda. I actually think more important point though is that social media makes it easy to entrench yourself within your own bubble, to just seek out people who have exactly the same opinion as yours."



- Mounk continues, "And if you look at people of a different opinion, you're doing what people call nut picking. You only look at the craziest manifestation of the views on the other side in order to be able to dismiss it even more easily in order to be able to say, you see, these people are evil and they want to do really bad things to me and so I just have to go and fight for my own tribe."

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Karen, a social activist in Detroit (00:41:59), says if there was a baseline for common decency, we wouldn't be experiencing what we are experiencing right now. When Reagan got rid of the fairness doctrine, news organizations got the license to lie. With deregulations, all of our media owned by six corporations, you pair that with the rise of the internet, you can't blame people for the misinformation they believe. It's harder to trust people — if you repeat anything often enough, that is the truth.

Social Media is the Media

- John Byers, a factory worker in Hazelton (00:43:20), says that the news media has reason to slant our politics. If you take time to investigate information and pull the facts out, there's a lot of misinformation.



[Peter Levine](#), Associate Dean, Tufts University School of Citizenship & Public Affairs

- Peter Levine, professor, states (00:10:30), “So you used to make the choice of whether or not to subscribe to a daily newspaper. And then if you subscribed, you got the daily newspaper every day and it had headlines and that wasn't really your choice. The headlines that were delivered to were chosen by the newspaper. Now

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

you're choosing which snippet of which article to read on which site and which one to send to whom and which social media tags somebody else's sends you to look at. So it's a kind of constant dis-aggregated choice. And I think that has advantages. It's kind of empowering. You choose...But I also think it's problematic because we are not exposed to things we don't want to see.”

Social Media is the Media



[April Lawson](#), Director of Debates, Better Angels

- April Lawson, Better Angels organizer, states (01:00:00), “So, are all ideas worth hearing? It's a fair question. There are some that are clearly beyond the pale. Holocaust denial is maybe the most obvious one, should not be accepted in polite company.”
- Lawson continues, “But in America, the reason that we have, one reason that we have free speech is that we believe that that actually is the best way to have the best ideas win. And once you get into suppressing them, then you get into some power structure controlling thought and speech. And America is just ... One of the things that has made our country so strong and that has made lots of other countries around the world mimic us is that, we don't do that.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Lawson concludes, “We say, we trust the American people, and that we believe that the best ideas are going to win. And has that always been true? No. We've had lots of terrible ideas win at different times in our history. But on the whole I think we're moving in a good direction, and it's not that I think that ... I think that there are some terrible ideas out there these days. But I think silencing them is counterproductive, and that the way to really defeat them is to defeat them. It's to engage them head on and show why they're wrong.”

Social Media is the Media



- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute, states (01:07:00), “I think that there has been a growing distrust in part at least because we have really created an individualistic society in which everyone has the right to have their own opinion. And some of that is good, but those opinions need to be informed. We haven't done a very good job of educating people. Furthermore, even when they're educated, they're increasingly turning to very narrow forms of information such as on social media, and anybody can have an opinion and can find some expert out there somewhere through social media who will validate that opinion.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Sawhill concludes, “So that's one reason why I think the belief in expertise is broken down...Another reason is because elites are lumped together with leadership including leadership in government, and in the corporate sector, and elsewhere. If leaders haven't been delivering what followers want, which they haven't, because our politics has become dysfunctional and paralyzed, then you get a vicious circle which because the elites and the leaders can't deliver what people need and want when people become cynical and distressful, and give up on their leaders, and that becomes a complete unraveling over time.”

Social Media is the Media



[Yascha Mounk](#), Author, [The People vs. Democracy](#)

- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (00:22:30), “The great strength, the great hack of populism is that it doesn't ask people to give up on their most cherished values, it promises to deepen them. Now, out of that great strength comes one great weakness, which is that populists don't tend to live up to those promises. They actually do make a lot of people unfree. They do become autocratic. And it takes a

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

long time, but eventually citizens realize that and they get deeply resentful. That is the moment in which populists tend to enter a deep crisis of legitimacy.”

- Mounk continues, “That is the stage we're at now in Turkey. It is the stage we're at now in Venezuela. And so I don't think that most Americans or most people in many other countries in the world have forgotten the importance of these basic democratic values. I do think that it takes a long time for them to realize the ways in which they are threatened.”

Social Media is the Media



Kyle, Retired Soldier, Erie, PA

- Kyle (00:43:50), former soldier, says the means Donald Trump used to win the election is a large cause of the divide.
- Roland (00:44:10), factory worker, says that the entire 2016 election was a reality TV show, using social media for people to feed on that drama.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Pranjal (00:44:20), says that someone in Trump’s campaign said say things that people will discuss at the dinner table. If he says one thing sensible and a second thing outrageous, they’ll cover the outrageous thing.
- John (00:44:49), says deplorable — that really sent people off. The media telling people that Republicans who supported Donald Trump were unintelligent. John made it through pharmacy school and doesn’t consider himself unintelligent.

Social Media is the Media

- David Azzerad, former Heritage Foundation fellow, states (01:09:00), “I mean, Marshall McLuhan famously said that the medium is the message, that the medium dictates and constrains what the message will be and television is an entertainment medium. It is not an ideas medium. You can try as much as you want to try to express complex ideas on television. It was not designed to do that. It's designed to entertain you, to invoke strong powerful emotions and that's what it does. But look, that's what we have and we're not going to do away with it so I don't know what to do about that one but it definitely contributes to the polarization and to the state of near constant hysteria that our political life seems to be in.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- April Lawson, Better Angels organizer states (01:09:00), “And what makes it so hard to tolerate watching the other side? And is there something you can do about that? Like, can you listen enough to Rush Limbaugh or Rachel Maddow, or whoever, to desensitize yourself to it a little bit, and to be able to, again, this is a matter of listening long enough that you actually hear. And, because otherwise, your view will be that there is one way to see the world. And I, forgive me for sounding scolding, but most people have this problem. And it's very hard to avoid because it's very satisfying, frankly. And when you're tired at the end of the day, and you're driving home, and you've got a radio show, you don't want to listen to somebody who's saying crazy things, right?”

Social Media is the Media

- Yascha Mounk states (00:31:00), “But a lot of the time people come to politics with different sets of values and different beliefs which are reasonable. And if we want to sustain a democracy, we need to have some amount of respect for our political adversaries. And so I think seeking out the smartest voices on the other side, the most reasonable articulators of values that you may not personally agree with is a way of keeping sane on social media, of not being angry every time you log in, and hopefully of building bridges within our country.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Kyle (00:45:19), former soldier, says that when we think it is okay as a society to call people names, be sexist, that's when it falls apart. There was nothing normal about that election.
- John (00:45:41), pharmacist, said that leaders now only write things out in 140 characters. The founding fathers write papers and papers. They fought out their positions.

Social Media is the Media

- Roland (00:45:56), says people only react to what they believe. They're not checking the information that they share. He has friends who post things offending to black people — why would you do that if you care? You can act out towards other people on social media — tease, bully, troll — so hurt people hurt people. Because I'm hurting, because I don't have any hope, I strike out at you. The haves and the have nots are becoming further and further away. When we sit down in person, you can see my sincerity.



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- David Azzerad, former Heritage Foundation fellow, states (01:08:00), “You do a lot of hate reading on social media. You're not going to believe what they just said and it really gives you a skewed view of the country because you start to think that whatever statement that's filtered to you through Facebook or Twitter is representative of what the other half of the country believes when in fact it isn't.”

Social Media is the Media

- April Lawson, Better Angels organizer states (01:06:30), “And so there's this tendency to see it as there are these two sides, and then there's the moderate middle, but that's not really true. That said, the loudest voices are on the two sides. And so we get stuck in these, frankly inane disagreements that allow for no nuance and no compromise.”
- Garrett (00:47:24), teenager in Hazelton, says that to get what you want, the ends justify the means for the betterment of society.
- But in history, as Guy points out, almost every cataclysmic event in history started with that line of thinking.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

A Shared Story



The order of civilizations begins with a shared story, a foundational tenant that creates the mythology that we collectively believe. When the story no longer is true, or feels out of date, the glue of that society dissolves.

- Colin Woodard, novelist, states (01:34:00), “People need stories of belonging. Whether it's to your family or your tribe or now, since the 19th century, this idea of nation and that we belong to it and it has certain characteristics and that need to know who we are and where we came from and where we're going. You need to supply that.”

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Woodard continues, “If the United States has now gotten to the point where we're not offering those answers, those ideals as to what our purpose is and who's an American and why, somebody else will step in and provide very bad answers to those things. That's what's happened throughout human history. The darkest chapters in our history are usually when somebody steps in to draw and exploit the worst aspects of human behavior; usually for their own gain. Like Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia and then to a certain extent, Donald Trump now. So it's essential that we have a story of what holds us together, because if we don't the vacuum will be filled by someone.”

A Shared Story

- Yascha Mounk, novelist, states (01:16:00), “Now, one of the things we've seen over the last decades is that a lot of the political cleavages, a lot of political disagreements in America are starting to lie on top of each other. So that if you are somebody with a post-grad degree, you are also likely to be white, you also likely to be very liberal, you are also likely to live in a big city.”
- Mounk continues, “And suddenly you're no longer surrounded by people who are different from you in some important political dimension. You're unlikely, for example, to go to church with somebody who has a very different political viewpoint from you. And that might mean that all of these different factions are now being fused into two giant factions.”



THE AMERICAN QUESTION

- Mounk concludes “But everybody in the country starts to see themselves as a Democrat or Republican and to think that if my side loses, or the other side wins, that is the end of days. That is the big danger.”

A Shared Story



[Isabel V. Sawhill](#), Senior Fellow – Economic Studies, Brookings Institute

- Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute (01:04:00) states, “I think the American public has lost confidence in their government. They've also lost confidence in leadership generally. They've lost confidence in the so-called elites, including experts themselves. And as someone who is presumed to be some kind of expert on something that includes me so that's discouraging because I think experts do still have something to contribute to society.”
- Yuval Levin, fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (00:38:00), “And so I think both to address the alienation, loneliness, isolation that a lot of people feel in their own communities, and to address some of the concrete policy challenges we have, it's worthwhile to allow more power to flow through the local. Not everything can be

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

solved at the local level. There are problems that can't be. Obviously, global problems, national security problems, even environmental problems can't generally be addressed at the local level, but we always have to ask ourselves, "Can this challenge we confront be addressed more effectively a little bit closer to the ground?" There are a lot of instances where it could be."

Conclusion

This marks the end of footage from the first shoot in 2016, the 48 minute rough edit of the film, melded together with interviews from our experts.

At this juncture, new footage from our featured subjects in 2020, coupled with solutions from our experts, will conclude the film.

Finale Preview

We found that this is in fact the 4th time America is going through an identity crisis and the solutions that were used before are the greatest chance we have.

To solve the problem, what is needed is a combination of emphasizing the need for robust civics education in schools, partnered with a call to form a deeper connection to local community rather than looking to national leaders in Washington, New York City, San Francisco or Los Angeles.

Not being able to depend on Silicon Valley to moderate its technological conquest or the media to step away from serving us drama and division 24/7, we found in certain parts of the country that the more engagement in civil society, the less technology and media can impact your hatred for those to which you disagree. A belief that your neighbor shares your values is the strongest buttress to these empire ending forces.

The Roman, Mongolian, Chinese, British and Dutch empires all ended due to a breakdown of a shared society. American is the most successful multi-cultural empire to have existed, it can serve as a beacon of how to build and even greater global society or just take its seat at the back of the bus behind past fallen empires.

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

Part II

- What's in History
 - Isabel V. Sawhill, Brookings Institute states (00:40:00), "What I'm seeing right now is a level of disconnection, tribalism, division that is quite distressing in America. It's interesting if you read the work of Bob Putnam, the Harvard professor. What he has argued, and shown empirically is that when you have big changes in society, and society diversifies for demographic reasons, or because of immigration we become more tribal. We resort back to the communities where we feel most comfortable as he puts it, and I love this phrase. We all become turtles again. We hunker down. I think some of what we're seeing is because of that, but what it means because it's been, I think, quite bad in the consequences it's had for our society and for our politics so what we need to do is to try to find ways of re-knitting communities, and finding a more encompassing definition of identity."
- Finale
 - How does looking back at nostalgia, and the repetitions of time, allow us to extract the things that were actually useful in the past to march forward into the present? Immigrants in Mexico are the problem. A healthier conversation = how can the local Amazon get someone to support the local worker like businesses of the past?
 - Amy Chua, author of Day of Empires (01:25:00) states, "A lot of people are interested in Day of Empire in this particular historical moment in the United States because they're worried that like these other empires, like the Roman Empire or the British Empire, are we at the moment where we are suddenly shifting to a moment of intolerance and xenophobia, which basically is the sign of our imminent decline? I actually think there's a lot of reason to worry about it. We're seeing rhetoric today that we haven't heard in a long, long time and being very explicit, white nationalist

THE AMERICAN QUESTION

movements, very, very open, almost proudly anti-immigrant, anti-Asian, anti-Muslim, anti-Hispanic rhetoric. I tend to think that we have the mechanism for self-correction, but if we don't, if we don't correct, if we continue down this path and the xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric intensifies and we lose the ability to be able to attract the world's best and brightest, I do think that America will start to lose the qualities that made it such a powerful country that allowed America to rise so quickly and so steadily over 200 years.”

- Chua continues (01:26:00) “The secret to our success has always been the ability to attract the world's best and brightest. I think that if we turn our backs on that, if we start to say, oh no, we have to be a Christian country or we need to get rid of our immigrants and we need to close our boundaries, America will stop being America and it will fall by the wayside of past hyperpowers. I don't think that's going to happen. I think that America is different from Rome and Great Britain and the Mongol Empire because again, we are a democracy. We're a constitutionally based hyperpower. I think that's the reason that we can self-correct more quickly than these empires of antiquity that really just had to rely on military might to hold their empires together.”
- Chua continues (01:27:00), “I think if there's going to be a glue that can save America as a hyperpower, it's actually got to be not military force but really tolerance. That is the foundational principles, which is people everywhere, not just in the United States but all over the world are equal. I think that ideal, if you could get other countries to believe that that's what we really stand for and there's a big question mark there, then I think that would be the secret to the kind of dominance that should we ever aspire to it that we would want to have.”