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WHAT BINDS AMERICANS TODAY: IDEALS OR IDENTITY?

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

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OPENING REMARKS AND RECOGNITION OF GORDON WOOD:

WILLIAM A. GALSTON

Senior Fellow and Ezra K. Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies, The Brookings Institution

PANEL ONE:

MODERATOR: WILLIAM A. GALSTON

Senior Fellow and Ezra K. Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies, The Brookings Institution

ROGERS SMITH

Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

YUVAL LEVIN

Founder, Editor in Chief, National Affairs
Director of Social, Cultural, and Constitutional Studies, American Enterprise Institute

PANEL TWO:

MODERATOR: E.J. DIONNE, JR.

W. Averell Harriman Chair in American Governance and Senior Fellow, Governance Studies,
The Brookings Institution

SCOTT R. ANDERSON

Senior Fellow, Governance Studies, The Brookings Institution
General Counsel and Senior Editor, Lawfare

KEON L. GILBERT

Senior Fellow and Director, Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative,
The Brookings Institution

JONATHON RAUCH

Senior Fellow, Center for Effective Public Management, The Brookings Institution

CONSTANZE STELZENMÜLLER

Fritz Stern Chair on Germany and Transatlantic Relations, Senior Fellow and Director, Center
on the United States and Europe, The Brookings Institution

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GALSTON: Welcome everybody. I'm Bill Galston, a senior fellow in Governance Studies at Brookings, and it's my pleasure to welcome you here to continue Brookings' celebration of our nation's 250th anniversary. This event is, however, tinged with sorrow. Gordon Wood, the great historian of the American Revolutionary era, was to be with us today participating in the first panel. But just weeks ago, he was hit by a car and died soon thereafter. Although he was ninety-two, he still had much to contribute, and he was eager to do so despite increasing infirmity. Witness the fact that he immediately accepted my invitation to make the journey from Rhode Island to Washington, DC to be with us.

As a young scholar, and I know I'm not alone in this, I was deeply influenced by Gordon's work and wrote some articles about it. Later on, our paths crossed several times, and I learned that he was not only a distinguished historian but also a fervent, if quizzical, patriot and an altogether wonderful man. He was a great American, indeed a quintessential American, and he'll be sorely missed. But although he is no longer with us, his ideas live on, especially in his most influential books, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776 to 1787*, and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, which he published some twenty-three years after his first notable book.

And I think it's altogether appropriate that we honor Gordon Wood today by taking one of his final speeches as our point of departure. It's by no means obvious that July 4th, 1776, should be singled out as America's birthday. Why not September 3rd, 1783, when the colonists in Great Britain signed a treaty recognizing the United Colonies as a sovereign independent country with agreed-on boundaries? For that matter, why not June 21st, 1788, when the Constitution formally and legally came into effect after the required ninth state ratified it? Nevertheless, it was recognized almost from the start that in the sense that mattered most, July 4th represented the true beginning.

And when we begin at this beginning, we immediately encounter a problem. The very first sentence of the declaration speaks of circumstances in which it is necessary for, I quote, "One people to separate from another." But were the colonists, in fact, a people? And if so, what made them one? This was a question to which Gordon Wood returned throughout his life, and it is the question that animates today's opening panel. In a speech delivered down the block at AEI just a few months ago, Wood offered a brief but pointed answer to this question, and I quote, "The United States is not a nation like other nations, and it never has been. There never has been any American ethnicity to back up the state called the United States, and there was no such distinctive ethnicity even in 1776." Despite, I

must add, what John Jay understandably but wrongly wrote in Federalist Paper Number Two Wood claimed no originality for his view. Instead, he quoted John Adams, who said, quote, "We're a hodgepodge of people, such an omnium-gatherum of English, Irish, German, Dutch, Swedes, French, and et cetera, that it's difficult to give a name to the country characteristic of the people."

And Wood added to that Native Americans and seven hundred thousand e- inhabitants of African descent. So hodgepodge nation. If not shared ethnicity, then what made Americans a people? To answer this question, Wood drew on a famous speech Abraham Lincoln delivered in Chicago on July 10th of 1858. Lincoln began exactly where John Adams did, by noting the diverse origins of America's population. Unlike most other countries, our common descent could not be the basis of national unity. But when people of different backgrounds who came to the United States generations after the revolution encounter the principle that all men are created equal, Lincoln declared, and I quote, "They have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood and flesh of the main- of the men who wrote that declaration, and so they are."

And Lincoln famously concluded, "That is the electric cord in that declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together." In Jefferson's declaration, Wood said, Lincoln found a solution to the great problem of American identity, how the great variety of individuals in America with all their diverse ethnicities, races, and religions could be brought together into one nation. To be an American, Wood wrote, is not to be someone, but to believe in something. That is why we are a creedal nation, and that is why the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the declaration is so important. In an essay published in 2019, Wood argued that of the beliefs that hold us together, the most important is the belief that all men are created equal.

The idea of equality, Wood concluded, is the most radical and most powerful force that the revolution unleashed. It is still alive and well in America, he insisted, and despite all of its disturbing and unsettling consequences, that is what makes us one people. Couldn't get clearer than that. Powerful stuff, but was he right? In a famous letter written in 1825, just a year before his death, Thomas Jefferson actually offered support for Wood's thesis. "There is nothing original about the Declaration," Jefferson said. Rather, it expressed what he called the American mind, what Americans of the revolutionary period instinctively believed based on the books they read and the experiences they shared, and it drew its authority from these shared sentiments and beliefs.

But we may ask, was Jefferson's account of his own time accurate? And more to the point, does his account offer a full picture of what Americans have believed since 1776? Has the United States ever been of one mind, uniformly dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, as Jefferson's most influential follower asserted? Or is the truth more complicated and more troubling? To explore these questions, our first panel features two outstanding scholars of American political thought. Nearest to me, Yuval Levin, the Director of Social, Cultural, and Constitutional Studies at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of many important books, including most recently, *American Covenant: How the Constitution Unified Our Nation and Could Again*.

To his, Yuval's stage left, Rogers Smith, now Emeritus from his longtime Chaired Professorship at the University of Pennsylvania, former President of the American Political Science Association, and the author of many well-known books, notably his book, *Civic Ideals*, widely regarded as a landmark study of diverse and competing narratives of American identity. Rogers? You can either go there or stay here. Oh, good. Yep.

SMITH: I was trying to follow your example as always, Bill.

GALSTON: Yeah, my example was a one-off, not to be imitated. So at any rate, let's get right to it. Okay. My first question goes to Rogers. Very simply, was Gordon Wood right? Are we a creedal nation, and is the Declaration that creed?

SMITH: I don't think that Gordon Wood was right. But let me begin by saying I'm feel privileged to be part of this discussion with my two outstanding colleagues here, and my disagreement does not at all diminish my admiration for Gordon Wood. Reading his *Creation of the American Republic* as an undergraduate was one of the books that made me aspire to become an academic. And I have always particularly admired the way that book and his later books gave attention to the ideas of the American revolutionaries, both in history and in my discipline of political science. There are many who dismiss the significance of ideas believing that material and psychological interests drive everything without recognizing, in my view that the-- those notions of interests are in part constituted by people's ideas.

And the work of Gordon Wood particularly illuminated the ideas that led Americans to embrace Republican self-governance, and I think we're all indebted to him for that. I did come to feel that

America was constituted by a wider range of ideas than Gordon Wood dealt with, in part because he didn't share many of the ideas that I think have nonetheless been deeply constitutive of American identity throughout our history. The claim that we're a creedal nation that Gordon would advance in his lecture and in other locations, I think expresses more what he thought Americans should be than a historical account of who and what we have actually been.

I contend that America has been defined not by overwhelming allegiance to a single creed, but rather by contestation, an evolving contestation over who we are as a people, but a contestation with a specific content. And you can see that contestation embodied in the very Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence was the product of a revolutionary movement led overwhelmingly by property white Christian men. But property white Christian men who felt impelled to justify their cause to those they sought to lead to the broader world, and probably to themselves in terms of the ideals expressed in the second sentence of the declaration saying that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that governments are instituted to secure these rights deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

And it is that second sentence that provides the content of the creed that Abraham Lincoln did say defined American identity and that Gordon Wood endorsed. If you read through the declaration as a whole, you will see other elements reflecting other aspirations and beliefs of the founding generation. You will see amongst their grievances the complaint that the king has incited insurrections amongst us, and by that, they were referring to the fact that Lord Dunmore of Virginia had promised freedom to enslaved Africans who would join the British cause against the American revolutionaries, and there were many who supported the American Revolution who also supported the institution of slavery and regarded it as just.

You'll also find a complaint that the king has called upon the revolutionaries assaults by those it refers to as merciless Indian savage- savages because the founding fathers were unhappy that the king had indicated that the revolutionary, that the American colonies should not move west of the Appalachian Mountains, taking land from the native tribes, which they felt entitled and called to do. The declaration also complains that the king has eliminated English laws in a neighboring province and threatened to subject the other colonies to the absolute rule of that colony. They're talking about Quebec, and how the French Catholics in Quebec had their legal systems upheld by the king as part of the settlement

that ended the Seven Years' War, and the Overwhelmingly Protestant colonists objected to the king treating the French Catholics as if they were on the same level as the American re- revolutionaries.

Now, you can describe these as simply expressions of the material interests and ambitions of the revolutionaries. But many of them sincerely believed that this was supposed to be a Protestant Christian nation that it had a providential mission from God to expand a civilization that they saw as genuinely superior to that of the indigenous peoples. And they felt many of them that the institution of slavery was one that had historically been a support of great republics and should be a support of great republics. They had ideas defending these different grievances in the Declaration, and that established a contestation over whether the ideals of the second sentence or the ideals that are expressed in their grievances about the indigenous tribes, about enslaved labor, about Catholics in Quebec whether those would define what Americans would become.

Gordon Wood notes in his lecture that most of the founding generation did believe that Americans would have to become a more homogenous people, and there were efforts to create greater homogeneity right from the very start, always in tension with the message of the second sentence that we should recognize universal rights for all. Now, that second sentence, very influential in American development. The second sentence was reflected, for example, in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, which stated that people are born free and equal. And in 1783, the Massachusetts Supreme Court said that means slavery is abolished in the state of Massachusetts under the state constitution.

But when they came to write what became the US Constitution in Philadelphia in 1787, the Southern delegates were well aware of that example, and you will not find in the Constitution a direct echo of the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence. It does speak about the blessings of liberty, but it says these are to be secured for ourselves and our posterity, not universally for all humanity. And that led to disputes throughout the antebellum era about whether the United States was dedicated to the principles of the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence. Debates over how that second sentence should be understood. Debates over whether it was really binding on the American people at all.

And it was that contestation between those who saw this fundamentally as a nation of propertied white Christian men and those who saw it as a nation dedicated to the universal egalitarian ideals of the second sentence that shaped and defined much of the development of the American Republic.

And the clash between those ultimately produced in the build up to the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln did take the view that the United States was dedicated to fulfilling the principles of the Declaration of Independence' second sentence. Gradually over time Stephen Douglas, his opponent in 1860, took the view, we're dedicated to the Declaration of Independence, but he said it applies only to white men, people of European descent.

And he said explicitly it did not apply to those he called Negroes, Indians and Mongols and other, quote, "inferior races," in his language. And Alexander Stephens, who became vice president of the Confederacy, announced that the Declaration of Independence was simply wrong when it said all men are created equal, and he said the cornerstone of the new Confederacy was exactly the opposite view that in fact men were not created equal and the Confederacy should be a white supremacist community. You might say that shows that Alexander Stephens wasn't an American, but when he was a Whig congressman serving alongside Abraham Lincoln, they were best friends. They had this one fundamental difference. But I can't imagine that Abraham Lincoln would ever have said that Alexander Stephens was not an American.

He was an American with a different view of what America should be than what Abraham Lincoln believed. Now I think to the great credit of the United States the view of Lincoln that the country should be dedicated to the principles of the second sentence of the Declaration was written into the Constitution by the three great Reconstruction Amendments. And Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax said that he loved Section 1 of the 14th Amendment because it embedded the Declaration of the Independence and the Constitution clearly for the first time. But that didn't settle the ongoing contestation over what the Declaration means and over whether we're really dedicated to the principles of the Declaration.

Moving into the Progressive Era, you had reformers like the Wisconsin economist John R. Commons who were influenced by the race science and then eventually the eugenics of that period who wrote explicitly that the notion that all are created equal should not be taken literally. And he said that race is the fundamental definer of human experience. He thought perhaps those he viewed as less advanced races could be elevated over time to enjoy equal rights, but he didn't believe that all were created equal or entitled to possession of equal rights. And when those kinds of views led to the 1924 Immigration Act imposing racial restrictions and quotas on who had access to American citizenship

via immigration and naturalization, the co-sponsor of that act, Albert Johnson of the State of Washington although he was actually born in Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, Illinois.

Albert Johnson wrote that immigration restriction, race-based immigration restriction, was a second Declaration of Independence because he said the day of the indiscriminate acceptance of all races has come to an end. That kind of contestation has continued with I'm glad to say, real progress in expanding civil rights through our history. So the view that Lincoln advanced and that Gordon Wood endorsed, that we're a country that is dedicated to the principles of the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence that has become more powerful over time. But it has never ceased to be contested. It is being contested in our own time.

We have recent speeches by Missouri Senator Eric Schmitt by Vice President JD Vance who say explicitly that it's not true that you become an American just if you believe, as Schmitt put it, in five words in the Declaration of Independence, all men are created equal. And they have insisted that if you are descended from ancestors who helped create this country and people who fought on either side of the Civil War then you are truly American and maybe more American in their view than a recent immigrant who professes belief in the principles of the Declaration of Independence. The contestation of between these different elements in our American traditions, for me, that is what has defined American peoplehood throughout our history. The contestation continues today. And I would not say that the fact that Eric Schmitt and JD Vance don't believe that you only have to believe in the principles of the Declaration of Independence to be an American, the fact that they don't accept that we're a creedal nation, in my mind, that doesn't mean that they're not Americans.

It would be a bit surprising if we concluded that a senator and a vice president are not in fact Americans because they don't accept a creedal view of the Constitution. We might think that means that they are bad Americans. Others might think that means they are good Americans. But that's the contestation continuing, that distinctive contestation that defines who we are as, The American people. And it is a contestation I believe that is best carried forward by seeking not to insist that these people are Americans and those people are not Americans feeding into the polarization that defines our time.

But rather through continuing the contestation over who we are in ways that tries to find as much as we can constructive compromises where we can agree on some measures that help us progress as a

people in light of what the great majority of us can agree on to be our best traditions of American identity. And so I was pleased when Yuval's recent book read the Constitution as an instrument for those kinds of compromises. If we are a people that recognizes that we have been defined by contestation over who we are, but we have found ways to progress nonetheless, then there's a chance that we might continue to do it in the future.

GALSTON: A powerful counterpoint. And so there we have a, there we have a continuum with perhaps two poles. Gordon Wood at one end and Rogers Smith at the other. Where do you yourself on this continuum? Or are there more dimensions than are dreamt of in Rogers's imagination?

LEVIN: Maybe there are. I, Thank you, Bill, and thank you, Rogers. It's an honor to be here with the two of you, and it's daunting to think that the person who was meant to be here with the two of you is Gordon Wood. I certainly can't satisfy that and fill those shoes. I would add to the quote you offered from the speech he gave at AEI, Bill, by just giving you a little background about how he came to give that speech. We, we... He received our annual award this past year and had planned to give a talk, a wonderful talk, which he wrote and sent to us about the evolution of his own thinking about the character of the American founding. Trying to make sense of some of the differences between his two great books *The Creation of the American Republic* and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*.

And then J.D. Vance gave a speech on this subject, and then Gordon Wood decided that he would instead speak about the question of whether America was a creedal nation or not, and gave what I thought was a very powerful case for seeing the Declaration of Independence as the, a-as announcing the core principle that defines the American character. And I guess I think that's what he said, rather than trying to use the Declaration to dis-- define the boundaries of Americanness. And I wanna say a few words about the difference between those two because I think it gets at some of the very good points that Rogers raises, but maybe also points out the disagreement that I have with him ultimately.

The second sentence of the Declaration does not s- answer the question, "Who is an American?" The second sentence of the Declaration answers the question, "What is a legitimate government?" And it dis-- it is offered as a reason why the Americans believed they were justified in breaking the bonds that had connected them with Britain. They declare themselves to be a separate people before that in the first sentence of the Declaration without offering much of a definition of what a separate people

means or of what exactly they are as a people. All good questions, which we might wrestle with. But it is in explaining why sometimes political revolutions are necessary that they resort to the conviction that all men are created equal and endowed with certain rights, that governments exist to secure those rights, and that those governments that don't do that can be overthrown and replaced with governments that do.

That doesn't suggest that the people being described are the people who ascribe to all of those views. The American people are the American people and exactly what that means is not specified, I think, in the Declaration itself. And as Rogers suggests the arguments made don't end with that second sentence either. In fact, having laid out the principles that legitimate revolution, the Declaration says, that doesn't mean that in every case when these are violated revolution should happen. Prudence should dictate that people should put up with difficult times for as long as they can, but we can't. And then they list the grievances which take up most of the Declaration of Independence.

And as Rogers suggests, there is in those grievances a lot. Those grievances are not an expounding upon the second sentence of the Declaration. They describe a very specific political situation. And yet I do think that in having declared themselves to the world in that particular way, those that generation of Americans set the country they launched on a path which meant that its character came to be defined by those premises. So that even if American character was not at the outset simply the second sentence of the Declaration, which I certainly think it wasn't, over time the character of our nation has developed, and that happens over time in any nation in a way that has oriented itself by the Declaration of Independence to a very unusual degree.

And I'd say more than that, the American people's character is rooted in the character of our regime to a very unusual degree. We are a people defined by its politics in an extremely unusual, maybe unique way among the nations of the earth. The people declared themselves first when declaring a government and they have, we have had that essentially same system of government for a very long time. We might say it began with the Declaration, so that we've had the same system of government for two hundred and fifty years. Maybe it began with the Constitution. That's still two hundred and thirty-nine years. It's still older than any other government that now exists on the earth. The British can claim they had institutions with the same names in 1800 that they have now, but no one would say they were the same institutions.

Ours are. The American people have been defined by one kind of government for a very long time, and as a result of that, they've come to understand themselves through the lens of that government in a very unusual way. And that kind of government is also a distinctly principle-based government. It's not just about equality, although I would argue that is the central conviction that then drives the others, but it's also about a certain idea of the rule of law and a sense of the need for the separation of powers, a conviction that certain basic rights are essential to political freedom and political life.

Liberalism, in a classical sense, has been part of the American character from the very beginning, and I do think that to call that creedal is not wrong. Now it's been contested, but the fact that our politics has revolved around a contestation of this creed doesn't to me say that our character is not creedal. There isn't really another nation on the earth that would say that its history has been defined by a contestation over a creed. The American people stand out in that way, and they are-- we are like other nations in a lot of ways. We have a history, we have a geographic home, a common experience that defines us, but we are unlike most other nations in a few key ways, one of which is our immense diversity.

The American people were diverse even at the end of the 18th century relative to Europe. We're certainly very diverse now relative to everyone, and that is distinct about our story and our character. And as I've suggested, we're also distinct in that we have a, an unusually principle-based understanding of what our country is about. And I think the fact that we have been fighting over this from the very beginning tends to reinforce the sense that this is central to who we are rather than to suggest that it isn't. But I would not say that this defines who is an American and who is not. I think it distinguishes the character of our society from others, but the argument that Vice President Vance and others want to have is an argument that is against an opponent that doesn't quite exist. They want to answer the charge that says anybody who believes that all men are created equal is an American.

I don't think anybody makes that argument. I don't think Gordon Wood believes that. It doesn't seem to me that was his view. And I don't think that's the case to be joined here. The idea that Americanness is defined by a conviction that we are all equal, and that therefore anybody in the world who believes it is automatically an American, is not any way to read the Declaration of Independence. But the notion that we, as a people, have this set of ideas in an unusually central

place in our own character as a nation does seem to me undeniable, and one way to describe what that means, I think, is that we are a creedal nation.

GALSTON: I have a lot of questions, but I'm more interested in the dialogue here. Rogers, what would you say to that?

SMITH: We're not too far apart. Yeah. The question is whether we should come down to the conclusion that we are a creedal nation because we have always had contestation over how far the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence defines our purposes and our identity as people. I think it can be misleading to describe us as a creedal nation. Bill read the quote from Gordon Wood which says- Yeah ... that being an American isn't a matter of who you are it's a matter of what you believe.

LEVIN: And I do disagree with that, I would say.

SMITH: And so again- Yeah ... we don't have a great difference. And I would also underline that by noting that when I wrote the book *Civic Ideals*, and came out in 1997 at that point for two-thirds of American history the majority of the world's population was legally ineligible to become an American citizen because of their race and that was true regardless of whether or not they believed in the principles of the Declaration of Independence. For three-quarters of American history at that point, a majority of the domestic adult population had been denied full citizenship in the sense of economic, social, and political rights regardless of whether they believed all people are created equal.

The disfranchisement of people of color and of women meant that through most of our history the idea that we were defined by our belief that all are equal ran, sharply against the actual legal structuring of American citizenship. Now, you can take the view as many of the progressives did following Lincoln that the, the second sentence began as a statement of government legitimacy, but it became a statement of the purposes of the American political project, purposes to be realized over time. And the fact that we have become, in important respects, in a more inclusive and egalitarian nation you can say if you wish that proves that the project of the American political community is defined by the second sentence of the Declaration. But if you make that claim, you have to come to grips with the reality that we have never come anywhere close actually to fulfilling that principle and that at the current moment I think in important respects we are moving away from it.

LEVIN: Let me try to distinguish two things there because I agree with a lot of that. But I think there is a difference between saying that the, that second sentence of the Declaration defines who in the world gets to be an American and saying that it defines how we treat Americans. I do think that it requires that we understand all Americans to be equal under the law because they are equal, but I don't think it means that we understand everyone to be an American. And that means that the argument we're having today about this question, which is ultimately about immigration doesn't make a lot of sense. But that the case made by the civil rights movement, that the Declaration of Independence demands a change in the mode of American life was absolutely justified by the Declaration. I think these are different points to draw out of out of that second sentence.

SMITH: I would say it's I think, in tension with the second sentence of the declaration to have a refugee policy for instance, that is confined solely to white Afrikaners viewed-

LEVIN: I think it's wrong. Yeah. But the idea that a people defines its own boundaries strikes me as part of what it means to speak of a people as the declaration does.

SMITH: I agree with that. The, And I think it's true that the project of the United States to make sure that all have secure enjoyment of basic rights is a project that is understood to be first and foremost, a project for American citizens. It is also true nonetheless that the declaration has been understood by many including Lincoln- Yeah ... to be an aspiration to ultimately to extend the benefits of basic liberties to, as Lincoln put it, all people of all colors everywhere.

LEVIN: Right.

SMITH: And so it does have relevance.

LEVIN: Yeah, absolutely. But not to extend American citizenship to all people of all colors everywhere, but to see these principles come to be adopted as modes of life in other nations, as by the way, it has happened in a lot of the world, thankfully.

GALSTON: Yes. I'm gonna interrupt this theory by playing political scientist for just a minute. One of the things we do here at Brookings every year is to help craft something that we call the American Values Survey. And last year, inspired in part by the J.D. Vance speech, which has been referred to

more than once, we decided to test out some propositions empirically. When you ask Americans What they think it means to be a true American.

What do they think? And here's a snapshot of a small set of the results. 88% of the respondents in our survey said that believing in the Declaration of Independence was an important attribute of being a true American. 88% compared to 42% who said that the true Americans were ones who had ancestors who did military service in past American wars, and just 23% said being of Western European heritage. Does that report of American public opinion have, in your judgment, any bearing whatsoever on the questions the two of you have been debating?

LEVIN: I think it's great to hear. And yes, look I think it means that when you ask Americans what our country is about, they do look to creed. Now, they probably don't look at it, to the extent that we've been trying to do here or parse the terms exactly in one way or another. I don't know if they think of it as defining Americanness in a way that extends beyond citizens of our country or not, but I agree with them that the American-- that the Declaration of Independence is crucial to the American story and the American character. And I'm glad to see that number is so high.

SMITH: I read those numbers as confirming my argument. Because it is far from unanimous that people define ourselves-- that Americans define ourselves in terms of the Declaration of Independence. You have a majority, and I'm glad to hear it that stress that the Declaration of Independence is a component of American identity. But then we have to ask how they understand the Declaration of Independence. Again, Stephen Douglas thought the Declaration of Independence was an important component of American identity. And you have substantial minorities that take different views. I would certainly agree, and I think I indicated that the belief that we as a people should be dedicated to the project of the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence has grown more powerful through our history, and I think that's a good thing. But the reality is, as an empirical matter, we continue to have significant differences in contestation over what the Declaration means and over, and o- over whether it really is primary in defining American identity.

GALSTON: We have spent a lot of time on the second sentence of the Declaration, and it's altogether fitting and proper that we do however, there is a first sentence, and, and there is a term in the first sentence that was taken to be self-evident in the same way as the terms of the second sentence, and that term, of course, is people, right? It's taken as an unexamined premise that Americans are, in fact,

one people in 1776 of all times. And that raises a question that's broader than the first sentence, but it's absolutely critical to the legitimacy project that Yuval was talking about because when you read farther on you find out that it is the right of the people to determine whether the government that they have created or perhaps that they have inherited is, is securing rights or invading them, and it is their right not only to make that judgment, to act on that judgment. So when we hear the term people, a people, one people, what on earth does that mean? It's not a rhetorical question. What does it mean?

LEVIN: It's an excellent question, and the document doesn't answer it. I think on the one hand, we can point to a relatively straightforward definition that takes a people to be a group with an, a shared political identity that shares a geography and governs itself, and the Declaration is an argument for national self-determination and for the legitimacy of a people making a choice like this for themselves. Now, there's also just an assertion there since the Americans, on the one hand, could have been thought to be part of another people. That's certainly what the British thought. They also could have been thought to be several quite different- ... and distinct peoples as in some respects they were.

I think they, they ultimately answered that question in the course of the war and after. The American people are certainly a people by now. They became a people long ago. I'm not so sure they were a people when they called themselves that in the Declaration. That could easily just be best understood as a-as, as wishful thinking. But their wish came true. Here we are.

SMITH: You note that Gordon Wood in that lecture and published as a Wall Street Journal piece pretty much stated that they were in error when they said that they were already a people. He insisted as the historian Edmund Morgan also did, that the American nationality is the child, not the parent of the American Revolution. Excuse me. I think that is in a significant measure, true, as Yuval has just said. They were not yet fully formed political people, and I understand a political people is a community that believes it has significant measure of self-governing authority that entitles it to trump the claims on it of rival political authorities.

But it would also be wrong to say that they were creating a people for-- de novo, from nothing. They did have shared senses of identity already. They certainly had senses of belonging to different colonies. But at this point, they had gone through a process where they had come to have a shared sense of themselves as aggrieved North American colonists and aggrieved colonists that had been

treated in ways that justified their coming together and asserting their political independence against British claims of authority over them.

And that sense of themselves as aggrieved colonists of the British Empire while that was the greatest unifying feature it is true that they were certainly defining themselves as a people in contrast to the indigenous tribes in contrast to the enslaved Africans they, in contrast to the French Catholics in Quebec. So they did have a sense of their distinctive ethnocultural identity that was already present when they proclaimed their independence. Again, it's reflected in their grievances.

LEVIN: Yeah I largely agree with that. I think there was more of a sense of internal diversity and division among them than might now seem to us looking at them. They all look alike and they were alike from our distance. But they understood themselves to be divided along some religious lines. There was even a Catholic signer of the declaration, and they certainly noticed that. The sense that there was a lot of work to do to hold such a people together was very powerfully felt among them and continued to be you, you see it hanging as a dark cloud over the Constitutional Convention in every one of their discussions. You mentioned John Jay's much more wishful thinking- ... in, in Federalist 2, which I think is just w- indefensible as a description of the America of the late 18th century.

But the- that was an attempt to answer the challenge of what will hold us together, and a lot of the rest of the arguments we know from the Federalist were too. James Madison takes up that same challenge, rejecting Jay's description and s- and suggesting the country is very divided, but also that it might be possible to hold it together, nonetheless. So I think this question of what makes this one people didn't go away for quite a long time.

SMITH: Yeah. On these points, unfortunately, we're in strenuous agreement.

GALSTON: Yes. So be it. I do have another question about the much neglected first paragraph, another assumption that's built into It's an, it's more than an assumption, it's an assertion that the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle each people to sovereignty and independence. You might say that this is the theoretical basis for the argument against multinational empires, and therefore the foundation of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. What do we think about the proposition- Yeah, you know, one people, one country?

LEVIN: On this point, Bill I then, there's been there's been a segment of the right in the last 10 years that's called itself nationalist. Yes. And they've tended to start by rejecting the tradition of the declaration. And I've tried to among other ways of finding them perplexing I've tried to make the case actually, you should just read the declaration. It is, it begins exactly from the notion that the world ought to consist of one nation per people, and that ultimately national self-determination is the principle of action that defines the American political tradition."

I think it's important to take notice of it. Again, it's the... I think these two assertions are connected to each other. The idea that the Americans had a right to break from Britain depends on the notion that they are a separate people, but also on the notion that means they have a right to break from Britain. And as you say, those are both to put it mildly, open to debate at the end of the 18th century and still.

SMITH: Yeah. I would suggest that the first sentence does not necessarily lead to a world of autonomous sovereign nations that are unaffiliated in any important way. The second sentence does make clear that governments derive their just powers from the consents of the governed, and that the people are entitled to construct their government in any form that they think is conducive to their safety and happiness. And if peoples decide- Yes ... to federate together and create some kind of overarching political community that's perfectly consistent with the principles of the declaration and indeed, I think that's what many of them thought they were doing when they created the United States of America.

GALSTON: Yeah. On the other hand, if I were a French Canadian inhabitant of Quebec, I might read that sentence as entitling me to certain things that the rest of Canada is not in any mood to grant. So yeah, the fact that you have a right doesn't mean that you are obligated to assert that it means it's always it's always there. And what it means in particular, if you have a country like Iraq, with essentially, three nations that the Kurds are on fairly solid ground by the language of the declaration as saying, "What about us?" Et cetera.

LEVIN: I think a lot of people around the world have taken the American Declaration of Independence to offer them exactly that opportunity.

GALSTON: Yep.

SMITH: And indeed David Armitage wrote an influential and excellent book arguing that the biggest impact of the Declaration of Independence around the world has not really been to establish commitments to equal rights for all. It has been to provide justifications for movements for national self-determination. I think that's the historical reality.

GALSTON: Yeah. Let me let me come at this idea of peoplehood in another way and, and Rogers, this is an appeal to a substantial portion of what you've written over time. We've already mentioned the possibility that it was a specific piece of our history, namely the Revolutionary War, that began to answer the question of what made us one people. We were one people because we had gone through a distinctive set of experiences together. Now, obviously, if you believe the standard accounts, a third of the country rejected those experiences altogether and didn't want to have anything to do with them, and another third was sitting on the fence trying to figure out which side was gonna win.

But let's set those complexities aside for a minute and assume a simplified history where the collective experience did help to shape us as a people. And when Lincoln referred in his first inaugural to the mystic cords of memory, obviously, what he was talking about was a body of shared experiences, which leads to the more general question of how much history and the experience of doing things together helps to constitute a people in a particular way above and beyond what they believe in the formal sense of the word belief. What about history?

SMITH: I certainly think that we can and should give history a central place in defining our notions of peoplehood. There are other Elements that people have used to define what makes a people, including religion ethnicity, culture, language, race, and so forth. But the political theorist Bernard Yack has argued, and I agree with him that to be a political people there needs to be a shared imagination or a recognition or sense of ourselves as being a people. It has to be something that people in their minds embrace.

And when they embrace it they always do it with some kind of account of how over time, through history they have developed as a people with some kind of shared heritage that they value and that gives them commitments to each other. And so I think there's an important sense in which all conceptions of people would have a historical element and I normatively regard that historical element

as, in many ways, more desirable than other bases for peoplehood that can be used in invidious and discriminatory fashion like race and sometimes religion.

LEVIN: I think that's well said. I would say the American people have always been unusually permeable, not uniquely, but unusually in that American citizenship is relatively open. It's grown more so over time, and there's a question of how new Americans can take ownership of that shared history and take some part in it. I would just tell you I am a naturalized citizen. I, w- I became an American when I was 19 years old, and the... W- when I took the oath at the federal courthouse in Newark, New Jersey, this ancient, retired judge who gave us the... Maybe he wasn't that ancient. I was 19. He seemed very old to me.

DIONNE: He's probably 50.

LEVIN: Yeah, exactly. Who gave us the oath stood up to give a little talk, and he said something that's never left me. He said, "From now on, you have to think and talk about America in the first person plural." And he explained. He said, "You have to say us and we. There's a way that immigrants say they a lot, and there's a big they in your experience, and from now on, that's you. You say us and we." And the example he gave was, "You say we went to the moon Now, I didn't go to the moon. You didn't go to the moon either, but the American people did that, and the question of exactly what that can mean to a new American citizen and how to think about the history of the country is challenging.

And I would say I've come over the years to think that it doesn't have to be that different from the challenge of just being born an American and taking ownership of a long history that you also didn't really have anything to do with personally, but that belongs to the nation that you're a part of, and there is a way to join in a national story- and still take ownership of that history and therefore that future. And I, I think when you start to look for that first-person plural, it is a very big and important part of the American story. W-We is the first word of the Constitution, and it is the first word of that second sentence of the Declaration we've been talking about. We hold these truths. These documents are written in the first person plural with a sense that they speak for a people taking common ownership of their fate, and I think history is enormously valuable and ultimately essential to being able to do that.

GALSTON: I've been a pretty moderate moderator up until now, but, I, I can't help intervening a bit on a religious note. The famous Jewish sage Moses Maimonides once received a letter from a recent convert to Judaism, and this convert was in great distress because he said the other members of the congregation that he had joined said he had no right as a convert to recite the verse, "The God of our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

And Maimonides wrote back a terrific response, in which he said, in effect, that by becoming a member of the community, you become a part of and an inheritor of and a participant in this shared history of a people, and therefore you have as much right as anybody else to say, "Our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Now, I suspect there are a lot of people in this country who don't believe that and say they don't believe it, and, until you've been longer two, three, and four generations, you're an American on trial. I don't believe that for a minute. And Abraham Lincoln in his electric cord speech explicitly rejected that understanding and said, "Flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood you too are." Now I'll retreat into my role as moderator because we have time, I believe, for one more question before we go to audience Q&A. In what sense, if any, is the Declaration of Independence a Christian document?

SMITH: I have been giving talks to public groups on the Declaration of Independence, and I at a recent talk, one of the questioners said to me rather sharply that the late Charlie Kirk had asserted that American institutions were designed with Christians in mind, and that it was a real question whether people who are not Christian could function properly within American institutions. Again, for me, that's evidence that the contestation over American identity continues. But I will say that while it is certainly true that values shaped by Christianity played into the declaration and the founding and American institutions more generally Thomas Jefferson the first author of the declaration famously was not a traditional religious believer.

He wrote a little book, *The Life of Jesus*, that took all the miracles out and simply included the moral lessons that he did think was compelling. And John Adams who served with Jefferson in the initial committee of three also presided as president on the signing of the Treaty of Tripoli in 1798 which told what is now the Libyan government that the United States was not founded on the Christian religion. And George Washington indicated that America was to be an asylum for people of all religions from around the world and all countries. I think that if you're looking at the intellectual currents that fed into the Declaration of Independence, certainly Christian traditions are amongst them. But to say that the

declaration was founded upon strictly on Christianity or requires Christianity, I think is historically inaccurate as well as, in my view, not desirable.

LEVIN: I, I largely agree with that. I think it, it makes certain assertions that many of the people who believed them because they were Christians, and that are well-aligned with Christian convictions and with Christian natural law. The American people were largely Christians when this was adopted, and they are still. I don't think that makes the declaration a Christian document or leads it to, or should lead it to be understood as making theological assertions. I don't see that in the declaration.

GALSTON: We're about to segue into the Q&A period. A friend of mine recently published a book with the title *In the Image of God* in which he argued that the proposition in Genesis, that human beings were created in God's image is the real theological basis of the pro-- of the assertion of human equality. Yeah. Just to put this in skeptical form if it's not in some sense a creationist justification of human equality, there's been a long-standing effort, which hasn't entirely concluded, in my judgment, to figure out what a non-theological pro-- basis for that proposition might be.

The, the drafters of the Declaration, of course, skirted the entire issue by speaking in the first person plural, "We hold these truths to be self-evident." A lot of other people might not hold them to be self-evident, but we do. And so that gives some textual credibility to Jefferson's much later proposition- Yeah that he was expressing the American mind as opposed to making a philosophical argument. And speaking of Jefferson-

LEVIN: I would say, Bill I think the... With-- even without saying that it-- that the Declaration is a Christian document per se, I do think that the conviction that all human beings are equal is a Jewish and Christian conviction, and that, that is a... That, that is knowledge that Plato and Aristotle did not have. I can't argue with you there. It was a massive advance- Yeah ...over the knowledge they did have which was substantial.

SMITH: But there are Enlightenment rationalist arguments that reach the same conclusion, difficult to disentangle from- Yeah Christian and Judeo traditions. But when Jefferson later wrote that humanity was awakening to the recognition that some are not born booted and spurred ready to ride the others by a kind of natural right he thought, and others influenced by Enlightenment thought that reason was discovering a kind of natural moral equality that didn't depend on particular theological beliefs.

GALSTON: So as I walk to the podium to begin recognizing questions I can't forbear one last quotation from Jefferson. Once again, Once again, written the year before his death, where he professed his utter conviction, that within a generation all Americans would be Unitarians Jefferson was wise about many things- but that was a failed prediction if I ever heard one. Okay, ladies and gentlemen, it's your turn. Yes, the woman over here. Anybody have a mic? Yes, here it comes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Does this work? Yes.

GALSTON: Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you so much. What a wonderful discussion. I love the Declaration. My father used to have me read it aloud every Independence Day. I plan to continue that with my seven-year-old this summer. So my question comes from the direction of deep within the den of the philosophers, a kind of political philosophy question. The way that you guys were framing up how we might understand It goes two ways an American way of life or an American identity, which those might not be the same thing was really focused on the political.

At one point Professor Smith gave us a short list of dimensions of life, including, and this was your list, the economic, the social, and the political. And so my question has to do with why we overlook the economic and the social. There was discussion here about religion, which I think would fit within the social, but my question is about the economic. When we think about the American way of life and going back to the colonists, right? A lot of what they're doing and a lot of what would inform their self-conception, I think, is to do with the practices of production and exchange and forming trust in these commercial modes of life. And one might think, I don't know a philosopher might think, that in fact it's those dimensions of life that shape and inform the political rather than the political being conceptually or temporally prior and informing the economic and the social. So I, I don't know, I wanted-- I wanted to invite you to reflect on maybe the three dimensions rather than only the political, and also this question of whether the political is meaningfully prior to conceptually these other things, or posterior to them conceptually.

SMITH: You raise, of course, a deep and long-standing question in the social sciences about whether political institutions and policies are driven by epiphenomenal to some kind of economic deep structuring. And there are powerful arguments both ways on that question, and I'm not gonna resolve

it to anyone's satisfaction right now. I will say it is certainly true that when Tom Paine published *Common Sense*, the pamphlet that in many ways helped catalyze popular support for the American Revolution early in seventeen seventy-six he said explicitly, "Our plan is commerce."

And many of the grievances of the colonists were driven by economic concerns the restraints on their commerce with the rest of the world that the British imperial authorities were imposing. So in their motivations and in their aspirations, certainly commercial concerns were very central. At the same time, I don't think you can account for the ways they pursued those commercial concerns without recognizing that they did have some sense of ethnocultural identity that included some as participants in this commercial endeavor and others excluded by it or exploited by it.

And at the same time you don't grasp the political institutions they created by seeing them simply as instruments of economic development. They served that purpose, but they served other purposes as well. But I admit, I'm a political scientist, and I am one in part because my bias is that politics does more to structure forms of economic development than the other way around, and a lot of smart people think that's not true. Rob?

LEVIN: I would just add to that the... Aristotle coins the term economics in the last chapter of book one of the politics, and I think that's the right way to think about it. What we think of as economics is often properly contained within politics properly understood, which is broader than what we normally think of as politics. I would say to say that politics is too narrow a term to describe what we're talking about is probably to say that we're understanding politics too narrowly. But I think ultimately economics is best understood as, a- as political.

GALSTON: In a similar vein, we actually have a question from one of our o-online viewers. The question is long, but I'll paraphrase it. What is the role of particular ways of life in forming identity? And the questioner referred in particular to the experience of rural life, which he argued is I-strongly identity forming as distinct from the very different way of life that's typical of big cities. And isn't that clash too part of what we wrestle with? It's certainly there are many people, many scholars who are arguing right now we have, among other things, a rural revolt against big city values.

SMITH: Yes, but Suzanne Mettler and Trevor Brown have recently published a book, *Rural Versus Urban* which provides a lot of evidence that the gulf in political values policy preferences, and

identities between rural and urban Americans is a fairly recent phenomenon. It was not nearly so severe twenty-five years ago, and it is shaped by the experience of public policies that they feel have treated these different groups in significantly different ways. So yes, there is certainly a place shaping sense of identity, rural as distinct from urban in some important respects. But it is something that has had different consequences at different times. Sometimes it's been polarized but often it is not.

GALSTON: If I wanted to start an argument, I would refer at this point to William Jennings Bryan, Cross of Gold speech, and what would happen to the cities if, if the rural America stopped doing what it was doing for them, et cetera. But that would be to start an argument, and that would be wrong, so I won't do it.

LEVIN: Thomas Jefferson can get you pretty far along that path. Yeah.

GALSTON: That is true, too. Okay. Now, in fairness- It's important in policy ... I'm going to move over to the middle section now. That gentleman back there. Yes, you sir. And if you would do me a favor, and I should have said this before, if you would stand up- That's all right ... and just, say who you are very briefly.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Edward Abrahams. I'm wondering what you make of Gordon Wood's argument that by seven- by 1825, 15 years after the Revolution, that the United States was essentially a different country, that it was capitalistic entrepreneurial anti-aristocratic, that the Framers really were unhappy with it. And the reason I ask this question is because I think that we might have missed that, Because Wood was an historian, he wasn't looking at the ideas of the Revolution as static. He was saying that they, they evolve over time. So- ... what do you think of that?

LEVIN: Yeah I think it's a very powerful argument, and I think it's actually something you can say about a lot of the thinking of the end of the 18th century in England and in America. They lived five minutes before the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and they didn't see it coming. Adam Smith didn't see it coming. The, the social and economic thinkers of even early 19th century England didn't quite see it coming. The American founders didn't either. The society that existed in their nations by the middle of the 19th century was very dramatically different than the one that they had lived in, and it's hard to know what they would have made of it. I don't think it's obvious that Adam Smith would have loved industrial London though he was a capitalist, if anybody was. A- and so I do think that's a

fact that should, that should weigh on our judgments of how we understand those very important late 18th century thinkers.

SMITH: I agree entirely with that. And just as a little anecdote the during the Constitutional Convention they took a break to see an exhibit of new mechanical devices that was a part of a local fair or something in Philadelphia. And they were so impressed that they went back and put the patents clause into the Constitution. But they didn't know where it would lead.

GALSTON: Yeah. For any students in the audience what you just heard was a discussion about the great theme of Gordon Wood's second great book called *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. Yeah ... which is a very remarkable document. I believe it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1991. But it, not just remarkable because it was popular. It was remarkable because it had a remarkable argument. I'll drop another footnote. I think, for all of its inadequacies as a piece of reportage, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* might be taken as some evidence in favor of the proposition that this movement, this assertion of social equality, had made some progress over the first 50 or, 50 or 60 years. Okay, a question over here. Yes, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. Oh, wow. My name is Dahlia Pustilnik. I'm an intern here this summer. I first just wanna say I appreciate the Maimonides reference. That was great. In a completely different vein, not political philosophy, but maybe the more limited use of the term politics that we use colloquially. Today's election day in a lot of places in the country. It's my personal congressional race right now. And obviously the twenty twenty-eight election is coming up. Y- we've spoken a lot, or you've spoken a lot about the right's use of the declaration, the concept of America, American ideals, especially in the past couple years. Where could you see the left embodying ideas of independence, America two fifty, the founders' ideas in upcoming elections despite, the limitations that the founders did place on Americans when they wrote those important documents?

SMITH: The left has used the Declaration of Independence repeatedly in various forms throughout American history from working men's groups in the eighteen twenties to steelworkers in the nineteen thirties saying that we now have class oppressors that are equivalent to the monarchical oppressors in the British Empire. The claims that the declaration secures to all the rights to the pursuit of happiness with many different forms of happiness has been used on behalf of different kinds of

groups including the first gay rights group chartered in the United States in Illinois in nineteen twenty-four.

And of course the civil rights movement has invoked the Declaration of Independence repeatedly. But I would say that the left might be well advised today to look at how FDR used the declaration to argue for a second economic bill of rights new institutions to make sure that people had the material conditions so that they could pursue happiness. But I think that there are lots of opportunities if the left wants to speak to traditions that most of the American people value.

LEVIN: I think it, the left would be very wise to become more comfortable with the American political tradition in general, and the Declaration of Independence in particular. I think they've tended to become uncomfortable with it for reasons that don't cohere and that are not good for them. And anybody looking for a vocabulary of criticism of executive overreach would find a lot to work with in the Declaration of Independence- ... in this particular moment.

GALSTON: We have time for one last question, alas, no more than that, which I am going to draw from one of the online questions. And it goes like this, and again, I summarize, that, "Can you discuss the idea," the questioner asks, "that beyond creed, Americans are united by being part of a hybrid American ethnicity and a distinctively American hybrid culture that emerged over the centuries to which immigrants assimilate in a generation or two, if not sooner?"

LEVIN: I think that's a question for you, Rogers. I would have to say I disagree with the premise. I don't think that hybrid ethnicity is the right way to think about what Americans have become over time.

GALSTON: What about hybrid culture?

LEVIN: Sure. I, culture emerges from practice and habit, and we certain- there is obviously an American culture. Ask anybody in the world and they'll tell you all about it. I think only Americans could imagine that there's not a coherent American culture. But that's different from ethnicity, and I think the difference is worth insisting on.

SMITH: I deferred to you because you're a director of a program on culture. But the, I agree entirely with the answer. It is true that we have collectively created a distinctive culture that much of the world recognizes as American. Some with admiration, some with fear and loathing, but with enormous

influence. And yes that culture is part of what defines us as a distinctive people again, going beyond and sometimes against creedal beliefs. But it's also true that culture is diverse and evolving so that using it as a prescription for who's really an American is an enterprise I don't think we should engage in.

GALSTON: On that nice, inclusive note, please join me in thanking our wonderful panelists. You are, oh, sorry, I should have announced we have a 15-minute break, after which we'll reconvene for panel number two moderated by another Brookings scholar, E.J. Dionne. So back at 3:45.

DIONNE: That extraordinary discussion. Oh can everybody hear me? Is my mic on? Yeah. Yes. I wanna say as the descendant of French Canadians from Quebec who actually, who-- for whom French was my first language I was deeply moved and gratified by the attention that Quebec got in the course of that conversation and I thought that Bill Galston said something that some Quebec separatists will hear and say that this brilliant intellectual Bill Galston said that the American Declaration of Independence calls for separation from Canada.

But that was a fantastic discussion, and it was so enlightening. I just wanna say that to... my favorite formulation that I've run across Of creedal nationalism. If you write for newspapers, you look to keep it short and I this one, which is in a way a variation on Gordon Wood. To be American is not to be someone, but to believe in something. And that really is at the heart of creedal nationalism. And I was looking up... looking around for essays that sort of offered an alternative view and I found it a sort of a traditionalist conservative magazine called *Modern Age*, the assertion the American nation existed prior to the Declaration and Constitution, and it will continue to exist if these governing documents are replaced and some new mode of government were adapted.

And I was thinking about that as we were talking because in some ways you could dispute that right from the start to say that the Declaration, which declared the existence of an American people and American nation, that they did not exist before. They were British. They were something else than that. And the alternative view, which Jonathan Rauch, who may not hold but has agreed to try to defend says that being American depends on history as this writer quite eloquently for *Modern Age*, quite eloquently spoke about a shared history. But of course, the question is, for how long is that shared history?

Am I more American because I've been here three or four generations more than my forebearers were or are they just as American as I am from the day they got here? Is it shared land? Is it shared ethnic background? How do we defend that? I thought Professor Smith made a great... A, a series of interesting arguments, but we're gonna-- we're going to probe this. We have a really spectacular panel, and I love the way Bill organized this with by calling on our colleagues here at Brookings to join this 250th,

STELZENMÜLLER: He ordered us.

DIONNE: What?

STELZENMÜLLER: He ordered us.

DIONNE: Yeah, he invited us all. We are a free people. He invited us all, and we have a wonderful group here. Scott Anderson is a Senior Fellow for the Governance Studies program here at Brookings and General Counsel and Senior Editor at Lawfare. Const- Constanze Stelzenmüller I practiced. I've known her for years, and I still have to practice.

STELZENMÜLLER: Constanze is fine.

DIONNE: Serves as the director of the Center on the United States and Europe here at Brookings. She's also a Senior Fellow for the Foreign Policy Programs. A wonderful title if you know her work, a Fritz Stern Chair on Germany and Transatlantic Relations, and you have to read her column whenever it appears in the Financial Times. I do, and I recommend it to you all. Jonathan Rauch is a senior fellow for the Governance Studies Center for Effective Public Management and has written some extraordinary books that touch very much on what we are talking about.

And Keon Gilbert serves as the director for the Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative, or PII and a senior fellow for the Governance Studies program at Brookings, and has also made some extraordinary contributions that you're going to hear about today. I decided that Scott... we are a lawyerly nation. God knows there are plenty of lawyers in Congress and we think like lawyers in a lot of ways. And so Scott offered to... Said his view of this question is inevitably inflected by his background. And so I just wanted to s- to ask him to what extent is a creedal identity embedded in our constitutional structure, which is a question he's, he proposed. And why don't we just put two at once?

How does the current Supreme Court debate around issues like birthright citizenship reflect this question of creed versus identity?

ANDERSON: Yeah, it's a really complicated question. I think our morning conversation really-- or earlier conversation, excuse me, not in the morning really hit on because there is this tension between the substantive content of the values we see reflected in the Constitution and the fundamental fact that they have changed and they are, in essence, mutable. We know we have the Bill of Rights, we have ideas about constitutional principles built into the Constitution, but they are all subject to amendment and have been amended, both formally through formal amendment and our understanding of them has changed and shifted through the Supreme Court, through popular understandings, imaginations, and one of them is legislative enactments and dialogue with the Supreme Court.

So I think it's harder to say that there is a clear ideological or at least a single ideological vision, substantive vision baked into our constitutional order to the point of being immutable. There are obviously certain principles and values that generations have elevated above others, like the Bill of Rights and said okay, if we're gonna change these, if we're gonna buck these, it requires a higher threshold of popular action." But at no point does it put those values beyond the threshold of popular action, of popular sovereignty. And that's actually not a given proposition. Many world constitutions, I think I searched for a stat, I haven't checked this myself, I think around forty percent of world constitutions actually have what are commonly called entrenchment clauses.

Clauses that have certain values, whether it's republican form of government, certain concepts of human dignity, and says, "These elements of our constitution are not amendable. They cannot be changed." And there, I think you can say this constitutional order clearly has substantive values that are baked into it foundational, that cannot be amended and still be the same constitutional order. Actually, that's a little hard to say about the American constitutional order. We do have two things that are close to entrenchment clauses, but they're extremely narrow if you look at Article 5 of the Constitution. One is that a number of slavery related provisions of the Constitution could not be amended until 1808.

I think that's actually the only hard entrenchment provision, hard limitation on amenability that was in the Constitution, and it stopped being relevant in 1808-- 1809. The other provision says states cannot

be deprived of their proportional representation in the Senate without their consent. So even that is actually not a strict, an absolute prohibition on amenability. It just requires their consent on top of that, So what does this mean exactly when you have a situation where a country's identity, our national identity clearly tied to our process of state formation? Again, we-- the whole idea of an American identity, there being an America arose out of the formation of first thirteen states and then one United States.

At some point, our government, our form of government is an integral to the idea of there being any sort of America, but what does it mean substantially? I think where I come out on this is that it's foundationally, in many ways, a procedural commitment underlying how we exercise popular sovereignty. If there is a commonality among all the different ideological views that we've seen espoused in the American tradition, the American political s- dialogue and space over its history, a very di-diverse range, I think it's hard to say there's any dominant thread that's been universally accepted or by any of them.

But probably the broadest we can get to is the idea that if we're gonna achieve political change, we're gonna do it through these mechanisms we have. Now, that rises up through the amendment process I think that's actually a profound proposition in certain ways because it suggests first that we have a very pluralist vision of what it can be to be an American. You can have an identity or maybe an ethnic-based identity saying, "Oh, I think this is what motivates me for my identity, and it's what I'm gonna use to motivate others to vote a particular way, to act a particular way." It means you can have a sort of specific set of values. Maybe it's that I am a liberal American.

I believe in liberal traditional liberal values like we see reflected in the Bill of Rights, at least the way I read the Bill of Rights, and I can be motivated by... I can tie that to my identity. But the thing that bridges those two, I think in the broadest, at least that I can see, vision, and it's not universal still even then idea of what it means for those people to be Americans together, is a commitment to the idea that to achieve our political vision and preferences, we are going to debate and contest and seek to win elections and seek to pursue litigation in Supreme Court and pursue all these institutional mechanisms of political change that are available to us, which is how we've decided to exercise our popular sovereignty.

And even those can be amended. I don't think anything in the Constitution says Americans can't amend the Constitution to get rid of the Constitution, except for that 1808 provision and the Senate proportional representation for states maybe, and say we go back to an absolute monarchy. This was a mistake. We go back to it." But maybe that's part of the vision, right? Remember Jefferson said each generation needs to... I can't I'm blanking on the phrase. Of course, you go to the Jefferson Memorial to get the exact text, but something like each generation needs its own revolution. Each generation needs to form its own laws.

We shouldn't over-inherit and passing onward to them. And I think there's something profound to that maybe is uniquely American about the idea that to have the state, the republic we want, we are opting into it to some extent. We are not hard bound to some of these restrictions. We can motivate them, and we can change them. There are processes for doing it, and if we want to keep the parts of the current status quo we like, we have to fight for them within the parameters of our kind of political contestation system. What does that mean for birthright citizenship, for these Supreme Court cases, for a lot of our legal cases right now?

I think it comes down to the idea about-- I think it's hard to say that certain ideas are fundamentally inconsistent on a substantive basis with the idea of being an American because we've seen such diverse ideas of American history, a lot of which we might find absolutely repugnant today, but were seriously held by serious numbers of Americans for big parts of our history but what I think we can say is how does this happen?

How do we act out this sort of understanding of our change? If we think that we don't want people to have birthright citizenship, how do we exercise that? In this case, I think there's a very legitimate procedural complaint to be raised here, particularly right with the Trump administration, right? The Trump administration is taking, doing, taking action by executive order that is hard to square with the idea that even if there is not a constitutional entitlement from the Fourteenth Amendment to birthright citizenship for the people being affected by the executive order, it's very hard to see how you get to the idea that this is something the president can establish through diktat as opposed to a congressional legislation that's part of the debate we're gonna see here, and we know that's a separate ground we may see this case actually resolved on.

This idea that setting aside whether the constitutional questions, there may just be a question as to whether the president can do this because the Immigration and Nationality Act and other legislation actually embeds this understanding of birthright citizenship in statute. We don't have to get to the constitutional question. Those sort of procedural values, they're bread and butter for lawyers. They're bread and butter for when you look how the Supreme Court resolves of this. But they're getting at that fundamental question saying, "What is the right way to contest and change our political system?" I think we're seeing that playing out in this particular case. Even though it has such weighty substantive questions, the outcome may be inherently procedural.

DIONNE: And I appreciate your reading of the Declaration. It has a right to revolution in it. And there is an implication of, we need a revolution every twenty years or every forty years. It doesn't say that, but the right to revolution, I think, is inherent in this in this document. Keon, you proposed a couple of really fascinating questions that I'd love you to take up. One is inspired in part by a speech by J.D. Vance. The question is: Is creedal nationalism over-inclusive or under-inclusive? And secondly and I love Professor Smith talking about this, are there evolving forms of creedal nationalism that should become part of the next two hundred and fifty years?

And if they are evolving, what does that say about the original creedal nationalism? I appreciated the question about the left and Professor Smith's answer because the use of the Declaration on the left from the working men's movements in in the '20s all the way through to Lincoln to Martin Luther King, who called bas- the Declaration a promissory note, I always love that line is really important. But what does it mean that creedal nationalism has evolved? So take up those two great questions you proposed. I love people who propose, answer hard questions, which Keon did.

GILBERT: Yeah, I'm starting to doubt raising those questions at this moment. Yeah. But thank you for this opportunity, and certainly appreciate listening to Scott a little bit before. I, I may start with something I heard on the first panel, and in particular, thinking about- what the what the Declaration of Independence, what the Constitution and es- essentially our forms of government that have not really changed much over the last 250 years. And I'm sorry, I forget which panelist said that last on the last panel.

I think in part, when we think about communities of color and folks who w- in various identities, the challenge that I think exists in terms of asking America to, act upon its, the various documents that we

have that set up not only government, how, but how we operate and function, is that there's something inherently al-ready m- a malfunction or dysfunction there. And in part because when we think about not only just the words themselves, but the implementation of these documents, that is when we start to see inequality and difference. And I think thinking about that in particular, that's where we have all of these various fractures across our communities, where we have a number of divides.

And in, in particular, as we think about various places where I think we've had some significant changes in forms and functions of government, maybe reconstruction, the modern civil rights movement, and probably even now when we think about significant changes to these institutions, I think it's important for us to think about how they have morphed and changed and evolved in a way that either can become more inclusive or less inclusive. And I think as we think about all of these various ex-examples over time, we recognize that there's still always going to be people who are going to be counted more or given more preference or more privilege, and then there always gonna be a group that's not. And I think when we tend to focus less on those, on the groups that have been excluded in a number of different ways, the more attention that we, move away from them, the...

We're really not adhering to the values and the principles of not only these documents, but the implementation of government itself or the implementation of the protections that, that we seek from g- from government in a number of different ways. And I think a lot of our work at RPII, in particular my work in, in, in public health, really tries to think about those questions and try to think about what are the mechanisms for change, as even Scott started to talk about. And we often rely on the law itself, or we hope that there are individuals who are representing our c- our communities, our interests, who will help to spearhead or guide the change, whether it's even at a small level or at the federal level. And so we've put a lot of trust, I think, sometimes in individuals to be the implementers or the guiders of change for us, in particular as it relates to laws and policies.

DIONNE: Could I just follow up on that? Because I, I think when we're talking about the 250th anniversary and the Declaration there are two factual two ways of looking at the origins of the country that are both factually true but lead to very different conclusions about who we are. Fact one is the people who said all men are created equal were, included a lot of slaveholders and then later wrote a Constitution that did not take on slavery.

It's the, its Constitution is somewhat odd in the slavery question. They were ashamed of it, but they didn't really take, they didn't abolish it, and that's true. It's also true that this phrase, as Lincoln argued, that the founders really did, in some sense know that slavery was wrong and set us on a path that eventually took a civil war to end. How do we, what's the best way, how do we keep these things in balance or how do we, what's the way we should think about them?

GILBERT: Yeah, one, one of the ways that I try to think about this is there's certainly an element, there was certainly an element that was anti-slavery and also an element that was either anti-Black or pro-Black. You could be against the institution of slavery, but you may not necessarily believe in the humanity or the human rights for Black people at that time in particular. And I think those juxtapositions, those oppositions still exist in terms of how we think about communities of color, how we think of lower income or resourced communities, that we live in both of these realities. And I think even the ways that W.E.B. Du Bois talked about race or even the racialization of America in particular helps to also understand these dualities that many people live in and try to reconcile them.

And we often turn to the, to our documents to try to help provide some guidance or even its recognition that they're inept or inadequate to address the questions. And then as we work through policy or laws, we try to also utilize them to try to reconcile these challenges and these differences that, that you're that you're talking about. And I don't think we could have completely solved it, and maybe that's even part of the process, is that we continue to work on them in a number of different ways to try to solve them and try to make it in many ways to borrow the phrase, make it more perfect. And I think the more that we struggle with it, that's great, but our inability to make progress is, will remain the biggest challenge that I think we'll have.

DIONNE: Thank you. I hope we can take that up some more. Jonathan Rauch often volunteers to be what I'll call a saintly devil's advocate. Saintly because he's willing to take on arguments 'cause he thinks they should be made wherever his views might lie, and he agreed to be a devil's advocate by, I asked everyone what they wanted to talk about and Jon said, no nation is purely creedal. The US does have, or many would argue, has an ethno-religious identity, whether we choose to admit it or not, and our culture and institutions can s- only stray so far from that identity before losing their creedal bearings." I'm not sure that's your exa- your view, but you've put it very well. Defend that view if you will, want to.

RAUCH: Oh, that's not a statement of my view. That's me emailing EJ and saying, "Look here at Brookings we're probably all gonna say it's a creedal nation. So maybe someone should just stand up to the opposite argument." There's a way-

DIONNE: That's a saintly devil's advocate part.

RAUCH: Yeah. It'll probably get me in some trouble when it goes up online, but so there's a dumb version of this argument. It's a civilizational argument, and it's basically just amounts to America is and always has been a white Christian nation, and that's what it should stay. And America is a European successor state, and that's what it should stay. And there's a lot of that out there. But I thought it was important to credit... There is a version of this of this argument or a related argument which is more subtle, and it is something that people like us should grapple with.

And it's, I think, the version of the argument which you just made, which says, yeah, of course, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and all of these things matter and there you swear an oath to the Constitution when you become an American or when you take public office. Fine. But let's not kid ourselves. There are sources of cultural, ethnic, and religious foundations to this country, which if you stray too far from them, you lose the ability to defend those creedal elements And that's what we're in the process of doing. We are not defending those ethnonationalist elements of our heritage which make it possible to sustain the creed.

And those people will say, and I think probably J.D. Vance is one of them we gotta face that reality, and we gotta base some policy on that reality. And that doesn't mean we should call non-European countries shithole countries, but it does mean we should pay attention to where people are coming from whether they really fit in here, what is their religious tradition, Muslims are different from Christians, et cetera, et cetera. Again I'm... I do not endorse this argument, but I also don't think it's a crazy argument, and I don't think people like us will do ourselves any favors if we just dismiss it as a bunch of racism.

DIONNE: Let me take you up on that, and then I wanna go to Constanze. There, there is a sense that if, I like the discussion in the first panel about the role of Christianity where certain biblical ideas can be seen here. But these founders were basically Enlightenment thinkers, and they may have operated out of a Christian tradition in some sense, but these were really Enlightenment ideas that are

universally available. It's one of the interesting kind of paradoxes that at times a certain style of conservative argumentation says they should be ethnonationalist. Another style of conservative argumentation says these are universal values. These are universal human rights, and people in non-Western countries dictators in non-Western countries put them down by trying to say these just come from the West. So how do you square the notion that, no, these aren't just Judeo-Christian values, these are universal values that the founders are asserting?

RAUCH: I think the answer they would give, again, it's a credible answer, is they're universal values that are rooted in Judeo-Christian doctrine the Imago Deus, that we're all in the image of God, Jesus' teaching. And that there are a lot of cultures on the planet, a lot of people on the planet that do not share those values. And if they come over here and redefine America, we won't sustain those values.

DIONNE: And now, are you, do you believe that or are you just channeling an argument? So I- And then I wanna move on, but I wanna, I want, I wanna give you at some sense to distance yourself from a view you may or may not hold.

RAUCH: Thank you for that opportunity 'cause I'm digging a, I'm digging a deep hole for myself. Yeah. No. No. I, I don't believe that argument. I am pretty conventional in my belief that we are fundamentally a creedal nation. We're not with these other ethnic elements, but I also think that this creed has shown tremendous ability to appeal to people of all faiths and regions all over the world. And it's also, I'm a gay American, and I live the story. I grew up in a... I, born in 1960 at a time when people like me were, marginalized isn't the word, anathematized is the word, not just culturally, but in law. And I saw the working of the American creed in action. I'm now married to a man, and it's recognized in all 50 states and barely controversial. So no, my personal account is not like JD Vance's account. But I don't want anyone in this room to think those people are nut jobs.

DIONNE: He did such a good job of channeling that argument, he had me for a moment. You were, I had thought- Constanze bless you for being here, and Constanze asked to go last as the non-American on the panel, as a German citizen. And one of the things you thought would be good to talk about was the pollination across the US and Germany, particularly in the post-war- Yeah ... period, how American ideas were reflected in the German Basic Law of 1949, but also how they weren't. And I'd just love you to take us from there to wherever you wanna go.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Let me actually start with somewhere else if I may. I'm living in this country for the third time in my life. And so I've, I'm, I've, I'm basically now transatlantic in my cultural makeup. And one of my favorite movies is a Powell-Pressburger movie from 1946 called *A Matter of Life and Death*. If you haven't seen it, go see it. It's a fantastic movie. It's a very early Technicolor movie made with the help of a lot of Jewish and non-Jewish, anti-Nazi emigres from UFA in Berlin who fled the Nazis. It's fabulous in many ways. But there is a very famous jury trial scene in that plays in heaven, in a black and white heaven, beautifully art deco decorations by all these UFA geniuses.

And, I'm not gonna get too into this for too long. But the jury is composed... Because this is about a, the adjudication of the legitimacy of an American and British marriage with an American who is supposed to have died and be in heaven, but the British woman is claiming him as her own. The jury is as a jury of American immigrants, of immigrants from all over the world who are turned into Americans, right? By Americans, by America's credulity. And if you want to see a wonderful visual application of this trope, go see... It's a long movie, but go see just that scene, and you will understand exactly what I'm talking about.

It is riveting, mesmerizing, compelling, and it is what attracts people like me to this country. The ability from people who are actually from countries that are very different from Americans and turning them into Americans with roots that are elsewhere, but who firmly believe that they are Americans in ways that they, distinguish them very notably from their own home cultures, right? And just want to put that out there. Movie recommendations are my thing. On the German element, I just want to say there, there's been tremendous constitutional, legal and philosophical cross-pollination between America and Europe since the American Revolution in both directions actually.

But the German, West German Basic Law of 1949 was literally midwived by the occupation authorities and by American jurists, some of whom who were actually German Jews who had fled the Nazis. And the German Basic Law is firmly creedal. But I want to read you a very famous quote that I was confronted with in law school by a German jurist one of the greatest of the post-war periods Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde. I'm gonna say this in German and then translate it. Don't worry. "Der freiheitliche säkularisierte Staat lebt von Voraussetzungen, die er selbst nicht garantieren kann." A key phrase of German constitutional theory. The liberal secular- secularized estate or state lives by preconditions which it cannot itself guarantee.

What that means is that there is an inherent tension between a constitutional architecture that is supposed to be identity neutral and the changing identity composition of a nation's citizens, right? And that informs the interpretation of the constitution, as it were, of the constitutional architecture as a constitution ages and develops, right? Or as a constitutional order ages and develops. And that tension is inherent to how we live in constitutional orders, and we just have to figure out ways of dealing with it, right? And I would actually like to argue with Scott on his interpretation of American constitutional order because I... as you very well know, Jefferson's position on, there needing to be a generational revolution was very much not shared by Madison, Adams, or Jay, right?

And the Federalist Papers are all about this. And I think we do have to take. I think if we reduce our interpretation of the American Constitution to the text of the Constitution and, as it were, exclude from consideration these really key textual materials that led up to its drafting, I think we are selling ourselves short, right? And the truth is that what you describe as a very process and procedure-oriented take on managing factions, which is what the framers were really concerned about. So arguably, they were already concerned about battling identities, right? And battling political groups. Then I think we're selling...

Again, we're selling the model short, right? And again, you are in a narrow sense completely correct that there are very limited entrenchment clauses in the Constitution. But did the framers think the, the Bill of Rights and the separation and balance of powers and disestablishment were abso-fucking-lutely entrenched? Yes. And so I-- No? Okay. All right. I seem to think I've been taught otherwise but then fine. I just... What... and the other thing that I would like to point out here as we go into these identity debates the framers were not just writing against the British, right?

They're, were also writing against their Puritan grandparents in Massachusetts who had fled a constitutional monarchy that had a parliament, that had some degree of separation and balance of powers and rule of law and came to America to establish a totalitarian established theocracy on American soil, right? So the... Never forget that the American constitutional model is also anti-Puritan. Now that Puritan totalitarian, direct democratic element has, as it were, always constituted another strand in the double helix of American constitutional order, right? And we see that in the progress of direct democracy later on. But, I think the model of 1787 is a little sort of more rigid in its, and tougher in, in its sort of defense against the totalitarian or- original model than you present it.

RAUCH: It's rooted in, It's rooted in natural law. This is- Yeah. That's- This is an old conversation and Bill Galston in the room here wrote a classic book about it. Yeah. But liberalism is not just legal process- Yeah ... w- which may end wherever it ends. Yeah. It's rooted in certain core values- Yeah, exactly ... and I agree with you, Constanze. Yeah. Those were not up for negotiation- Yeah ... from the founders' point of view.

DIONNE: I want Scott. That's fine for the defense of his view. I just want to observe something I think many of us have observed over the years, which is immigrants to our country often have a much deeper appreciation for our history and even for the Constitution and the- these documents than many of us who grew up here, so thank you for that.

STELZENMÜLLER: Not even an immigrant, technically.

DIONNE: You're not, But you get the point. Scott, defend your view.

ANDERSON: Yeah, so look, you have to divorce, I think, the idea of what can establish the commonality of an American identity, which requires a degree of broad acceptance, both, I would say, in terms of the people who we view as being in the community of Americans and across time. Because we have an American identity that has had a degree of continuity since- ... the last 250 years, why we're having this event, right? So what can you say about that commonality? What are the elements? Can you say somebody who says, "Oh, I don't believe in the freedom of speech"? Does that mean I think...

I believe in, the words of the Bible, people should listen to it to that. Is that person, born wherever they may be in the United States, able to vote, not an American? I don't think that's the right way to think about this. They may not be a liberal American. They may not be a good American or my vision of a good American, and I have very strong visions about what is a good American and a bad American. Don't get me wrong about that, as I'm sure many of us do here.

But I do think it behooves us a little bit to take a step back and to say when I am defending my cultural views, which is deeply informed by ideology and identity and lots of other factors that go into the cultural milieu and experiences that form how I view the world, and importantly, how I try and persuade other Americans to adopt my view of the world and implement it into public policy. Those all

narratives all play at the different heart, but they're very rarely universally embraced or even broadly embraced. Our, what we view as now as our most fundamental constitutional changes were incredibly controversial. Huge numbers of Americans did not buy them, right? The Fourteenth Amendment was enacted primarily, and it was able to be enacted primarily because the Confederacy had been beaten in a civil war, So I think it's hard to argue that these elements have been part of a continuous American identity for the last two hundred and fifty years.

What has been a part of a continuous American identity for the last two hundred and fifty years is the idea that we have in a government by the people, and we have certain rules by which that government will be exercised. And I actually think it's harder to get past that if you accept that a credo-based vision needs to be temporally and broadly accepted and consistent. And even then, it's not universal, right? There are probably Americans who wouldn't even buy into necessarily this view. But I will say, I think it's pretty-- that itself is actually really notable and actually really important for two different reasons. One, it underscores the fact that what we have because we choose it and we keep it, right?

You have a republic as long as you can keep it. We have this idea, these values, because even though it is quite possible for political change to steer us in different directions, we have opted and drifted in this direction, and in fact, have moved in the direction of expanding the franchise and moving things in a particular historical direction that vibes with what many of us view, but not everyone, as a cultural, historical tradition, an ideolog- ideological tradition and beliefs that we deeply buy into and believe in and see strongly reflected in the framing era, even if it's not built into our constitutional order.

That's notable. The other part of it that I think is really interesting, and I think important as well, is this idea that when you have a constitutional order that is premised on the idea of people exercising popular sovereignty in contestation with each other, that itself is a commonality of experience that perhaps we shouldn't or be surprised leads people to arrive at certain conclusions. Perhaps there's some correlation to the fact that we are in a broad democracy and have been for a long time, where people do have to argue about and persuade others how to pursue types of changes. There may be a correlation between that and say, a belief in certain civil rights or certain core sense of values.

The veil of ignorance, right? In a kind of Rawlsian sense. We all now experience that we're operating in the system. Maybe that leads us to conclude given that I don't know how I'm gonna feel about this identity or this belief, how it's gonna be situated in our broader national context, maybe I can agree a universally applicable rule will be we'll have freedom of speech, we'll have these other sorts of virtues, right? So I'm not trying-- saying that there's a complete dissociation from the constitutional order as we have it, which I do think is foundationally procedural, is the way I describe it, maybe not the perfect way to describe it and these more other perhaps civic virtues that we have that I do think get built up in our system. But to say they're embedded in our constitutional order, I don't think it's quite there. They're privileged. They're ones...

RAUCH: the constitutional order is embedded in them. You got it backwards.

ANDERSON: I don't think that's right.

DIONNE: Let me, in fact, I wanted you to reply just to make a one quick point and to ask a question to our panelists to respond to you. I do think the word entrenchment can be viewed two ways. You are viewing it in a very strict sense that in principle, virtually everything except the Senate can be- ... can be amended. In practice, entrenchment, I have Paul Starr of Princeton wrote a great book called Entrenchment, where it really means something so deeply embedded in the political tradition that it can't be overturned.

Social Security is a kind of entrenched program by this definition. There is a lot of that entrenched. But here's the question I wanna ask that bothers me and makes me wonder if I am consistent with myself. So I'm calling out my own potential contradictions here, which is, I've always thought in some ways the word, the phrase un-American is un-American because the phrase implies excluding some group of people because of who they are or because of what they believe. We had a House Un-American Activities Committee that engaged in some of the worst abuses of McCarthyism. Yet, if you are a creedal patriot or creedal nationalist you actually do believe that there are certain parts of making you what makes you American are a set of beliefs in the equality promised in the Constitution and the right to self-government and the like.

How do we resolve, how does, I'm asking J- In a way, I wanna ask John to take... he's been so good at taking both sides of this question. Maybe he can resolve my contradiction by taking both sides of

the question I'm asking 'cause-- And Professor Smith raised this in the conversation as well. What does it mean to be a creedal patriot and yet be very uncomfortable with declaring anyone un-American?

RAUCH: Why are you so uncomfortable with the idea that something's un-American? For example if someone believes that we should have a dictator in the model of Mussolini or Hitler, would you have trouble saying that's un-American?

DIONNE: I have trouble declaring that someone is not free to say that, and I have trouble reading them out of the political order. But I agree that idea, by my definition, is un-American. But I worry that the very idea of un-American undermines the, some of the core freedoms that I think- yeah ... are inherent in the American order.

RAUCH: We're going to depths that are far beyond me here, but what we're touching on is a very old and very deep controversy among liberals, which we all are. Liberals, small L, that is, we believe in equal rights before the law and democratic government and minority protections. But one group has what's been called a fairly thin procedural idea of liberalism, which kind of says it's a big open-ended process with a lot of procedures, and where it comes out is where we are, and no one is really in a position to say, "Here are the values of liberalism."

And the other is a kind of thicker school of liberalism less like John Rawls, maybe more like Immanuel Kant which says, "No, that's not right. Liberalism is premised on certain substantive statements of values, and you can only go so far from those statements, and you won't have a liberal country." This is a very live debate right now. I'm in the latter side, which I think is the founder's side. I think they told us in as many words, "Look, we can give you a constitution, a process," but as Madison said, "It's just a parchment barrier. This will not survive without virtue in the public," what they called Republican virtues. And that's a substantive set of prescriptions for deeper values. And in that sense, yeah, I think you can say that if a majority of Americans abandon those values, they're un-American. That's a controversial statement, though. I- And I think that, and

STELZENMÜLLER: I think that I, as a German, don't have to explain why I'm also on that side, right? Because my country has, within the experience of my grandparents and parents, seen what it leads to when you abandon, that you plunge to the depths of inhumanity, right? If you abandon a commitment

to these profound, these inalienable substant- substantive commitments, right? And that, that is, I think, indeed what the sort of West Germans of my parents' generation saw in this act of writing the basic law, which, by the way, was intended as a provisional constitution, right?

For until such time as Germany was ever reunified. And when we did reunify in nineteen eighty-nine, 'ninety after the wall came down we kept the basic law and basically did what I would somewhat sarcastically refer to as an M&A, a merger and acquisition. And the East Germans basically were pulled under the umbrella. Which is not to say that I think that the East German constitution was worth keeping. There were many ways in which it was a non-- an anti-democratic constitution, obviously. It was the order of an authoritarian state that preyed and spied on its own citizens.

DIONNE: Keon, I wanted to, and then come on back in. I wanted to I, I am I'm closer to the thicker side on liberalism as well, in the sense I do believe there are sub- substantive commitments. I am just in a sense, so tied to f- the certain fundamental freedoms of expression that I worry about how that word has been and can be abused. But Keon one of the things you suggested in the, our emails is what we as a young country can learn from older countries. And I think that has some bearing on this because, Jonathan went back to Cott. There are... the ideas embedded in the Declaration are much older ideas. Talk about why you wanted to talk about that that issue.

GILBERT: Yeah, I think in part because one of the challenges to pick up on a phrase that Constanze mentioned in terms of, depths of inhumanity. I think many communities feel that they are living that reality. But they also can recognize that living in in this country, they have an opportunity to revolt, to talk, to protest against the things that are happening to them and their experiences, and to find and build coalition to try to find some remedy for change. So when I, part of why I think in, as I wrote that question, I was, thinking about the news, and I think I saw that the British prime minister is planning to step down And I thought about that and saying, while other places can make change really fast in, in terms of who the leadership is, and then also questions about leadership changes in and of themselves.

I think that one of the interesting things that could be viewed as American is we are really committed to messianic l- leadership. This idea that there are people or an individual that can lead us to whatever our version of the Promised Land is, or our versions of change, great social change. And I think about that in terms of our adherence to it, our reliance on it, our even the idea that we've even

built rituals and practices around these things. And often that sort of leads us to being very traditionalist and very conservative in some ways, and we're-- we fight against ourselves also in some ways of being able to try to make rapid change. As we think about and live through this current administration, everyone says, "Whoof, if I could just get through this term."

Yes, we have other measures or levers of change, but whoof, we have to get through the change. We have to get through this individual that's in office. And then also the changes and the decisions that they've made in terms of if we think about the Constitution of the Supreme Court. And this even goes back to the previous panel in terms of the discussion about our institutions of government have not changed very much. So all the conversations about whether or not, federal judges and Supreme Court should have lifetime appointments, or the ways that we have talked about or discussed whether or not elected officials should be able to have such long tenure in, in, in their offices or so many consecutive terms. Those I think are the kinds of questions that we will need to continue to grapple with and to discuss in terms of thinking about how much are we willing to change as a way of demonstrating or people recognizing that there are other levers of change that they can push forward in making sure that they are truly represented.

DIONNE: Yeah, I appreciate that point a lot because we have kinda lost our constitutional imagination that over... our founders changed the way we elect the president really fast. They changed the electoral college when they realized it was defective in 1800. We had the Civil War amendments that radically changed the country, were a kind of second founding for us. We had the Progressive Era amendments. We have gone through a period of real t- We had s- some changes in the 1960s. We've gone through a long period for various political reasons where we have not thought seriously about updating this document, and the founders imagined more updating from what I have read of their thinking than we have engaged in. Constanze. And then I wanna do one more round on a slightly different topic, and then I wanna bring everybody in. Constanze.

STELZENMÜLLER: I would just like to comment on this really interesting point that Keon made about the relationship between a, an increasingly rigid constitutional order and political factions seeking adaptation or change, right? Or wanting to see societal and political change represented in the architecture of the constitutional order, right? I would maybe phrase that a little bit differently which is that yes, there is clearly a really important balance to find between the rigidity of constitutional order

and the changing identities of the citizenry represented by that order and governed by it governing themselves through it.

But I think what we're seeing right now is a constitutional order where key federal institutions have abdicated, apparently either under coercion or out of fear or timidity or for whatever other reason their constitutionally mandated responsibilities to some degree. Yeah. Acquiesced in a presidency that would like to be able to recast itself as a unitary executive, right? That kind of thing. So in, in some way, y- you might argue that here you see a sort of self-deformation of representative democracy- ... that is because of the polarization and the s- separation of communities in America is really hard for citizens to get any purchase on, right?

That, that is what, to me is really profoundly troubling about this moment, right? I have to say that, I was y- you... when I was going to law school and certainly the generation of my parents, we looked up to the American order as one that perfectly encapsulated the ability to balance in temporality and the potential for change, right? And something seems to be out of whack, right? And the question is whether, given that we are-- we're looking at political forces that are attempting to change the order for good and to their benefit, right? Is it even possible at this point to bring this back, right? And as it were, bring the system into balance again. That to me is the really fascinating aspect of, and the sort of the overarching constitutional question of the moment.

RAUCH: I'd love to know what you think the answer is.

STELZENMÜLLER: I have thoughts, but I don't want to monopolize the panel conversation. But I did want to put that out there because it strikes me as being a very-

DIONNE: In all these conversations key aspect ... I remember pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. But the old Gramsci line. You wanted to come in.

ANDERSON: I was just gonna say one thing I think is worth bearing in mind that's really being drawn out in this particular moment- Yeah ... in a lot of the ways you described, Constanze. Which is this question of we're in a moment where we've conflated in our own discussion here the concept of America and liberalism. Closely related, but are they inherently one? I'm not sure they necessarily are

or all Americans believe they are. I think there's a lot of Americans out there who say, "I believe in XYZ system that's different than what I think of as liberalism."

Sure. And that doesn't make them less American. And frankly, I'm not sure it's productive for me to label them as un-American, their beliefs as un-American, or for them to label me as un-American. Where I do think you might find common ground with them is the idea that if you want to push public policy in the direction you want to see, you will win elections. And you will-- If you need to enact constitutional amendments or enact statutes and get them to legislation, or you'll go to the Supreme Court and persuade the Supreme Court, or you get the justice you want in the Supreme Court by appointing them, confirming them, and then you'll get the way you want, right?

There's areas for disagreement along these, but generally, those are the norm for people who can fundamentally disagree about what they think is right and wrong, what they think is American or un-American, can agree on that. That's under threat today. That's actually, to me, the much more concerning part that we see in elements of what's happening today in a lot of different domains. There's always a tension there. There's always points of friction between the substantive vision and how committed you are to the procedural norms that you pursue it through.

But never have we seen, at least in the contemporary era, I think, a moment where there is such tension here. And the point to which the Trump administration pushing them to the hilt and leveraging a lot of mechanisms. And that, to me, is more concerning than the substantive vision behind it. Because there are ways I can accept Americans who disagree with me can advance a substantive vision I don't agree with. In fact, Americans, many Americans try and do that every day, and that's fine. And I wholeheartedly support their ability to do but...

STELZENMÜLLER: If they want to stop you from advancing yours ever again- Yeah ... that's a problem, right?

ANDERSON: Exactly. And that comes down to proceed-- the commitment to this idea of how we go about change as a less than the substantive vision. And what I will say is also is I think that's where you can get common ground, and I think that we're seeing common ground being built because I think you are seeing more negative reactions and pushback to those most controversial actions the Trump administration has taken during his first year in office. And that, to me, is a glimmer of hope.

DIONNE: I just wanna say I think Jonathan is using liberalism in the very broad sense of the word, not in the narrow- Not meaning left-wing progressive ... yeah, electoral sense. Although there is a rise of opposition even to that kind of liberalism. Yes, there is. Quick question before we go to the audience. The... I think one of the reasons why many people, myself included, want to hold on to creedal nationalism is because we are more and more worried about the implications of the alternative. And the alternative has frequently been described lately as blood and soil nationalism, which both intentionally so to remind us of kind of fascist roots of that idea, but also because we hear people saying things that actually begin to sound like that.

And if we take that view that is how you define being American, you, first of all, you throw out the window a kind of openness to immigration, to immigrants, to people who are different that has, we think, we broadly, Americans have thought is who we are. I found a... John F. Kennedy wrote a book called *The Nation of Immigrants*, and he said every American who ever lived, with the exception of one group was either an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants. And so if you're not a creedal nationalist what are you? And is there is maybe it's Churchillian. There may be some of the flaws of creedal nationalism that Professor Smith suggested analytically but it's better than all the alternatives. Just quick, quickly on that reason to advance a view of creedal nationalism.

ANDERSON: That's challenging. I wish I was going last 'cause I wanted to think about it for a second. I will say, I think there is something there to the idea of, as I described, I think a deeply substantive, deeply vested vision of American identity, of credo American identity, is always gonna run into tension to the fact that it's just hard to find that many universally held beliefs. I think the procedural vision, which is a thinner vision, is as close as you can get to a broad foundational sort of thing that you would want for that to be able to... Formation of a broad national identity. That doesn't mean that ethnic identities are the alternative.

This isn't a binary. You don't have to have one or the other. And in fact, the reality is we have lots of different American identities. They're all valuable. They can, many of them can bring different things to the fore. And the secret is we need a framework that allows that to happen. That's how we've gotten political change and expanded the franchise, and done a lot of things that we value today, is by a willingness to act on traditions that may not, that some people think, many of our countrymen think is not consistent with how they wanna see our country going. Long story short, I'm just not sure the idea

of a thick vision of American identity, whether it's ethnonational or credo-national, is actually the healthiest foundation on which to build a republic.

DIONNE: Constanze?

STELZENMÜLLER: This is perhaps a slightly coming from an angle answer to your question, but it seems to me that the beauty, the attraction, the compelling force of creedal nationalism is that it presupposes a maximum of individual agency, right? Or rather, which is the opposite of cultural pessimism, cultural determinism, and being bound to g- to community identities for... or racial or gender identity, that you are, in the sense of Emerson and Thoreau, that you make yourself and remake yourself. If anything is American, then it's that, right?

And that appealed to me immensely when I came here as a German female graduate student from a law school, where I was a tiny minority of women, and I came here and thought, "My God, I'm being treated like something completely different," right? This is I can literally remake myself here. And frankly, I would have stayed had not the wall come down in Europe and had I not realized that Europe was in the process of remaking itself, right? And that I was going to be returning to a different country and a different continent, right? So in some ways, we adopted that from you. But that is, I think, one of the, that is such a propelling force, right? This idea of individual agency. That, that I think is unique to the American story, and I f- I, I continue to find that admirable despite all the extraordinary conflicts and frictions and brutality that it also has enabled in the history of this country in its 250 years.

DIONNE: I think we should send you on a national tour to improve American morale. That's a beautiful thing. Jonathan and Keon, and then put some hands up so we can get mics in your hands. We'll do a couple at a time. Why don't we this gentleman up front and this gentleman there, I'll just do each group. But Jonathan, go ahead, both of you, before we go to the questions.

RAUCH: Inclined to yield my time because my colleagues have been so persuasive.

DIONNE: Keon, do you?

GILBERT: I, I think my response is freedom. I think anything that interferes with freedom is a challenge and a threat in many different ways. And so I think that's probably a really great way in terms of just thinking about these very important questions and how an individual or a community or a

collective tries to identify more opportunity to be free or to exercise their freedom I think is critically important.

DIONNE: Thank you. This gentleman over here, and then there was a hand right... those two folks here, and then I'll go to the-- Just go across the quadra- or the thirds here. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. So the Constitution for its time was a profoundly liberal document. I think about 80% of the amendments were also very liberal for the time Yet we still had Jim Crow laws, which the Nazis actually copied for the 1935 Nuremberg Framework, right? It's 2026 and I think we still have unequal distribution of the privileges of citizenship. In fact, in DC, 800,000 citizens pay federal income taxes, but we have no representation in Congress. So I guess my question, I think, and Scott touched on this a little bit, is given that millions of liberals and conservatives already disagree on what binds us, how can either side claim that we are share- we are united by shared ideals when basic democratic privileges are still treated as a political wildcard depending on where you live?

DIONNE: Thank you. That's a great question. And then the gentleman over here. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Should I wait? Okay.

DIONNE: No, go ahead. I'm gonna take two at a time at each, so I can get more folks in. Okay,

AUDIENCE MEMBER: perfect. Hello.

DIONNE: A, it's a democratic and, a small D approach. It's liberal. Yeah, liberal.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, just choose to pass over this question.

DIONNE: Goddamn liberal.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay, so with this question, it's referring to the is it possible to bring things back, where I'm thinking about the rural element specifically because I think the politics of western Nebraska and northern Idaho are pretty starkly different from urban America. So I'm thinking about this in the blood and soil source of national identity because I've been reading the Crisis of German

Ideology book by George Mosse and he's talking about how there's this mythical, like pseudo mystical religious bent that there's a national identity of Germans that they want to bring back with the Volk and have this sense of true Germanism that makes them great and I'm probably misinterpreting it pretty bad.

But the point is How can you speak to the rural environment and have them speak to the urban? And I think there's a huge discrepancy there. For example, like my family in Western Nebraska, again, this is anecdotal, they have the resources to cross-pollinate, send their kids to university, but they don't want to do that because they see it as their kids will be I-I-impacted by these institutions, so they prefer to keep them separate. But then if we go to the education argument of, okay, education is the true cross-pollinator to have these liberal values be disseminated Paul Fussell shows that you have the most educated generation ever killing each other. So how do we move past that?

DIONNE: Thank you. Who wants to take on one or the other of those?

GILBERT: If you don't mind, I, let me start with the second question. W. B.- W. E. B. Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* one of the chapters that he has, this is one of my favorite chapters, it's called *Of the Coming of John*. *Of the Coming of John* picks up on this point about rural communities perhaps, Wanting their kids to stay closer to home, maybe to not go to college. And essentially, this chapter speaks to that in a very interesting way, thinking about Jim- Jim Crow South in particular. And so the story is about young man who grows up in rural South, segregated South, goes away to college. Goes away to college, comes back during various visits and realizes that probably he already knew segregation was wrong, but he starts to behave in a way that starts to reject segregation, and his life is then threatened as a result of that.

And so this... He talks about it in the sense of we all live in these very interesting in a simplistic way, dualities of trying to understand that perhaps what I may have experienced and what in a future experience, in a later life contradicts one another. And what does it mean for my family to be in a place like that, and I'm in a different place ideologically, politically, et cetera, and how do I try to reconcile them? And how does it also suggest am I rejecting a part of me as well? I think when we take this into consideration and recognize that, yes, there are vast differences, some of those differences, it literally exists because of geography. We were talking at lunch about Pittsburgh as a place.

I, I went to graduate school in Pittsburgh, and that was the first place I experienced very deep segregation in the way that I experienced it because of physical neighborhoods, ethnic identities in various neighborhoods. And I didn't understand it, although I also understood it, if that makes any sense. And to recognize that each of those neighborhoods had a very deep sense of history and culture, et cetera, and I- and identity that didn't always necessarily contradict with the neighborhood next to it, but they were all trying to figure out what it meant to live in a place like Pittsburgh in America in their own unique way, as well as trying to find some commonality with the neighborhood next to me, et cetera.

I think our ability to embrace all of that allows us to be American and allows us to really think about what are the conversations that we need to have to ensure that everyone can think about what it means to be rural be Polish be Black, be Jewish, et cetera, and live in our respective, communities in lots of different ways. But also to make sure that we're not creating policies that infringe upon the freedoms and those abilities in interesting ways.

DIONNE: Anyone else want to take either of those on? I... Oh yeah, g- let me just say a quick thing about your question that I appreciate. I constantly go back to the Lincoln and King reading of the Declaration as a promise. And if you haven't heard it or read it before, I think that Barack Obama's Selma speech has a very interesting theory of American history in it. And it's a contested theory. But it... I summarize it as a two steps forward, one step back theory of American history. But it's a belief that over time we have made more progress than had regression, so that we had slavery, then the Civil War, we had Reconstruction, then Jim Crow.

It took a whole long time, but then we had the se- the second reconstruction of civil rights. We're probably going through the era of moving backwards. Similarly, on economics, just think about the '20s versus the New Deal, that we have had these cycles of reform that, in general, left us better off at the end than we were before, that I think are, written into the founding documents, not only in the Declaration, but I'm a huge fan of the preamble of the American Constitution, which really describes our purposes and the purpose of the Constitution.

Some people say the preamble is meaningless. I am a heavy preamble person. And that's my sort of short, e- excessively glib but somewhat hopeful answer to your good question. If I could go, Let's bring in let's see more hands, and we'll bring a bunch of people in, and then I'll let everybody close

with a brilliant and inspiring comment. So who else who else wants to come in? Over here? Please. Yeah. The mic is coming your way.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. This is a difficult question to answer. I'm fascinated with this concept of something being un-American. So when... Right now I'm also fascinated with this concept of political polarization and how we are very focused on supporting our parties that we are affiliated with rather than, the values that we support as fundamentally written out in our American documents. Do you think that we are moving in a direction towards that we are becoming so polarized as a nation based on our parti- like, our parties that we would consider this un-American? Do you get what I'm saying? Sorry, I couldn't... I was having trouble putting it into words, but

DIONNE: No I think that's pretty clear. By the way, there is... I wanna throw into the mix one question, a profound question that we got online, which is, are Americans still bonded by ideals or identity in any kind of positive way? Anyone else wanna come in? But I wanna, I want you to take up that question. Why don't you take that and then I'll-- and you can either use it as a closing comment or I w- I have a lot of questions still, but go ahead. Or why don't we start this way? Why don't we start with Keon then go back this way?

GILBERT: Which question?

DIONNE: On American. The lady's question and also, are we... And they are connected because of the notion of polarization. Are-- Do we-- Have we lost these ties?

GILBERT: Yeah. I think in part we, we just have to just honor and respect that we are more heterogeneous than we are homogenous. And I think even starting from that place is a very important distinction. I'll give you just a very quick example. In my own studies about Black American political thought, et cetera, et cetera, there's this, belief all Black people are, or majority of Black people are Democrats. Okay. Sure. If we just take that as a as a reality or as a thing, as... however, Black Americans also tend to be very conservative in a lot of very interesting ways as well as part of that, and that starts to unpack or unearth questions about heterogeneity and even questions about geographic identity or where the geographic splits are.

As you think about that, I don't think, for example, Black people would say that because someone is a bit more conservative than another group of Black people, that either one of them is more or less American as a result of those beliefs, choices, decisions, voting behaviors. I think we run into the challenge in general about recognizing or forgetting or choosing to not recognize that there are just general differences. And I think, Jon, you were talking about this in your very earlier comments about that these are real b- these are beliefs that people have, and they are real, and they act on them in very real ways. It's, there's differences that people choose to break the law and all that kind of stuff, but I think we just have to recognize and understand that they're-- we are quite divided in lots of different ways. And we're all on a spectrum, and sometimes we go back and forth, even as individuals, families and communities. I'll stop.

DIONNE: Jonathan, closing thoughts? The- Which, whichever one, whichever Jonathan you wanna be, whichever-

RAUCH: So there-- those two questions are closely linked. Is there a level of polarization that... I'm not sure I'd phrase it as anti-American per se. But are there levels of polarization that are so great that they're inconsistent with a republican form of government? I think the answer is yes, and I think we're getting closer to that level in the United States, and I think the same is true for a number of European countries as well. Britain is now on, what? Its seventh prime minister in ten years. A lot of countries are starting to look ungovernable, and polarization and identity issues are a big part of the reason. I'm terribly worried about it. I am, I realize, America's been through a lot. We came through the Civil War.

We're okay. We came through race and other issues. We're okay. I'm not triumphalist about this. I am not sure. I am hopeful, but I am not sure that America will be a liberal democracy in ten or twenty years. I wish I didn't have to say that. That goes to the second question as well. Are Americans still bonded by ideals? I think it's what Keon said. Americans are still I-I-idealistic people, or at least ideological people. Not the same thing. But we have deep disagreements about those about those ideologies, and some of those ideologies are illiberal. Meaning, again, inconsistent with the values of the Declaration and the Constitution. And to the extent that those take root in the mass public, it becomes harder and harder to sustain a liberal democracy on our soil. And that's the place where we are right now. I don't like it, but I think it's where we are.

STELZENMÜLLER: There's a famous essay by the Belgian constitutional theorist, Benjamin Constant which is part of the European constitutional movement of the first third of the 19th century. Belgium was interesting in 1832, the first European country to have a liberal c- constitution, despite the fact that it remained a monarchy. Where he says, and I'm gonna summarize this very imperfectly, basically the point of having a liberal constitutional order is to permit citizens to go about the business of running their daily lives and making money and not having to be heroic citizens every day.

This is the whole point of having this kind of machinery, right? Is that you can have, I think there's another famous saying about the American Constitution created by genius for use by idiots. Slightly more rude, but right? It permits... it is generously allows for the occasional appearance of idiots and the malevolent or the malignant. The question is, it seems to me are we in a moment right now of political conjunctures of the, the sinus curve going one way and then the other way? Or are we in a moment when people are changed-- are trying to change the order in such a way that that the natural operation of political conjunctures can no longer work, right?

In other words, of permanently empowering and entrenching one faction to the exclusion and disempowerment of all other factions, which is clearly not what the framers wanted, right? And it seems to me that there are some very concerning signs- ... that mischief is afoot, and that there are people who are trying to do exactly that. So I would say to you that for from the point of view of this grateful guest of this gr-great country this is an architectural moment. This is a moment when people probably should make a choice between being consumers of a constitutional order and active citizens, right? And protecting its foundational principles against the enemies of that order.

And I'm can-- I can tell you that the very same thing is happening in different European constitutional orders, and certainly in mine. That is exactly what the AfD, the Alternative for Germany, is about, and it's very publicly about. Which is why I find it hard to comprehend that anybody in this administration and in this, and the State Department of this great country, would be willing to support them rhetorically or with money. But that's just an editorializing PS.

ANDERSON: Amen. Thank you.

DIONNE: John.

ANDERSON: Yeah. I would just say, I think all four of our questions have a lot of commonality, in some ways they're all getting back to the same root question. And I think fundamentally that this is a topic for a whole other debate. We have to understand there are profound differences between our people in our country. There are also lots of factors that amplify deliberately and not deliberately various ways, those discrepancies and disparities to make them seem much greater than they are. People do it for political advantage because it's how you raise money, it's how you mobilize people to the polls. People do it because it's an incident of social media and how we understand and perceive our community and perceive people on social media.

Variety of other factors that have amplified it to this moment. It is dangerous, but I also think that it's often exaggerated. There are profound differences, but there are also lots of profound commonalities that often get lost in the mix. What misses, what you're often missing, particularly in the rural-urban divide or places where you just have communities that don't interact, is that ability to understand, perceive, and acknowledge and build the empathy that comes from commonalities and common understanding and degree of social trust, which is the thing that we've seen, I think, deteriorate more than anything else in the last many years.

How that relates to this conversation? Only partially. It's a much bigger problem. Where I do think it relates though, is that if you're going to build social trust with someone, you need to be able to articulate a community of which they can be a part as much as you, even if you have profound differences. And I think frankly it is even more important when they're not willing to do the same to you, at least in the first instance. Somebody has to be the initial one to build that divide, and that's where this concept of how we build the American identity intersects with beginning to address these problems about building a concept of community that has space for all these different Americans, even ones with which we profoundly disagree.

DIONNE: Thank you. I'm gonna close by being an immoderate moderator. I love the idea of a moderate moderator, Bill. I wanna make two quick points, one on polarization and one on the declaration. On polarization, one of the things that's bothered me about our discussions on polarization is we tend to say partisanship is a terrible thing. And no, what partisanship means at its best is twofold, and Nancy Rosenblum, the great philosopher has written-- who wrote a book about partisanship called *On the Side of the Angels*. And there are two things that we need to understand about partisanship. One is you are advancing a view of the good.

You are advancing a view about the direction that you believe your country should go in. But by being a partisan in a democracy, you accept on principle that your view is partial, that you might lose, that the other side might win, and that you have to advance your argument. That is the advantage of a democracy. There are no final victories, which means if you're on the losing side, there are no final defeats. And so I think we need to not get rid of partisanship, but rediscover partisanship rightly understood. And I love the fact that our colleague, John Valland, is doing a project on, of all things for a think tank, intellectual humility because I think intellectual humility is actually central to the success of democracy in the long term.

And on the declaration I have this idea that we Americans, all of us, each of us, is divided between our dedication to individualism, but our quest for and deep respect for community. And that's not a split one side or the other. I think it's within us. And I love the declaration because it begins with the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but it ends with the wonderful words, "And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." And I think all of us need a little bit of that in us right now. Thank you, Bill, for organizing these discussions. Thank you for coming. Thanks for the people watching, and thanks to this wonderful panel.