Religion and Politics in an Age of Fracture: Eboo Patel and Ken Stern

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Emerson Auditorium in Knight Hall at Washington University in St. Louis

Prof. John Inazu: I'm John Inazu and I'm a faculty member of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and also a member of the law school here. I'm pleased to introduce our speakers for tonight in the second of three events in our ongoing Spring discussion series: Religion in an Age of Fracture. Our final event will be a discussion between Emma green and me. Emma Green writes for The Atlantic. That will be right here on April 3rd. Tonight's discussion features my co-teacher Eboo Patel and Ken Stern. Eboo is a leading voice in the movement for interfaith cooperation and founder and president of the interfaith youth core. He's the author of *Acts of Faith* in 2010, *Sacred Ground* in 2013, and *Interfaith Leadership* in 2016. Eboo is a regular contributor to the public conversation around religion in America and a frequent speaker on the topic of religious pluralism. For over 15 years he has worked with government social sector organizations and colleges and university campuses to help realize a future where religion is a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division. He holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University where he studied on a Rhodes scholarship. Ken Stern is co-founder and President of Palisades Media Adventures and the former CEO of National Public Radio. He is the author of *Republican Like Me: How I Left the Liberal Bubble and Learned to Love the Right*, published last year, and also the book *With Charity for All: Why Charities Are Failing and a Better Way to Give,* published in 2013. Ken is a frequent contributor to publications including The Atlantic, Slate, The Daily Beast, and the Washington Post. Prior to joining NPR, he was a senior executive in American International Broadcasting. Earlier in his career, he held positions in democratic politics. Ken holds degrees from Haverford College and Yale Law School. Please welcome me in joining – please join me in welcoming Eboo Patel and Ken Stern. [applause]

Eboo Patel: Great. Well I'm looking forward to – we've had a great afternoon. I brought all of my counter-intuitive ideas to Ken after the book that he wrote, I figured, you're the person I could bring them to. So I appreciated the opportunity to do that with you over the seminar today and over dinner. I must say that I'm jealous of you, because not only did you have a great idea for writing this book, not only do you have a very lyrical writing style, but neither your spouse nor your editor stopped you from free-falling with cuss words throughout the manuscript. [laughter]

Ken Stern: So could I say that as many bad words as I put in my book, are nothing against the way my wife talks at home. So maybe she'll give me a pass on that.

Patel: I thought it was a great book, I really enjoyed reading it and what strikes me is you bring two themes throughout the whole book, right? One is the dangers of tribalism for diverse democracy, how polarized we really are, and how deeply damaging that is to attempting to build a healthy, diverse democracy. And the second is, just how partial so many of us are in our approach to issues. There's a great line you quoted toward the end of the book, the greatest bias isn't liberal bias or conservative bias, it's confirmation bias. And we basically find ourselves absorbing the facts that we want to see. What I'd like to do in our 30 minutes or so in this format, before we go to the audience, is bring these themes through the set of questions I'm going to ask you. And the first question is, is there a story that precipitated interest in writing this book? Something that personally happened to you, that you read, that you thought to yourself, I have a great idea for a book?

Stern: So thinking about the idea of, the idea of trying to see and understand our politics by seeing it from the other side for a while, and it comes out as sort of concern for how polarized, how angry we are, and the fact that shouting at the other side doesn't seem to be working as a part of constructive democracy. But the idea really crystallized around something called the Hobart Street Pledge. So I live in this nice neighborhood in Washington DC called Mount Pleasant. Some of you may know it. It's a lovely neighborhood, I've lived there for 20 years. It's, as I write in the book, it's very diverse, when it comes to sort of black, brown, and white, and to the rainbow colors of the – the colors of the rainbow flag, but not so diverse when it comes to political persuasion. 94% democratic, my house is 100% democratic. Judith Stein outpolled Donald Trump in my district, in my precinct 74 to 70 in 2016. There aren't a lot of districts where Donald Trump came in third. And that was always something you might notice about the area but it's not really all that different from the rest of the city and a lot of areas in the country. I didn't take much note of it until the Hobart Street Pledge. So we have a lot of team spirit on Hobart Street, that's my home street. We close the street for Halloween and we close it for something called Porch Fest, which is our summer festival. It's a townhouse, rowhouse community and we all do things on our porches, it's great fun for the kids, a lot of kids. It's always a big parade with a firetruck and all the kids lead the parade. It's really nice. It all begins with something called the Hobart Street Pledge. I always liked the idea of the pledge, a sense of community in this (?) world. They've changed the pledge every year, that whoever is writing it, and one year it went something like this, I'm paraphrasing, but it went: all welcome on Hobart Street, men or women, gay or straight, white or black... everybody but republicans. [laughter]

And it was a joke, but it wasn't a joke. I mean because we've now come to a place where there's a social compact where we're not allowed to dislike someone for different religion or different race, but it is okay to dislike someone for a different politics. It's a very dangerous place. That was sort of the starting gun. I wrote actually a mediocre article for The Atlantic about the Hobart Street Pledge, which made me somewhat unpopular on Hobart Street, but that really began my desire and, like, wait a minute, how could it be that we don't want republicans as neighbors? Maybe I need to see things through their eyes and that's sort of the book.

Patel: Yeah it's the introduction to the book, it's a wonderful introduction. Part of what you do in this book is you tell stories so well. You tell journalistic stories really well, you tell personal stories really well, and you have this gift of being able to juice complex social science studies into like three highly readable paragraphs. Add that to the fourth reason I'm jealous of you.

Stern: Well that's because I can't actually understand more than three paragraphs myself so it helps.

Patel: I'm wondering if, and I was struck by the range of social science studies out there on the extent of our polarization, how parts of it are woven into parts of our neuroscience and psychology. I'm wondering if you could tell just one or two, if you could juice one or two of these studies into a handful of sentences that really – studies that illustrate for you how deep and dangerous our polarization is.

Stern: Yeah, so I will tell... there are so many interesting ones it's hard to give it justice to. So one is, I'll start with actually not a study but a poll that the Washington Post did during the course of the election, because I think it begins to show how divided we are. They did a poll in Virginia, a purple state, asking people whether they knew, they asked Clinton supporters whether they knew or had any close persona friends or family members who were voting for Trump and they asked the same question of Trump supporters, whether they knew anyone supporting Clinton. And so it's an interesting question, intuitively you would think most everyone must know someone voting for the other side, must be related to them, they must have close personal friends, especially in a state like Virginia, which is evenly divided. But it turns out, and I had to sort of recognize the question for myself, we actually sort ourselves out, much more than we used to. It's called the 'big sort.' We sort ourselves out so we actually create communities where you only know people from your side. And more than 50% of Clinton voters and 50% of Trump voters didn't know anyone who was voting for the other side. And I mention that because I think that's an extraordinary thing. And I was shocked until I realized it was true for myself. When you only know people on your side, it is very easy to demonize the other side. You should see that in a lot of different social science studies. The one that I think I'll mention here, I think the foundational study in the area, which is really about how team identity become so strong in us to quickly. And that's the work of a fellow by the name Henri Tajfel who was a Polish social scientist who has a really compelling story. He was a Polish Jew who couldn't study in Poland because of his religion, so his family sent him to France, I believe. Because of that, he missed, unlike the rest of his family, the Warsaw ghetto and the horrors of that. So Tajfel's studies after World War II are around really how could it be – like a lot of other social scientists he was trying to understand – how could it be that so many people – how could the Holocaust have happened? How could Nazism have happened? How could it be that the Germans and others so readily signed up for a horrible thing? And he did a series of studies in the 60s and the 70s which showed the pull of team identity, and when you hear them they're kind of funny, but when you think about them they're really scary. One thing he did with English school boys is he did a series of studies where he'd divide them up into teams on an arbitrary basis. One thing he did is he showed them a picture of dots on a page and said, "Guess how many dots there are on this page." And then he divided the teams up into over estimators and under estimators. And then he didn't even introduce these kids to each other, they just knew they were on the over estimator team or the under estimator team. And then he gave them a series of choices, and he was very clear in these studies, in these experiments, that once these kids were on a team, it didn't really matter how arbitrary it was. They wanted to win. They wanted to beat the other team – so much that they would actually make judgements that were harmful to them. One thing he said is "OK, you guys can get 20 dollars for your team, as long as the other team gets 20 dollars. Or you can get 15 dollars for your team, but then the other team only gets 10." Those are my numbers but that was the basic idea. And universally the kids voted for 15. They actually punished themselves just so they could beat the other team. They wanted to win. It didn't really matter if there was no substance to that win. And that was really, I think, a lesson in group dynamics, in tribes. How it becomes so easy for us to identify with our team and how intrinsic it is within us to beat the other side. And I think that's a lot of the story that's going on around the world and it actually describes fundamentally what is going on in America today.

Patel: I love that story and it shows that I read the whole book because that was at the end of the book.

Stern: It was!

Patel: One of the stories you tell--

Stern: You started at the back, didn't you?

Patel: I did skip around, I went both ways to the middle, but I read it all! One of the stories you tell at the beginning of the book kind of sets up my next question, which is: the classic line by Daniel Patrick Moynihan is "you're entitled to your own opinion, but not your own fact." And you actually say that people actually have different views on facts all the time. You tell the story of this Dartmouth Princeton football game in 1951, which was particularly brutal. There were noses broken and cheap shots taken. The social scientists that the film of this game and they show it to future years of Dartmouth and Princeton college students. This is the case now and it was the case especially in the 1950s that the populations in these colleges are essentially interchangeable, socioeconomically, racially in the 1950s, probably all men's universities at the time. And the two groups, Dartmouth and Princeton students, had radically different takes at a 3.5-hour football game. And then you point out, look, think about what we learn from this and now consider an 18-month, sprawling, media saturated election campaign and think about how differently a laid-off worker in Youngstown and a tech entrepreneur in Silicon Valley is gonna view this. How can we say that there's only one interpretation of a single set of facts? And you take that through a set of complex issues in the book: climate change, government programs when it comes to poverty, coal. I'm wondering if you can tell us a story about how your view on an issue changed as you opened yourself up to a new set of facts or a different interpretation of a known set of facts.

Stern: Yeah so the one issue that you didn't mention there that I spent a lot of time on was guns – obviously a hot button issue talked about today. And I actually built the issues I was going to talk about in the book and study in the book and see things from the other side around issues that I knew I didn't know tons about, never studied them in depth – I was sure I was right. I come from, you know, I don't know anyone who owns guns: no one in my family, none of my close friends (that might be a slight exaggeration) but by and large, guns were something that police and military have and not private citizens. And I spent a good deal of time trying to explore it from the conservative side and understand John Lotts, the conservative economist's views on "more guns less crime." I went to gun shows, I went pig hunting in Texas. And there's actually a story, which actually isn't in the book because it happened afterward, and it's a terrible story. So, I went pig hunting in a place called Gonzales, Texas – 2 hours west of Houston... and you want to see things from the conservative side, the republican side, great, how do you do that? How do you have republican's experiences? It's a fairly arbitrary thing. So I went to see Tucker Carlson and I said, "I want to be a republican for a year, what do I do?" And without a pause he said, "Go pig hunting in Texas." So I did. I'd never shot a gun before I went pig hunting in Texas and, when I tell the story, some of the people I met along the way, including my hunting mentor, a 9-year-old boy named Isaac from Georgia, who sort of taught me the ropes. Gonzales, Texas is about 10 miles as a crow flies from Southerland Springs, where the church shooting took place last year. I think 9 -- I don't remember how many – too many people were killed by a guy with an AR-15. You can look at the set of facts around Southerland Springs and they're two completely different narratives. So there's a very obvious, "how could this guy have an AR-15 and walk into a church and shoot a lot of people. It's horrible. There shouldn't be AR-15s." But if you know, there's another lens on it. Which is also important to know, which is, the guy who -- the murderer, the killer – was eventually chased down by an NRA instructor with his own AR-15, and killed. And that's because, if you're in Texas, in Gonzales, Texas, it's about 10 miles as a crow flies from Gonzales, but it's about 40 miles by road because it loops around. There's not a cop within 40 miles. It's like the bumper sticker: I'd rather have a gun in my hand than a cop on the phone. That's a very strong narrative in that part of Texas. Two people can look at the same set of facts and come away with completely different takeaways. And they're both legitimate -- we can argue about that and it's a very powerful, difficult thing to talk about – but they're both legitimate perspectives that have real ideas and real meaning behind them, but they compete with each other. We have to recognize and we can't dismiss the other side, whichever side we're on.

Patel: By the way, Marie Griffith, who is an estimable scholar of religion, you should've seen the look when you said "Go pig hunting in Texas." [laughter]

Stern: Have you never been pig hunting in Texas? [laughter]

Patel: That might've been the source of the luck.

Stern: So it may make you feel better, it turns out I've never shot before, against every sort of boyhood expectations, I'm a terrible shot. So, no pigs were harmed in the making of this book. [laughter]

Patel: However a chapter was written in a book, which is something we all think is good. So, you've been involved in the media for a long time. And correct me in reading about your background in NPR, but there's probably no media outlet, at least on the mainstream liberal side of things, that outfits its members quite as tribally as NPR does, right? Tote bags, t-shirts, bumper stickers, right, there's a sense of you don't just listen to NPR, you are part of a virtuous community (11 dollars a month right here). You write for The Atlantic, you write for Slate, Washington Post... basically this is my, you know, when I actually have the time, this is my weekly diet of reading and listening. You also are self-reflective enough to say, "Look, I am sure that in the liberal bubble that is NPR, that is The Atlantic, etc., the choice of story, certainly the choice of telling, emerges from this bubble. Is there a particular story that comes to mind, that you've been involved in, that you've supervised, or that you edited over the course of the past 10 or 20 years of your career in this general world of The Atlantic, NPR, Washinton Post, again my diet of information, that you think to yourself, when you were with evangelicals, when you were not harming a pig in Texas, when you were talking to coal miners in Kentucky, did you think to yourself, "Man, that story we did in 2007 or whatever, there was a whole different angle that I didn't see?"

Stern: I don't have a crisp answer to that about a particular story, but my experiences have made me reflective on the composition of the newsroom – at NPR, but really in mainstream media in general: New York Times, Washington Post, Vanity Fair (where I do most of my writing now). When I wrote this book, I traveled around the country, I didn't really want to write about media, but people wanted to talk to me about media. It's one of the interesting things – they wanted to talk about how they felt locked out of the national conversation, how they felt patronized, how they felt that this was covered not genuinely but sort of anthropologically, and it made me give a lot of thought back to the conversations I had when I ran NPR. I feel bad for using NPR as an example here because in many ways I think that NPR is the best of the breed, in terms of its making sure that voices from all around the country are heard, but it's the example I know best. Diversity was extraordinarily important in NPR, and it's a little bit like diversity on Hobart Street: racial diversity, gender diversity, but not political diversity. I remember raising this issue when I was at NPR, I was the CEO at the time and there's always this sort of publisher/newsroom wall being told "Look -- we hear you," but these are serious journalists trying to tell stories from both sides. And it's true, but it's also true, I think, that places like NPR, New York Times, and Washington Post, the newsroom is basically made of progressives. And I don't think -- we would never cover, without at all denigrating the seriousness or purpose of those journalists and their dedication and craft to telling stories about both sides. We would never think of covering race issues with only white guys, no matter how good they were, or covering gender issues with men, no matter how dedicated to the craft they are, because that inherently changes the nature of the coverage. I don't think the media has questioned itself enough about how can we tell political stories in newsrooms – no one knows for sure because there's no statistics on it, but everyone knows for sure that voted vastly for Hillary Clinton and not at all for Donald Trump. And I think that's a problem of perspective that's hard to deal with. I think if the media wants to be in a different place, it needs to grapple with it in the future.

Patel: Want to watch me get you in trouble?

Stern: Oh, I'm already in enough trouble with people because of that.

Patel: So, if this is the case for the media, is this the case for higher ed? Bloomberg does a commencement at Harvard a couple years ago, in which he says 98% of your Humanities faculty are democrats, how do you call yourselves diverse? Jonathan Haidt has just launched Heterodox Academy on this idea, which is basically how do we have diversity in academic disciplines if there is a political group think. If it's the case in media, which you've been closest to, do you think it could be the case in higher ed?

Stern: Yeah, I think I'll take the safe bet, yes. There's a similar challenge, maybe a different dynamic. I think there's a consequence. You know, it's a consequence to hear one side of the story (although I assume the purpose of university is to hear divergent views and to challenge your views) but there's a consequence to only hearing one side of the story, whether you're conservative or republican – uh, conservative or liberal. If you start at the very beginning, where we live, where we learn, what we watch and listen to, has that confirmation bias – that's a quote from Emma Roller who wrote in the New York Times. We begin to make sure, we begin to believe we're right and they're wrong. We lose the perception that there's good faith on the other side. And when that happens, I think that becomes a very dangerous dynamic in American democracy. It's interesting to me who should deal with that – I think about the media a lot and their responsibilities, but you could also talk about the university and their responsibilities equally as well.

Patel: You know, I feel like I live in --

Stern: Did that get me in trouble?

Patel: Potentially. We'll see what the Q and A looks like. Look, there's a higher ed version. Well, I did not offer an opinion on that; I only asked for your opinion on it. I am neutral. I am just seeking information. But if the way journalists talk about this, which is "you can trust our world view because of how much time we have spent seeking information about the world." There's an academic version of this – both of these are plausible, right -- "you can trust our world view because we have to accord to the rigors of a discipline." You don't get to a university unless you're really smart and really rigorous and therefore, our judgement, our worldview, is more trustworthy, which is a reasonable rejoinder to the worldview-political-diversity move, which is basically, look, it's the Paul [?] statement, which is: smart people are democrats.

Stern: Yeah, facts lead you to the left. I think everyone on the left thinks that and everyone on the right thinks something dramatically different.

Patel: One of the things I was struck by about your book was the other narratives you offered. In other words, the other way of interpreting the facts, that were (a) facts that I hadn't heard, so I knew about the first use of the AR-15 in Southerland Springs, Texas. I am sure that there was a line or two or three in the New York Times stories I read about how the shooter was stopped. For whatever reason, didn't stick out in my mind. I mean, a very kind of confessional moment on a different issue is the first time the word opioid registered for me was like 2006 or 2007. And I remember it because I was deep into the Oscar So White kind of movement, you know very frustrated – this is probably 2012, 2013 – great movies of that particular year with great black writers and great black actors weren't being recognized. So I'm like reading Atlantic and reading New Yorker, New York Times pieces on this, and then I come across, maybe it's the Angus Deaton study of the mortality rate amongst working class whites that spiked so dramatically that economists could only compare it to AIDS in the 80s. You look in that article, and I read the word *opioid*. I remember thinking to myself, "what's an opioid?" And of course, two clicks into that rabbit hole, I'm thinking, for 30 years this has been ravaging vast swaths of America that I haven't been within 20 miles of. My kids don't know what a Cracker Barrel is. That's both true and it's a metaphor. But, when we're on a vacation, or whatever, 30 miles from the city, and they walk into the local grocery store, and they don't like the look of the watermelons, they will ask the clerk, "where's the nearest Whole Foods?" because they have better watermelons. It's a recognition. There's a great line by Susan Sontag, "whatever is happening, there is always something else going on." Oscar So White is a legit movement and it's not a spike in mortality rates amongst a whole segment of the population.

Stern: Yeah, I mean, it's the stories you know that change your views. You know, when I think of, without at all diminishing it, or actually disagreeing with the arguments being made about what we need to do about gun control after Parkland and way too many others, I also don't forget where the vast majority of shootings take place. I didn't know most of this, I mean it's all available, killings, homicides, with long guns, not just AR-15s constitute about 4% of gun homicides in this country. The real action, you have to be careful with diction, is shootings with handguns mostly in cities, but even more importantly, the place where there's real dramatic increases: gun suicides. That actually brings us back to opioids, because it's largely working class whites who have seen their sense of the future, their sense of optimism, their sense of hope disappear; disappear into opioids, disappear into SSI, disappear into unemployment and single motherhood/fatherhood for their kids. That's actually the place where gun policy has really failed, because it's not really about gun policy. It's about mental health, economic growth, and those are deeply complex and troubling issues.

Patel: Last couple questions, right. Does seeing the other side make you a traitor?

Stern: I have been called Benedict Arnold. So, I'll diverge, I mean I think one of the disappointing things, but not surprising things, is how angry people get when they think you are a traitor, when they think you're doing what I think it a very sort of liberal thing to do, which is trying to see things from different points of view and trying to understand others, other tribes in this country. But a lot of people who have never read the book love to call me, say if I learned to love the right, which is sort of to have the bonds of affection and not necessarily agree with them, I also must be a racist or hate gays or be a Benedict Arnold. There is that diction going on in social media that worries be enormously. You know, I don't know whether – I spent my life as a democrat – but for this book, I'm going to be all in to see things from someone else's point of view. I went down to the voter registration office in Washington DC and became a republican. One of the few in Washington DC. A little bit of street theater, but I thought it was actually an important symbol. And when I came back, not literally but figuratively, I reregistered as an independent, because I didn't love, even though the subtitle of the book is *I learned to love the right,* I certainly didn't learn to love the republican party of Donald Trump. But I became a lot more jaundice about American politics and both parties, and it left me thinking that neither party is serving the American public very well – or even their core constituencies very well. I don't know if that makes me a traitor, but it makes me a changed person after this experience.

Patel: Ok so, final question. One of the things that struck me about the book was the time you spent with evangelicals, with John Inazu played Virgil to your Dante in some of that territory. And as I'm reading that chapter, you're walking us through your realizations. One is, wow, these, people, I thought they would only care about abortion and same sex marriage issues. Turns out, they care a lot about race, they care a lot about – basically, they care about the same things that I do.

Stern: They're actually people, not stick figures.

Patel: And realization number two was, wow, these people do a lot better than my people do. When we do an anti-poverty thing, a service project, a couple dozen people show up. But when this evangelical guy in Portland does it, there are hundreds of people and they don't just come once, they come every week. This notion of wow, your group exemplifies a value that my group loves to trumpet but you guys do it better... is that a fair reading of some of your time with evangelicals?

Stern: Yeah, so I think a lot of this is a lesson in humility: how little I know and how quickly I was to assume often the worst about, or even limited things about, the others. So, I'll sort of step back and tell you, if you want to understand republicans in the United States you have to understand evangelicals – the largest religious group in the country, votes 80% republican, doesn't really matter who's running, whether they're of high moral character or not, and that's one of the truisms of tribal politics. And, you know, I'm and agnostic Jew from Washington DC who wouldn't know the inside of a church, let alone an evangelical church. So John Inazu, professor at Washington University Law School, became a little bit of my guide and the first thing he did was bring me to a triennial, something called Urbana, a triennial gathering of 15,000 evangelical youths in the Edward R Jones dome in St. Louis, Missouri. And you talk about sort of the middle aged, Jewish, agnostic, I'm not gonna fit in very well. And I came with a lot of preconceived notions, mostly formed through what I knew about Jerry Falwell Sr., who had been dead for a decade by that point. I thought I would go there and talk to kids about what I thought they should be interested in: fighting gay rights or chaining themselves outside of an abortion clinic. But they wanted to talk about what they were interested in, things that probably matter here on campus: black lives matter, refugee issues (how to help them not how to keep them out). And I was struck by the social commitments of this group that was very different and very admirable, really, in ways that I didn't expect. And my hero out of this is sort of, you alluded to them in passing, my heroes out of this, was a guy named Sam Adams, who was actually a little bit unknown but a somewhat historic figure here in American politics – the first openly gay mayor of a major US city, in his case Portland, Oregon – who formed a, grew up closeted in Oregon, in a time when there was a lot of negative energy, for lack of a better term, around gay rights. There was ballot movements, very conservative folks, very conservative Christian communities, try to stop the teaching of gay rights in schools and ridiculous things like that. So he had every reason to be suspicious of the evangelical community, but, to what you alluded to, he ended up forging this extraordinary partnership with this fellow who was really the head of the local evangelical community. He needed help as the mayor of Portland and evangelicals, it turned out, wanted to be known in Portland what they were for, not what they were against. And they were able to mobilize thousands of volunteers to help them in schools and all sorts of programs. It was the most important partnership of Mayor Adams' work and what he said to me is, "on any ten issues, I will agree on eight. There are a couple issues we're not going to agree on, but why are we spending our time focusing on the two when we should be thinking about the eight?" And I found that to be sort of a very different view of American politics today, which is much more about exploiting differences and the anger at them, as opposed to finding common ground, which I, you know, which hopefully the book was about.

Patel: Yeah, it reminds me of, I'm an Obama democrat quoting Ronald Reagan, I'm learning from your book, but the Ronald Reagan line, that somebody who agrees with you on 80% of the issues is not a 20% traitor. So, thank you. We've got 30 minutes maybe 40 minutes for audience questions. I've enjoyed this time tremendously. [applause] Right here. Why don't you introduce yourself; name and something else.

Audience Question 1: I'm Steve Nevel and I just like to come to these things. I've worked with people, I've worked in government for a while, in the defense industry, and so it was a primarily conservative group and I had lots of good discussions with heart-felt conservatives. I would read George Will and Mike Gerson and even Ross Douthat and Jennifer Rubin, but now, none of those names I kicked off has anything good to say about the president. And so it seems like he personally has driven an even bigger wedge between thoughtful people of the two sides. And so, as for knowing people who voted for Trump, I got in-laws, they all live in mid-Missouri, and you know, the big sort, from my perspective, is with the urban and rural, with the suburbs being, you know, the battle grounds... I don't even know how to talk to these folks anymore because it's like, if I am a democrat, I am an evil creature.

Stern: So it's interesting, I had plenty of time researching while writing this book, which I started before Trump came along, time when I was concerned about polarization, which seems quaint in reflection. And I had plenty of time to wonder whether I was just dead wrong about this, right, that you know, that my belief in listening to others and finding common ground was something that didn't make sense in a country that would vote for Donald Trump. I spent a lot of time – so most of my mentors along the way are sort of "never-Trumper:" Pete Wehner and Michael Gerson and plenty of others, who taught me about conservative policies but weren't interested in supporting Donald Trump because "God knows what he is." But, you know, I spent time – I didn't spend just time in, you know, The American Enterprise Institute and places like that. I spent time in Youngstown, Ohio and I spent time in Pikeville, Kentucky and pig hunting Texas. And I talked to a lot of people who I grew to respect, who support – who I think were – whose votes were coming from a place, I don't think necessarily about policy, but a place about anger and despair. I mean I think Trump is really a story, a man who is capable of exploiting the anger and despair of tens of millions of Americans. I met a lot of people who said, this is back to the story of declining life expectancy, declining income, declining belief in the American Dream and the future. And I met a lot of folks you said, you know, felt betrayed by the establishment of both parties, and would say things like, so many people said to me, like, "Yeah, I'm gonna vote for Donald Trump, or maybe Bernie Sanders." And that sort of puzzled me, because on the policy perspective, the hell are you thinking, but on the sense that, you know, nothing has worked in the ordinary sense, we need something different. I heard that expressed in lots of different ways, which is: maybe Trump will be a great president or maybe he'll cause World War

III. And that was a bet that a lot of people seemed to be willing to make – wasn't a good bet for me, ‘cause things are actually pretty good on Hobart Street, but they’re not so good looking up from the bottom of the pile in Pikeville, Kentucky. So I thought of a lot of folks who voted for him, not as a, you know, carefully thought out policy perspective, ‘cause you drive yourself nuts trying to figure out that equation, but really of a sense that America has disserved them in some ways, and that something needs to be different, whatever that was, and they were voting for the most different person, I think from that perspective – didn't agree with it by any stretch of the imagination -- but I at least began to understand the perspective of a lot of people who voted for Trump.

Patel: Thank you for that question. [pointing] Here.

Audience Question 2: My name is Harvey Schnieder and I’m past president of the Interfaith Partnership here in St. Louis. You spent a lot of time, very informatively, on the politics aspect. My question is: What impact or effect has religion had on the tribalism that you described previously?

Stern: So, um, I mean, obviously religion drives a lot of core beliefs. So, you get a lot of single-issue voters or two-issue voters that are built around religion, whether that’s abortion or gay rights or things like that. So it drives a lot of, I think a lot of, um, core political beliefs. But I think it’s, the thing that’s interesting the most is actually the decline in religion in terms of its importance in terms of tribe. I don’t think this is gonna be a good answer to your question, but it interests me so I’ll sort of riff on it anyway, so forgive me for that. You know, I think one of the reasons that politics is so important in identity now is because other things have become less important. So labor unions have become less important in their identity. Religion has become, with the rise of the nones and things like that, where fewer and fewer people identify with a religious group. It becomes less important in terms of how you identify yourself. And that has created, with us being so tribal, by some odd form of DNA, it means that politics has sort of replaced religion, or has replaced, in some ways, economic class, as how we think of ourselves. And, um, at some point in my life I would’ve thought, you know, it’s good that we’re not dividing ourselves as much on religious grounds, it’s less of an identifier. Um, now I think that it’s dangerous that we’ve found these substitutes that have pushed religion aside and pushed political antagonism to the forefront. It reminds me a little bit, by the way, do you remember the, uh, do you know the old, and this is really a diversion, do you remember the old Tom Lehrer song *National Brotherhood Week*? Does anyone know that song? Alright, so there's at least one. So, uh, I love talking about Tom Lehrer. He was a Harvard – I think mathematician or physicist – who kind of chucked, he didn't give it up, but he became famous for writing songs, sort of political songs, that were very catchy and my parents had some of them, they had records when I was a boy. And one of them was called *National Brotherhood Week* which is something that was real – set up by I think the National Catholic Conference in the 20s and 30s. And the song went: "All the white folks hate the black folks, all the black folks hate the white folks" and it sort of kept going, it was like: "The Protestants hate the Catholics, the Catholics hate the Protestants. The Muslims hate the Hindus. And everybody hates the Jews. But during National Brotherhood Week, we get along." And I mean, it was really, it was a piercing criticism of how we divide ourselves. Um, and, as I listen to those lyrics again, read those lyrics, all those divisions are still here, but I think subsumed under politics. So, we never once said, "and the democrats hate the republicans and the republicans hate the democrats," because we wouldn't have thought about that. It wasn't that division. But now that is the tribe that sort of overarches everything else. And it's just a very different world than when Lehrer was writing these songs in 1960 and 61.

Patel: Here and then here and then here. [pointing]

Audience Question 3: My name is Dana Logan and I am a postdoctoral fellow at the Center on Religion and Politics. Um, so, I wanna defend academics. Most academics chose to live their entire lives in non-cosmopolitan places, um, which strikes me as an incredible dedication to engaging in conversations with people who are, in most cases, from non-liberal backgrounds. I'm curious for you, what the bar is for engaging in conversations that are about understanding and what constitutes that kind of dedication to inhabiting the space of another person.

Stern: I think I would go out and write a book, spend a year writing a book, I mean, there's just no other substitute for that. You know, it's interesting, I'm not gonna disagree with you, you know more about the university setting than I, and I'm gonna be, one of the things I learned to say along the way is "I don't really know." But I will say that people are able to create micro communities. I'm not saying that academics are this sort of, but if you go to places like Milwaukee, which is the second most politically segregated cities in the country, how people have actually sorted themselves out into red counties and blue counties, you can actually drive across a line, there's a line in this case, between Milwaukee City and Wasaw, I'll get this wrong, County. And you go from blue land to red land, and it's from 80% democrat to 80% republican. As a whole community, it's actually fairly balanced, but they've sorted themselves out in ways that people don't need, even if they're in the same community, they don't actually have to interact with each other. And I wonder whether some of that is true with academics in their communities as well. I don't know, but I would sort of raise that. And I think, you know, the people that have really interested me, who I admire, are more authentic than I am in searching out others, I did this as part of a book project, but in their everyday lives search out others in search of dialogue. I admire Eboo's work around faith communities because I think it's also around political communities. That's their, you know, those are the people I think who every day are trying to create those lines of dialogue. And one of the interesting things you actually see, I saw it in my book, Book Travels, but you actually see it in the social science experiments. It actually doesn't take much if you get people together talking to change people's points of view about the other side. Actually, very pliable people in real life terribly insensitive and sure of our rightness in social media. And when you're listening to Fox, if that agrees with us, or MSNBC if that agrees with us, easy to reconfirm your views. When you get face to face with someone who thinks differently it's relatively easy to see sort of how people view change. So, I really admire the people who are...and I think of it sort of as the obligation of the university community...who are working to bring together people across political, religious, or social lines because that's the only way we will restore this notion of good faith and this idea of what you might call the American super community.

Patel: I wonder if there's something behind this question; part of this is I'm probably on twenty or twenty-five campuses per year and not that many of them are Washington University. It's more like McMurry College in Amarillo, Texas. And probably a dozen other places like that. And I have had no small number of conversations with like a gay faculty member at McMurry who's like so you're the one person every three months who can tell that I'm gay, because I can't tell anyone at my college I'm gay. And I wonder if the point you're making is, if you're me and you fly into Amarillo for thirty-six hours and you're going back to Brighton Avenue, I collect lots of nice stories about people in Amarillo and McMurry that I bring back to my cosmopolitan friends. But my man there is like, you know, this is a wonderful community, and I'd get fired if they knew I was gay. Or some version of that and I wonder if part of what you're saying is that it's true about the vast majority of colleges in this country...they're in places like Oberlin, Ohio, Kenyon, Ohio, Amarillo, Texas, in which depending on your identity, inhospitable is a mild term.

Stern: Yeah but I think that's a...I mean it's a powerful story...but I think that's true of not just universities. More and more in places, because of how we sort ourselves out, that's inhospitable to the other side. Fifteen years ago, there were about a thousand of what are called landslide counties, counties that one party or another won by more than twenty percent. This time around, there were about twenty-five hundred. The overall vote didn't change that much, still pretty close, but how it was distributed, because people have sorted themselves out in to a way that they're living with people who they agree with. I suspect that's in work, in school, and otherwise. A fellow came to see me the other day, walked into my office and hand delivered me a letter. He lives in Washington, D.C, and he works in a legal community and he's a Trump supporter. And he's afraid to admit that to anyone he knows. In the letter, he says he drives out into Virginia, into Red country, to find social circles that he can sort of be himself. And it's like, you know, your professor from McMurry. And I think that's a...it's an awful thing that your professor at McMurry has to hide his views, and I think it's the same for this fellow in Washington, D.C.

Patel: You know, and I'll just say one more thing. And I think this is where my progressive stripes start to show. Because I love the book and I want to sympathize with that guy, and I just don't think it's the same thing as being gay at a college where you can't be gay. I mean to be a free market conservative and to not be able to talk about that openly and to be like I can't have a partner here. My sense is those are different.

Stern: Yeah, I don't know if it's a competition between the two. Both are stories that are wrong, right, you can rank them and argue about that, and I'd probably just agree with you. But it's a problem I think when we're in a place where if you come out and say what your political beliefs are, you're going to essentially be tarred and feathered, or ostracized by your community. That wasn't true when Tobler wrote National Brother's Week, but it's true now.

Patel: Do you bring your spouse to your kid's play, right, and in other places you can't do that. I mean, you know, I think to myself, the principle of my kid's school has never shown up to any school event with a partner that I am pretty sure that he has and there's a reason for that, and that's a sadness to me.

Stern: It is a sadness.

Audience Question 4: So this is kind of going back to a little bit about what you've talked about with different answers to different. But for better or worse I am one of those people who has a lot of people on the Trump side and a lot of people on the Hilary side. And as I'm listening to you talk a lot, something that I've encountered a lot is what you do with those one or two issue voters. Right, the people who do focus on the twenty percent, and how do you start moving them, and helping them to think more about the eighty percent they have in common. Because you know to some extent that's kind of like the key that we're all looking for here. Because it is really hard when you have two people who can say...so I'm originally from the deep South...and you can sit side by side one person who says you cannot be a good Christian and vote for Trump and if you're a good Christian, you must vote for Trump. So how do you think, as more centrist-ish people, we help people think more about the eighty percent?

Stern: Yeah it's a great question and I wish I had an optimistic answer because you know my sense of America today is most forces are focused on pointing out points of disagreement. That's media, that's politics, it's the world division. It's interesting to me how many people actually want to find common ground. I think the interesting thing is you don't really hear about them in media, you don't see them in social media, but one of the things I've observed is how tired people are of the cacophony that we live in. And one of the things I've noticed and written about is how many people are leaving the political parties, not because they're changing their point of view, but because they're embarrassed by the diction of both parties. The biggest political trend over the last generation, I would argue, is the growth of independents, which now are forty to forty-five to forty-six percent of the American public. And I think that's because there are people out there, who are not necessarily changing their views, they're not necessarily even moderates, but they don't like the politics of division, and some day, if I have a political perspective, it's to give voice to those folks, who I think are more about comity than they are about winning every argument.

Patel: Excellent question. Thank you.

Audience Question 5: I'm James Croft. I'm the outreach director of the Ethical Society in St. Louis, which is a humanist congregation here in the city. So when you were speaking about a lack of political diversity on campuses and in the media, you're argument relied on an analogy between political identity and racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identity. And you said things like if we spoke about race with only white people, it would be a problem, and when we speak about politics with only progressive people, it's a problem. And this gets to something that Eboo was talking about just a second ago. It seems to me that that analogy is a very bad one. That in principle political identity is quite different than other forms of identity. Firstly, we don't choose racial, ethnic, or sexual identity. Secondly, they're not responsive to evidence or reasons where political identity should, in principle, be responsive to evidence and reasons. And thirdly, there are often structural, institutional impediments to being black, or gay, or transgender, when there are very rarely structural institutional impediments to being conservative. There may be some social consequences to being conservative, but you'll very rarely be fired from a job or given harsher prison sentences if you are a conservative, when that will happen in many parts of the country if you're gay, or transgender, or black. So, it seems to me that that analogy which is fundamental to some of your argument is very bad, and I'd like you to convince me otherwise.

Stern: [chuckles] Okay. I will do my best. So, it's interesting when you talk about politics, which is....I will argue that one of the things I've learned about talking about politics that inevitably gets everyone mad, and people hear things that you are not saying, or at least that you did not intend to say. And one of consequence is that it makes people reluctant to talk about politics with anyone disagrees with them. I think the argument I was making actually was not a direct comparison between race or gender denigration or political denigration, but I was talking about the responsibility of the media, to tell a well-rounded story about politics in America and a well-rounded story about political issues. And very hard to do that when you walk into assumptions about which side is right and which side is wrong, about what's important, about what voices should be heard, and you know, what is the right take on it. If you come back to the Selvin Springs story, Eboo didn't know that it was the citizen who used his own AR-15 for the good cause in the end. An important part of the story. And that's because I think that's not the narrative that liberals want to take. And that's the challenge, which is how do you tell a well-rounded story when you have preconceived notions about who's important and who's right. And I think the only way to deal with that is to have diverse views within the news room. And that's really about, in a time when...and this is part of my concern about the media...I mean trust in institutions is way down and part of where you see the decline in trust is with the media. Last year, in 2016, only thirty-two percent of people said they trusted the media. Forty-eight percent of people, including a lot of democrats, said they thought the media made fake news. That's actually the power of Trump's phrasing, which immediately worms its way into it. That worries me enormously. The media is a pillar of democracy. Faith in media, faith in sort of common set of facts or common values is really important in the direct function of democracy, and when media is mistrusted as being from one side and not the other, that's a problem, and my concern is how do you try to fix that. That's by trying to get different perspectives into the newsroom. Otherwise, people are just going to write it off as saying that's just the narrative of the other side. Thank God I've Fox News to tell me the truth, which is how it's playing out right now.

Audience Question 6: Hi, I'm Brooke. I was an atheist that majored in religious studies. [audience chuckles]. And so, my question, related to what you just said, is, is there a similar kind of navel gazing conversation among conservative media that's going on? Because I feel like what you've been talking about is you know, empathy for arguments on the other side and that certainly seems to be that a lot of liberals have been having, mostly I think, because they're interested in winning elections. But, do you think that this conversation is necessary among similar conservative spaces whatever the analog of liberal universities is? And do you think that that conversation is necessary to restore a good faith argumentation in American politics? And if so, is there evidence that that's happening, or if not, how do we get there?

Stern: Yeah, I think everyone needs to have more navel gazing conversations in the future. I'm firmly in favor of navel gazing conversations. Yeah so, it's actually a really good question. Some people have said to me, somewhat as a challenge, well that's great that you as a liberal have gone out and tried to see things from the other side. Good for you, where's the conservative doing that? I don't think that I can only do it from my side. I'd love to see it from the other side. I don't see a lot of energy to try to see things from the liberal side, unfortunately. And I would love to see someone write "Democrat Like Me," I just don't know who's going to do that. Everything I would say about liberals is at least equally true on the other side. Everyone thinks they have a monopoly on fairness and tolerance and no one does. And, you know, it was great to go out and listen to conservatives and learn from them. They sure as hell should be doing the same. I don't see a lot of people doing that. Even among the people I grew to really admire and like, who I thought were smart and thoughtful, like Pete Wehner, Arthur Brooks, and others like that. Really admire them, but I think there needs to be equal attempt on both sides, because it's a two-way street, or it sort of becomes pointless.

Audience Question 7: I'm William Groon, and in the 1950s, my father and older brother were Communists. I'm now the third ward republican committee man. So, I've heard things from many sides. And I think looking at division, tribalism, is not helpful. A little preface, at Partners for Torah last week, rabbi Roberts was talking about why it's a holy day for Jews to be drunk, because the real self comes out. And he observed, interestingly, that the more authentic and interior a person lives, the more he finds in common with people. The more a person has social masks and lives on the surface, the more narrow his associations become. So, it's a matter of how we understand humanness. And, it's a sin to denigrate another person. So, these are just values of humanness that don't seem to carry in a lot of religious circles itself. A second observation, is it seems the Wall Street Journal always upholds western civilization as superior. This seems, to be in the world, a very unhelpful paradigm. We're heading into war with China with that kind of attitude, thinking they're malicious towards us. And there is a lot of projection of motives. So, my question is...well, I've talked to, not many, but students in philosophy from India and China and I've asked them if any of their professors have asked them what their native philosophies are and the answer is, what I've heard, is no. So, there's this bubble of philosophy in the west that's harmful, I think.

Patel: That's a perfectly, um, lively stand-alone comment. [To Stern] You're welcome to comment on it also. I didn't hear a question. So, we can let that stand alone as a comment or you can...

Stern: Um, yeah, so I'll say something...[said with hesitation]

Patel: That's what we do for a living right....[audience chuckles]

Stern: It seems ungracious not to say something, you know, in return to I think an interesting set of comments. I mean I would say there's something unique...I mean as much as we have....well I want to say something nice about America and sometimes it feels hard to do that. But there is something I think still unique about the fact that we are still open in ways that very few other countries are to different points of view and different perspective. I mean it's hard to be French without being French. It's still possible to be an American, to be of different backgrounds and diverse viewpoints. And that doesn't work...ultimately, I mean we've had lots of fights among ourselves and will continue to have lots of fights among ourselves. But, that idea doesn't work unless you buy into that notion that there is something special about an open society. And I think the biggest...Trump is not unique in trying to close the doors. I mean it's happened a lot of times in American history. And that seems to me, fairly un-American, about trying to close the doors. Because there is something special, and I don't know if it's from western civilization or just the American experience. You know, you don't become...of allowing different points of view, allowing different perspectives and different backgrounds, and I think we need to encourage that if that's our humanness, that's our special sauce. And I worry that were losing that in this day in age.

Audience Question 8: Hello, and welcome to St. Louis. My name is Iris Fletcher Preston. And I have a question for both of you. From my observation, at least within the past twenty years, the political discourse in this country has been, or has appeared to have been, somewhat uncivilized when individuals with opposing political viewpoints are discussing whatever the issues are. I made this observation a few years ago actually on Fox and CNN. I am politically independent and I always have been. So, I look at both sides of an issue and, um, what I've noticed and what I have observed in the mass media is that many talk show hosts tend to undermine or hinder the first amendment and freedom of speech when they're talking to someone with opposing views. And I've noticed this even on talk radio on the...not only here in St. Louis but all over the country. But it definitely occurs on television. So, what is your take on individuals hindering freedom of speech and other's first amendment rights, who have opposing views?

Stern: So, here's the observation I have about the news media. So, not very long ago, the accurate narrative around the news media was that it was failing. Newspapers were going out of business. Internet startups in the new space were failing. It was a terrible business to be in. I think what the news media has learned in the Trump era, that Fox news figured out ling ago, is that anger sells. Trump has actually saved the news media because people have figured out that taking one side of the story, I think to your experience, and really driving it hard, really drives audience. The New York Times, now, says it has gone over a billion dollars a year in subscriptions. And I would bet heavily that is people who are being drawn by their coverage of the Trump administration...their unfavorable coverage of the Trump administration. The news media may have its challenges but they're not stupid. And they learn what sells and what doesn't sell. And I think they've learned the story, sort of your observation, which is taking one side implicitly works as a business perspective. And that's why, on CNN.....I talked with Frank Sesno last night, the former CNN correspondent and now the dean of the public media school at George Washington, who remembers when CNN actually did reporting. CNN doesn't do reporting anymore. It does often really interesting opinion, but it's definitely opinion. They've found that opinion works. Implicitly that means opinion from one side. And that means excluding, belittling, or driving out opinion from the other side and I think that’s probably what you’ve experienced, unfortunately.

Audience Question 9: Hi, my name is Russ Thomson and I’ll try to make this concise. You did say a lot of very interesting things. You mentioned Kenyon and I graduated a lesbian daughter from Kenyon two years ago. I asked her to come tonight. She didn’t make it. I would’ve loved to have heard her opinion, of being gay in Kenyon. I own an AR-15, I have a thirty-round clip, voted for Trump. I consider myself socially very liberal, fiscally very conservative...I said I’d keep this concise...toured Georgetown and the young lady leading us around was talking about the wide variety of speakers they have. Bill Clinton, Hilary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, some other prominent Democrats. And I asked her if they have a wide variety of other opinion people as speakers. She said well...so that addresses the academia situation, which I think is fairly liberal these days, and I’d like your opinion on that. And then, one other thing. I heard Ted Koppel, he wrote a book recently. He was talking to Hannity, which I don’t watch much, but he said that there used to be a law or a rule that said if you were conducting editorial news you had to say it was editorial. That law went away and that’s how we got the plethora of basically kind of left and kind of right opinionated cable news that we have these days. And you mentioned CNN. I work in Ferguson. Don Lindman asked me a question one night when a big protest was starting. He said would you mind saying a word. I’m like no not at all. They brought over the camera, turned it on, he said hey all these people are taking off protesting here. He goes, you think that’s wrong, don’t you? I was like, yeah, wrong, no....so, I gave him my two cents worth about how it’s their right to do that. That did not make the news.

Stern: So, I’ll try to be brief. I think one of the things you’re referring to, I think, is something called the fairness doctrine, which applied to all FCC licensed television and radio stations for many years. Not cable, because cable is not licensed by the FCC. But that was a rule, essentially of equal time, that if you provide one set of perspectives, as a matter of public service, you had to provide the other side as well. That went away a nuber of years ago of a belief that there were so many voices out there you didn’t need that. No one station had that public service obligation. Um, and you could debate the impact of it but that was the change that probably Ted was referring to. I think whether that sort of regulatory change was right or not, it has had a central change inside the media where people don’t feel as much responsibility as in the past with people saying that we really have to provide all sides. And I will say, from time to time, I’m critical of the media, so in all fairness, to be equal time, I know many journalists doing amazing work. And some of the work, the coverage of the Trump administration, is actually critical to our understanding of what’s going on in the world. I think it’s hard to have a nuanced conversation about these things, so I just sort of want to give equal time to it's complicated. We really need to be introspective in the media, but also recognize the important work that a lot of journalists, whether you include Don Lemon in that or not, do every day.

Audience Question 10: So, you had a lot of experiences that made you come up with a new mindset. And I'm a senior here and I think that as college students, it's really uncommon to have those experiences because we're here in the classroom. So, what do you think the role of the university should be in enforcing and encouraging students to get outside the classroom and hear these stories that change their mindsets, as well?

Stern: I think, it's a great question. It's hard for me to speak to universities and their responsibilities, but I can't imagine that the university doesn't have the responsibility to bring in competing points of view...into the university and exposing their students to different points of view. Or helping them get out of the community and meet people of divergent backgrounds, divergent ideas. It seems like that's....you know I had to wait until I was fifty two to have some of those experiences; I hope others don't have to wait.

Audience Question 11: Paul Shultz – I like coming to these things too. How does one draw the line between having the reasonable position of there's people of good faith on the other side and not become, I think the repugnant position, of there's good people on both sides, that our President took, for instance, in Charlottesville.

Stern: A really interesting question, and maybe not exactly what you're asking, but sort of like, we want to be respectful of other points of views and learn from other points of views, and you want to reject repugnant points of views. And where do you draw the line - really hard. And you know, for me, I drew the line at the gun show around the guy that was selling Nazi paraphernalia. It was a pretty obvious line, but others have chosen to draw it line in ways that I think are much more problematic, you know around people's views on – we talked about this in class today - on religious issues, religious tests, kicking Evangelical groups like InterVarsity off of campus because they have prohibitions against...- let's call it 'sexual congress'; I like using that word, that phrase - outside of the bonds of marriage, whether its heterosexual or homosexual. There is, I think, a new norm, where I think we're drawing the lines very tight about what is appropriate discourse and what is a legitimate point of view. As much as I never want to talk to a Nazi, and have even been trolled online by him, I think in a contra-pluralistic country, we're closing the door to points on the other side, we have to be really careful about excluding anyone from the conversation. I think for myself, I chose to drew the line at something sort of obvious, but I would be reluctant to reject conversations with almost virtually anyone else.

Patel: Great. So, we're going to do two one and a half sentences each. Bang, bang! And then you're [directed towards Stern] going to answer the easier of the two questions. So here, and then here. One and a half sentences each.

Audience Question 12: Thank you. Hi, my name is Jack Gillis; you talked a little bit about the trends in society, giving one narrow example you can actually measure these things and if you look at the degree of partisanship in the US Congress, it's reached a level that we hadn't experienced since the time of the Civil War. And yet you also cited that a lot of this is just innate; it's part of our personality. You cited one study with the children where they were divided into random teams. And so some of this is just in us; there's this tribalism that you described. If both those things are true, first, why are we on this trend line if it's sort of always been in us and if we understand that, how do we reverse it?

Audience Question 13: So, my question is about....well, so before you talked about facts and how they could be seen different ways, but I guess how do you have productive conversations when the facts seem indisputable or scientific facts, such as in cases like evolution. Like how do you still have a productive conversation when you just can't wrap your head around the other side, I guess?

Stern: Yeah, gosh those are hard questions. So, this is an area of hard questions. I think that's one of the things about it and I approach this with humility. So it's interesting you mention evolution, because so many Americans believe in Creationism, and I mean one of the things I did, one of the experiences I had when writing the book is I went to the Creation Museum in Kentucky, Northern Kentucky, and spent a day making fun of Creationists. But, you know forty percent of Americans still believe, and it's always been the case no matter, you know people tie in sort of a belief in Creationism with a lack of education. But, as the country has gotten more educated, it has not changed the number of people who believe in Creationism at all. And I think at some point, I think it's really hard, because it's so...it's such a difficult one for me to deal with on sort of a personal level. At some point you got to say, belief systems do not agree. We got to agree to disagree and try to be respectful of others along the way. And it's really hard. It was one of the hardest chapters for me to write because I could not put my hands around people with such opposing points of view. But, if we want to live in a community, if we don't want to divide into sort of 'Red-landia' and 'Blue-landia' and have split countries, we're going to have to find ways to say, listen, I can live....believing in Creationism doesn't define someone. The people who believe in Creation are whole people with lots of different points of view, who live in communities, who contribute to their communities, and have lots of different things to sort of...it doesn't make them un-American, it doesn't make them people who aren't contributing to their communities. I met a lot of people along the way who I didn't agree with but admired them for the things they were in their communities. And I think we need to say, we don't have to agree on everything. We don't have to...but we have to honor our disagreements and recognize it and look for places where we can find common ground. So, of the people who believe in Creationism, I bet I can find almost something to like in almost all of them. Places where we agree and can respectfully disagree on the fact that God did not literally create earth in six days and that, you know, the history of biological evolution built over two hundred years of tests and re-testing. You know, the scientific method is something I value and admire. It doesn't have to mean that we can't be part of the same community. That's my best shot at that one. Sorry I went more than a sentence and a half.

Patel: [Directed towards Stern] So, thank you for your time with us on stage. [Audience claps] Your book addresses all of these issues. One of things I love about your book, in addition to the excellent writing and the prolific cuss words, is that it doesn't shy away from these really hard issues. You find things that are, in effect, hardest about the other side and you go investigate those and you ask yourself hard questions in the course of this book. So, I would highly recommend the book and thank you again for your time with us.

Stern: Thank you for that. Thank you for having me. I really enjoyed it and thank you all for coming.

Inazu: And that book and Eboo's book will both be available for purchase right outside during our dessert reception and for a signing. And Ken mentioned good journalists doing important work. A reminder that our next discussion in this series is with Emma Green of the Atlantic on April 3rd right here. Thanks and good night. [Audience claps]

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