

DOOMED TO REPEAT:

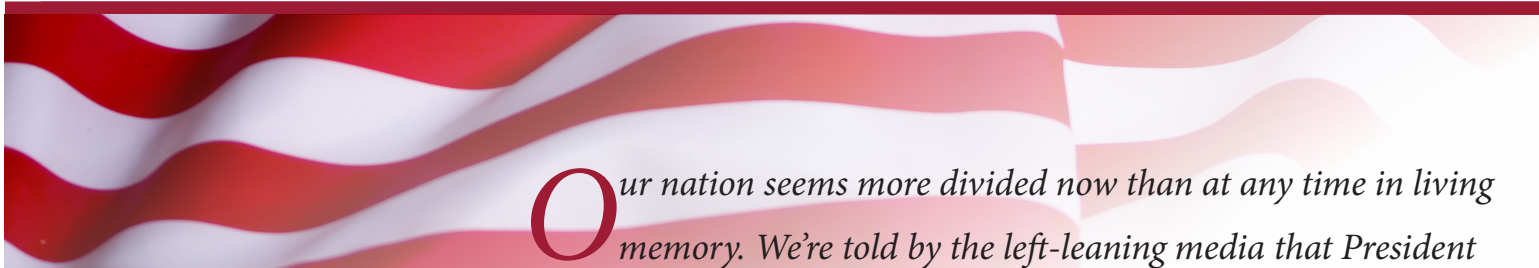
Learning from American History

Transcript of a discussion on July 6, 2020, between

Kevin Roberts, PhD

Mike Gonzalez

Matthew Peterson, PhD



Our nation seems more divided now than at any time in living memory. We're told by the left-leaning media that President Trump's speech praising America was "dark" and "divisive." We're told our Founding Fathers were slave-owners and nothing more. We're told ours is a heritage of hate. How has it come to this? TPPF's Kevin Roberts recently hosted a livestream with experts Mike Gonzalez of the Heritage Foundation and Matthew Peterson of the Claremont Institute to discuss this and other matters. Our nation's heritage is one of revolution, risk and redemption—and our story isn't over yet. Learn where the anti-Americanism stems from—and how to counter it to keep America, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, the "last, best hope on earth."

PARTICIPANTS



Kevin Roberts, PhD, is executive director of the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He has 20 years of experience as a teacher, professor, headmaster, and college president and has been involved in a number of education reform initiatives around the country.



Mike Gonzalez is a senior fellow for the Heritage Foundation. He spent nearly 20 years as a journalist, 15 of them reporting from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. He left journalism to join the administration of President George W. Bush, where he was speechwriter for Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Christopher Cox before moving on to the State Department's European Bureau. He joined the Heritage Foundation in 2009.



Matthew Peterson, PhD, is vice president of education at the Claremont Institute as well as the founding editor of the American Mind. He directs the Institute's expanding portfolio of educational programming, including Claremont's annual Publius, Lincoln, John Marshall, and Speechwriters fellowships. He also heads up Claremont's initiative to create a new center designed to support and advance graduate level study.

This [July 6, 2020, discussion](#) has been edited for clarity.

Kevin Roberts:

Good afternoon and welcome to yet another Texas Public Policy Foundation Monday livestream. We started this a few months ago, focused on the pandemic and government response. And as our audience has built—thanks to all of you who have dutifully joined in every week and asked friends and family to join—we’ve taken on larger topics, but part of the story of the development of this livestream is that this is very much like 2020. It seems, in other words, like every passing week gives us another challenging public policy question to tackle. And as an American historian, a very proud American myself, it has been distressing over the last several weeks to see our country, and in literal cases in some cities, torn apart. It’s time for us to push back on that, and helping me to do that are two guests who’ve spent the better part of their careers promoting the ideals of America—of course not at all whitewashing what’s challenging about our society, we are after all a human enterprise—but make no mistake, this is an episode of this livestream that will inject back into our national conversation a sense of pride of who we are as a people in spite of, maybe you might even say because of, the pluralism that we share. With that, we will jump right into the conversation after some quick introductions, but just know that if you have been frustrated, especially over this last Independence Day weekend, with protests and I guess events that are just short of being riots, we want to be sure that 60 minutes from now that you know that you will be a lot more optimistic about what’s going to happen. But the first step we have to take is to diagnose the problem seriously and responsibly and that’s what we’re going to do.

So let me now introduce our guests. It is a great pleasure to have two leading scholars, thinkers about the American project, with us today. The first is Dr. Matthew Peterson, who is the vice president of education at the Claremont Institute. He’s the founding editor of the *American Mind*, something you should be reading, and Matt will tell us about that if you have not been. He’s a graduate of a wonderful institution of higher education, higher learning, Thomas Aquinas College in California, and he also holds a PhD in political science from Claremont Graduate University. For a few years, Dr. Peterson was in charge of the design and implementation

of the US Department of Education’s Teaching American History initiatives. So, Dr. Peterson, you’ve been busy teaching a really important summer fellowship program out in California. Thanks so much for making time to join us today.

Matthew Peterson:

Thank you so much for having me on. I am here in the middle of the Publius program, a 3-week program that the Claremont Institute runs for young leaders across the country, and it’s especially heartening to be with them during this time.

Kevin Roberts:

Thanks a lot for making the time. Our audience members will get a little taste of that program as well as some of the things that our friend Mike Gonzalez of the Heritage Foundation is doing in his line of work on the opposite coast. Of course, I will just say with a little bit of Texas twinkle in my eye I’m glad I’m neither on the East Coast or in California, but in the great state of Texas. But Mike Gonzalez, that’s just a distraction to a very important introduction I need to make. Obviously I could, as I could have with Matt Peterson, spend a few minutes telling the world about why they should tune in, but there are a few aspects of your biography that I’ll highlight.

You are, of course, senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation—like Claremont, a great institution of civil society in the United States. You spent 20 years as a journalist. You are also one of the most accomplished speechwriters of our generation. You’re a humble guy so you would not ever say that that’s true, but it is true for those of us who’ve read your speeches over the years. And I really want to emphasize something that’s important. We’re doing this episode because of events, but how timely is it that in just 3 weeks you have a new book coming out, entitled *The Plot to Change America, How Identity Politics Is Dividing the Land of the Free*. I would be lying if I said I’ve read it, because it has not been published yet, but I am not lying when I say that I ordered a copy just before coming on air, because the book looks fantastic. We do want to invite you to speak about that obviously, Matt Peterson, you too, with the publications you’re doing.

Gentlemen, we're going to jump right in, and I just want to ask you a 30,000-foot question. Here we are in 2020. It seems like July 4th and the days after it we should be celebrating everything that's great about America. We understand that we have this health crisis; we have what some of us see as a government-response crisis as well. But nonetheless, we're still Americans; we're still the last best hope for all humans on earth. But we have thousands, if not a few million Americans, who don't agree with that. So I just want to ask each of you—we'll start with you, Matt—for our audience, to sort of make sense of why it is in 2020 that we're seeing this destruction—literally—of some of our American history.

Matthew Peterson:

I want to answer this on two levels. One goes way back, and it goes to a problem that Claremont scholars have talked about for 40 years now, which is that over 100 years ago, you had a change in elite American society in education and a sort of questioning of whether or not the Declaration of Independence is true. Carl Becker, a famous historian in the 1920s, writes a book called *The Declaration of Independence*.



For a long time, it was the book on the Declaration. And in that book, which is sort of a historical study, at one point he says that whether or not the Declaration is true about being a self-evident truth is essentially a meaningless question. We all have different ideas, different times, and this kind of relativism lurks in the background for a long time.

And then something happens in the 60s, which I think Mike will speak to, that lights a match. A lot of young students act on this idea that not only is it not true, but historically America is actually an evil place. Why does this happen in 2020? There are different ways to answer that question. There's politics going on right now—obviously, this is a full-scale war against the president. It's a political gambit that they're just stoking as hard as they can to try to sow division in the wake of the election. But also, I have to say, we're getting what we paid for. We've paid for this for decades. Our schools have gotten worse and worse every year; conservatives have complained about it for 70 years, and for the most part, things have worsened, and now we're just getting what we paid for. This is baked-in for a lot of millennials and younger folks that America is evil and that these sorts of actions that are lawless are justified.

Kevin Roberts:

And that's a theme—getting what we paid for—that we'll be touching on a lot in this hour. And I'm sure some of our audience, when they have the opportunity to ask questions in the second half of the hour, will pursue that as well. Mike Gonzalez, what is it about 2020 that makes this the year of discontent when it comes to American history?

Mike Gonzalez:

I'm glad that Matt took it to about a 100 years ago, because that also is where I'm going to take it. He spoke about the progressives here in America. I'm going to take it back to Antonio Gramsci, who is this Italian Communist who gets thrown into prison by Mussolini “so his brain will stop working.” As we know from the apostle St. Paul and everybody else, the last thing you want to do to a thinker is to put them in prison because they can become very productive and write and have the time to think. And he came out with this idea of the hegemonic narrative. He realized that the Communist Marx had promised revolutions, but yet very few had

happened—only one in a backwater place called Russia in 1917. Every other revolution had failed from 1848 to 1919—the Biennio Rosso in Italy.

He decided that that was because the worker will never rise up because the worker has become his own oppressor. The worker has bought into the culture, the narrative of the capitalist, of the bourgeoisie. And he realized that they would need to come up with a counter narrative. This then gets worked over by many people in the 60s, Marcuse included. And by the way, all of our schools of education have been taken over by critical theory, which is a big part of this. And critical theory is a tool for criticizing the West and all those institutions. And if you look at the curricula for schools of education, they're all suffused with critical race theory or critical legal theory or pedagogy of the oppressed and all this other stuff.

So what we're seeing play out in our streets is the attempt at throwing out the American hegemonic narrative, what is to you and me and to Matt, the beautiful story of America with all its problems, America has had problems, but it's also the only place created predicated on the idea that all men are created equal. They're trying to overthrow that with an ugly narrative, a narrative filled with grievances, and it's a hamster wheel that never stops. We can go into why later, but this is why I think we're seeing all this hatred and all this turmoil on our streets today.

Kevin Roberts:

There are so many follow-up questions I want to pursue, but I'll try to be clear as I do so, because I think our audience is really keyed into why this is happening now and both of you have done an excellent job of laying it out. But I think about, say, a generation older than us—my parents or aunts and uncles. They might be pretty much all over the political spectrum, but one thing they share is a love for this country. And what they literally do not understand is why someone would want to go tear down statues of American heroes. They would disagree with, but they might understand focusing on, some slave owner who was a Confederate. We'll deal with that specific issue in our conversation subsequently.

But my question is, to get to the real origins of it, how long has this been happening? Both of you talked about



roughly a century. Mike, you talked about the importance of Marxist thought, but sort of on the ground, on the sidewalk, starting in the 1910s, going to the 1950s to the 1980s, what has had to happen in order for this tinderbox to really explode here in 2020? Whether it's in higher education or K through 12 schools, or is it something in our own communities that our older relatives, older friends simply have not seen?

Mike Gonzalez:

This is something Matt referenced when he spoke. Rudi Dutschke, who was a man of the 60s, taught by Herbert Marcuse, came out with this idea of the Long March through the institutions, the Long March being a reference obviously to the miles-long march through China, through rural China in the 1930s, except that Mao used violence to defeat the KMT, the nationalist party in China. On the Rudi Dutschke and on the Marcuse and on the new thinking of the 60s, the institutions will be taken over peacefully and owned by the leftist ideologues. So they take over the academy, they

take over the media, they take over Hollywood. The battle right now, I believe, is over corporate America and is waged through HR, but there's a big battle now over corporate America.

Once they take over, Howard Zinn's book is published in 1980—a book of very shoddy scholarship. One could not really even call it scholarship, it's a handbook for hating America, hating everything from Columbus on. It has no footnotes; it is a pack of lies. And if you go to Amazon today and you look for people's history of the United States, you see it's still number 1 in several categories. It is taught to our children from middle school on, never mind high school and college.

More recently, we've had the very egregious, mendacious 1619 Project, which is a project by the *New York Times*, but the really worrisome thing about it is it's also a curriculum which has now taken over. It's being used in our 4,500 classrooms in 5 cities all over the United States, and again it teaches that the beginning of America is not 1776, with the glorious revolution to create this last best hope for man on earth, but it is 1619 when slaves are first brought from Africa to North America. Obviously slavery is a stain on our history, just like it is a stain in every country's history, because it has been practiced everywhere. But it is this attempt to make America unlovely that we see in the results of today.

Kevin Roberts:

Marxism is a stain in every country's history, too; we might want to remember that in 2020. But, Matt, I want to pursue that follow-up question with you because you've spent a lot of time teaching students American history and teaching teachers of American history how to teach those students. And so just add some texture for us based on your experience, especially for those audience members who really are just trying to understand the origins of this problem.

Matthew Peterson:

My 3 years, as you mentioned at the beginning, evaluating and teaching American history programs, I was not working directly for the Department of Education, but I was helping the third-party providers both evaluate the effectiveness of the program and meet the requirements that DOE would set out. There were so many stories from that time



period, and they're not only anecdotal—we tested thousands of students and teachers in their knowledge of American history and civics. And what we've found, what I experienced, was the same thing that every major survey has shown in the last 40 years or so and more: We don't teach this stuff.

What Mike is saying about the education in schools is so key, and people like us have been warning about this for a long time, but it was very difficult to get politicians to do anything about it. I really hope that this entire show today helps your audience understand that this isn't just discontent about race. It really is not. What's behind this is a concerted effort, a concerted movement, to reform and reshape America. And that's why goodhearted people of goodwill look at this and say, "Well, the death of George Floyd is awful, and people are upset about race in America." And what they don't get is that when you look at what's really spearheading the violence and taking down of the statues is not an organic movement. This has been percolating for a long time.

Let me give you one example. At one point, I believe in the Princeton School District—which is *that* Princeton—I

remember some years back, it seemed as if there were two views of the Cold War. The moderate view was that the US and the Soviet Union were equally responsible. And the liberal view was that we in fact were responsible, we were the aggressor throughout the entirety of the Cold War. I remember sitting in a room and between a quarter and a third of the teachers didn't know the answer to this question: The United States and which other country were the major players in the Cold War? That's in living memory. And older teachers were looking around in anger in this particular district.

This has been neglected, and it seems as if no matter what we do, nothing is done. No matter what we say, nothing is done. And let's think about this. In a way, the conservative movement starts with William F. Buckley writing *God and Man at Yale*. And in that book, in the 50s, 70 years ago, he says, look at Yale, these people are atheists and Communists and this is a problem. So this has been going on for a long time, but I think the difference is what Mike is talking about.

One of the differences is that we now have entire generations for whom culture is anti-American and runs with

this narrative, and their entire K through 12 curriculum is the same. And they kind of came up in the age of Obama around that time and they look around, and they don't like what they see, and it's baked-in to what they think about their country. And in a way, I think all of us feel this. When you see something heroic or noble or patriotic, there's this little voice in the back of your head that says, "Well, no, actually, that person wasn't really a hero; actually you have to balance that with this, that, and the other thing." And the sad thing is that that voice in many cases comes from historical ignorance, not knowledge.

Kevin Roberts:

It's so true. And the point that I might home in on, especially from my purview at a policy shop, is that for a generation, elected officials, state legislators, congressmen, governors, even presidents of the United States, some of them acknowledged there is a problem in terms of civic and American history education, but they didn't want to take bold stands to do anything about it. Even elected officials who are right of center, who might be a little more inclined to do so,



I would like to think that maybe there would even be some left of center politicians, like modern-day Daniel Patrick Moynihans, who would recognize the beauty of at least the experiment that we're all engaged in, which we call America. But I realized the extent of the problem almost 20 years ago when I had my first full-time professor gig at a state university in the Southwest.

I was teaching one of the surveys of American history, and I walked into the university bookstore to see what my colleagues were assigning. Every last section of American history at that very large state university was being assigned Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*—except the ones that I was teaching, and I over-corrected and used a wonderful textbook called *The Patriot's History of the United States*, which is why when tenure review came up, I thought it might be time to switch careers. But the point is that, of the students who were taking all of those sections, a third were social studies education majors. And let's just say that 75% or 80% became certified teachers in that state. They were inculcated with the nonsense—that wouldn't pass any sort of muster from serious historians—that's in that book.

And then they're assigning either that book or now many, many volumes that are aligned with it. And we're easily 25 years into this in terms of the accelerated phase of this problem. So there's just no coincidence that in 2020, this is happening. There's no coincidence that obviously it's happening on the heels of the 1619 Project. With that said, why is it that we're not just looking at tearing down Confederate statues, but we're tearing down statues of Abraham Lincoln, of the White commander of the all-Black 54th Massachusetts Infantry, of Frederick Douglass on July 4th? What is it about this movement that has gone beyond tearing down Confederate statues? Mike?

Mike Gonzalez:

Edmund Burke, probably the founder of modern conservatism, wrote that in order to love your country, your country had to be lovely. And that is what they're trying to do. They're trying to say that America is not lovely, that America is not the country that is founded on this idea that all men are created equal, that Lincoln then later called the last best hope for man on earth, whose Constitution Frederick Douglass,



a towering figure in civil rights history and a former slave, praised, for which Martin Luther King came along and called the Declaration a promissory note which African-Americans have come to them all to cash on. All these things have to be torn down, and it is my belief, it is what I've written in the book called *The Plot to Change America*, that there are no Thursday night meetings—there's no conspiracy—but they're all reading the same texts, as Matt said. And what they're trying to do is create a country where the people accept the larger role for government in their lives, they stopped believing in individual agency. It's a collectivist effort. It's determined, it is planned, it is purposeful. I point out in my book several instances where the lines are, who said what. Louis Hartz—not a man of the right—wrote a book in the 1950s talking about the liberal tradition in America—in fact, that was the name of the book—in which he said we never had feudalism in America, so we never really had socialism or reactionary conservatism the way that Europe has. And it is very hard—and has been throughout our history of 244 years—to convince Americans to accept to become beholden to the state.

And it is through this propagation of grievances, the creation of victimhood culture, that you can start to get people to then rely on the government more for their livelihoods, for everything else—for everything, really. So I think that is the idea. This is why the 1619 Project, which I referenced earlier, in one of its foundational essays, ties slavery to capitalism, to free markets, which is really, again, an inaccurate thing to say. Slavery has existed for millennia. The idea is to change America. The idea is to make an America that will accept more of the continental submission to the state that the Anglo-Scottish enlightenment tradition never was meant to have, in my belief.

Kevin Roberts:

It's well said, Mike.

Matthew Peterson:

I think that's absolutely right. And it's important, again, that people realize this is not just a simple desire for a kind of equality protests in the streets Martin Luther King-style. What's really behind, what's driving the people who are pushing this, who are pushing the destruction of the statues, etc., is

exactly what Mike said. They want to change the system, and that includes the market, that includes government taking more power, and implementing their will, and the rest of the population being forced to do what they want. But I think it's important to talk about justice and to talk about the way in which they see justice versus, I think, the way in which we see justice and the way in which we think America understands what's just at its core. A colleague, the chairman of the Claremont Institute, just wrote a wonderful essay at the American Mind (Americanmind.org) that Rush Limbaugh picked up on, in which he talked about how we need to say that we are going to preserve the American way of life.

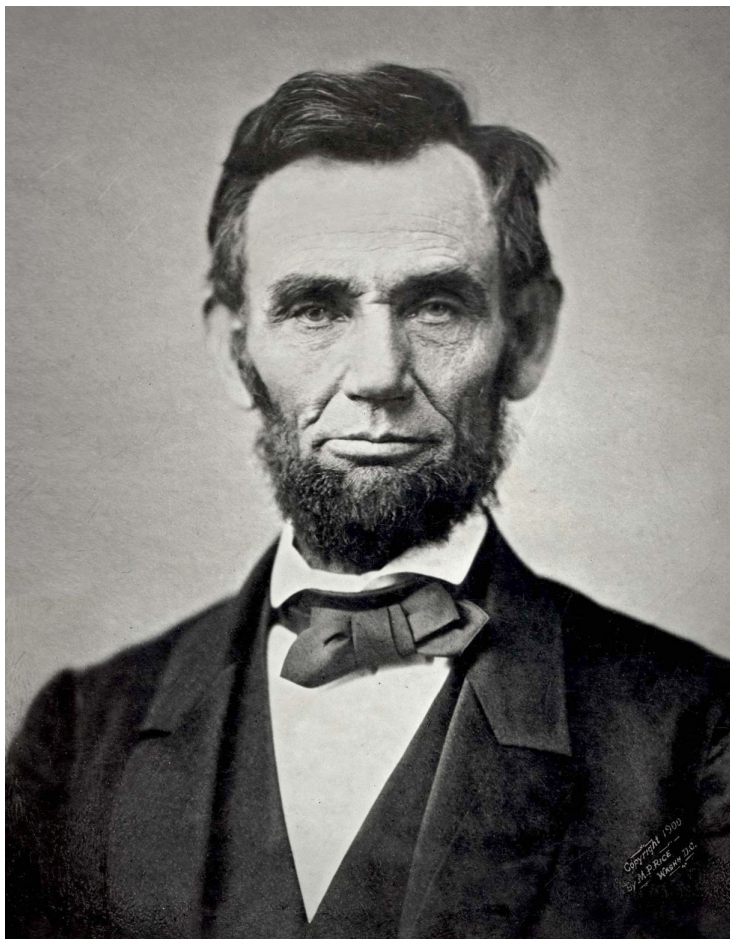
And there's a *New York Post* piece playing off that which was just published called "Republicans Need to Unite in Defense of America's Culture" that Tom Klingenstein wrote recently. What he says, I think, is very true. What is our way of life? Well, the Declaration says that we all share in a fundamental equality and that therefore the government, when it treats us, should treat us equally under the law and as a citizen. And the problem is that what these groups want to do is to create a hierarchy of groups that then have group rights based on race, sexual orientation, and these sorts of categories. What we've seen since the 60s is a kind of perversion of the Civil Rights Act where they want government to be color-conscious. They want law and legality to be color-conscious and to treat people differently based on the color of their skin, on sexual orientation, whether they're male or female, and everything else. They want law itself to recognize all these groups that divide the population and then to rank them. And I don't think it is too extreme to say, when you look at the *White Fragility* book that everyone's talking about now, all these weird racial books, that I think a lot of Americans just kind of thought it was silly or didn't pay attention to. All of a sudden, you have to look seriously at what they're saying. And the worst of it is essentially a reverse Jim Crow. It's saying, okay, now it is our turn, whatever the group is, and now we're going to oppress these other groups based on their race. And that's scary.

You mentioned the author of the 1619 Project. The Federalist just published her op-ed from when she was a sophomore—and we were all sophomoric when we were sophomores, we get that. But what's remarkable, she was at

Notre Dame, and Mike and I were talking about this earlier, it's full of racist statements. Everything from white devils to... the entire thing is a racist screed, and we need to start calling it out. That is still racism, even if you're saying it about White people. It doesn't matter what the color of your skin is. In America, we need to hold to equality under the law. And that's the difference, really, between what American conservatism rightly understood is about, and what this movement is about. And if we don't start naming that, we're going to get in trouble. This is why I think the president's speech at Mount Rushmore was wonderful because he actually named the enemy and started talking about this problem, and that's an important first step.

Kevin Roberts:

It's crucial to frame. I thought the president's speech was remarkable. And that's not a political statement; it's a historical statement because there has never been such an assault on the American republic from the inside, at least from an intellectual point of view, if you can call the 1619 Project intellectual, as what we've experienced. And so that has required the



president, whomever he or she may have been at the moment, to push back on that. I also happen to think, just looking into a kind of political crystal ball, that it's likely to define one of the really important vectors of this presidential election. And I suspect that it's going to be very difficult for candidates who are running left of center to be able to distance themselves enough from the radical left. To the extent that any candidate left, right, center, or something else want to associate themselves with this not just baseless but tragic set of ideas that the activists have, they ought to lose, whatever party they happen to be members of.

So let me just underscore one other part of the problem, and then we'll make our pivot toward audience questions, because I have no doubt that both of you have evoked some questions from our audience. This is a poll that came out in the last few days. It has gotten a lot of press this morning, thank goodness. And it's a poll that's called the Youth Patriotism Index. It's done, just to give full credit where it's due, by Young America's Foundation and Townhall. Consider the contrast between the patriotism of high schoolers in the United States and patriotism of college students. Ninety-one percent of high schoolers have a favorable view of the American flag; for college students, it's 73%. By the way, *this* is remarkable to me as well for a bad reason: 44% percent of high schoolers have a favorable view of the United Nations flag; for college kids, it's 51%. That gives us a little bit of insight into what's going on in our college classrooms.

A couple more statistics and then I'll ask you to comment on. Sixty-six percent of high school students believe America is exceptional; that declines to 47% for American college students. And 48% of high schoolers would sacrifice for America, very low percentage if you ask me; only 32% of college students would, which is not just wrongheaded, but it's ultimately ungrateful for what any American, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances, wakes up to each day. How do we, acknowledging the reality and extent of this problem, begin to propose and then enact some solutions that actually will get us back to a correct understanding of this country? Matt, you want to start?

Matthew Peterson:

You want a “how do we solve the problem” in five minutes or less?

Kevin Roberts:

You got it, it’s a simple question.

Matthew Peterson:

Yes, it is a simple question, and it deserves a simple answer. I think number 1, following off of my screed earlier, we have to call out the problem. We have to correctly identify the problem. And that means that politicians of some stripe are going to have to stand up and say, “This is an existential crisis, the Republic does not survive if it teaches people to hate their country.” If we’re going to teach people to hate their country and we’re going to teach their country it is evil, our country will end. It will be destroyed and become something else. Until politicians, as well as others, are willing to stand up and do something, we’re lost. Then what will they do? Well, that means taking much bolder action when it comes to public education. And it means a lot of the rest of the right coming up with much bolder ideas when it comes to the rest of the educational system. I think the title of your book, Mike, is *The Plot to Destroy America*?

Mike Gonzalez:

Change America.

Matthew Peterson:

Change America. That’s exactly what people need to understand. This is about regime change. And when they say there’s systemic racism, it’s really code for a systemic change that needs to happen. So we change the very form of our government. Number 1, we have to name and understand the problem. We have to understand that we’re being taken advantage of because we do care about equality; Americans aren’t racist. Overall, Americans, compared to other countries, do not live in an ethno-state. Americans understand something about equality; they want to strive towards those ideals. We have to stop being taken advantage of by these scoundrels and say, “No, that’s not what you’re talking about. What you want is something antithetical to the very principle and purpose of what America is.” That needs to be called out.



That fight needs to happen. But then the solutions are going to have to be bigger and bolder. And frankly, I’ll end with this, I think that no matter what we do to reform our school systems and our universities, we’re going to end up having to build new institutions.

Kevin Roberts:

That’s right.

Matthew Peterson:

I don’t think there’s any way around that just because things are so rotten, and people need to understand this, when people are in the streets, tearing down statues of American heroes, that’s because the educational institutions are rotten to the core. They are in their very structure. You can’t just come in and, in my view, say, “Well, we need to add a few professors here and maybe we could...” No. The whole thing is designed now to teach this kind of stuff. Just bigger and bolder solutions are going to need to be proposed, and we have to understand that this is a war, a political war for the soul of our country.

Kevin Roberts:

I couldn't agree more, especially about how poisoned some of these institutions are. To use another metaphor, I might say that sometimes termites become so invasive in a wooden structure that you just have to tear it down. And if there's anything that needs to be torn down, it's those institutions that are not willing to at least tell the truth about the advantages of waking up each day as an American. For those of you in the audience who are ready to fight this war, we welcome you to that fight. Yes, it's good to be speaking about things like education reform at the university level and at the K-12 level, but coming from someone who started a school and ran it, an upstart college, as Matt knows, I can tell you that it's much easier, and you have a much bigger impact, by starting new institutions with those values because they become competitors to the existing regime, which really is rotting at the core. Mike, what would you add before we take our first audience question?

Mike Gonzalez:

There are 90,000 boards of education in America. I think that we rightly talk about universities and colleges—very important—but we also really have to think of K through 12. I have three children, two of whom have either gone through high school or are going through high school. From the very beginning, when my first middle-school child came home and showed me a worksheet that was clearly anti-American, I looked at it and then I looked at the bottom and it said “The Howard Zinn Project.”

And I realized what I was faced with: that I had to start decoding and deprogramming my children when they came home with all this stuff. And, by the way, my children have taken APUSH—AP US History—they teach Howard Zinn there. They have to sit down and write essays; they have to do things that were done in the Soviet Union, which is you have to write essays that will please the teacher, that will resonate with the ideas they have read in Howard Zinn and all these things in order to pass the class because they want to get good grades and go to university.

So we have to start thinking of reforming the K through 12 system. When I go vote and I haven't had the opportunity to review who's standing for the board of education, I stop by



the teachers' union's table; I'm very friendly, and I say, “Who do you recommend and why?” And they give me the recommendations, and I do the exact opposite of what they have recommended. We have to take these elections very seriously. People who need to attend meetings of the board of education, raise their hands, lose your fear. Lose your fear. This is still America. Don't be afraid to speak out at the lower level with your neighbor, with anyone else.

We have to enable people in college. I'm old enough to remember in the 80s when it was cool, for example, at Dartmouth, to have students actually face up to their liberal professors and call them out. And all these great rebel college papers were started out attacking the liberal monopoly on thinking. And that was the era when I grew up, when I was going to college, and it was really a breath of fresh air.

I don't want to leave the audience before you go to Q&A being pessimistic. No, no, this is America. This is the last best hope for man on earth. If we lose it, we lose what Lafayette

called, Liberty has a country now. This is the country of Liberty. It's worth fighting for.

Kevin Roberts:

Absolutely. As I think it's important to emphasize something each of you has mentioned, that you've got to diagnose the problem, understanding reality. That doesn't mean we're going to be pessimistic, but for example, to your point about the boards of education, just an apolitical observation, here in Texas, the great state of Texas, the state board of education, very important in terms of curriculum, including social studies, history, civics instruction, there's a whole slate of candidates aligned with the 1619 Project running for almost each of those state board of education seats. Our audience members, whether they're in Texas or, as I understand the majority of the audience is, in other states, need to be sure that you're paying attention to those kinds of races. They may be farther down the ballot, but they require a look from us and that we act and vote accordingly depending upon what we believe.

Second observation I'll make before taking the first audience question is, there's a report out this morning from North Carolina that its state Department of Education has seen an 80% increase in the number of homeschool applications for the coming year. That probably has a lot to do with schooling not happening in person, but I think one of the silver linings of this entire pandemic and government response and shutdown is that parents are spending more time looking at curricula and understanding the nonsense that's being taught for their kids. And whether through public education, which we pay for through our tax dollars, or through private education, which we're paying for on top of our tax dollars, I think American parents need to be spending more time looking at those curricula.

If they do so, then I'm optimistic about the future. With that said, we have our first question from an audience member who wants to pick up on something that you mentioned regarding President Trump's Mount Rushmore speech. Here's what the audience member says: "The mainstream media said that President Trump's Mount Rushmore speech was divisive



and racist. How do we, as common people, counter this false narrative?” Matt?

Matthew Peterson:

I would quote the speech. I would grab parts of the speech and put them out there. I think that speech does name the problem, and it does so in a way that, if this is objectionable now to talk about the greatness of these presidents and to say America shouldn't be teaching itself to hate itself, I mean, I don't know. I would want to know where they think the divisiveness is. The reports after that speech were terrible. They really just lied about what the speech was about in the mainstream media, but they did have to pay attention to it. And that's, I think, because this is a turning point in this campaign, because all of a sudden Trump planted a flag.

And I think that the more we quote that speech, if you're in this situation that this viewer is, the more then you press the other side to say, "Where is the racism? Where's the racism in the notion that we should all be equal under the law? Where's the racism in the idea that law ought to be color-blind?" That's the ideal that we're striving for, not the opposite. And frankly, I think it's sad because most people just don't know about the actual ideology of, say, Black Lives Matter, the organization. But I just don't understand why it's so hard for politicians to make this distinction; it's very simple.

Black lives matter because all lives matter in America. But Black Lives Matter, the organization, is very much influenced by fancy-school Marxism. And if you go to its website, they don't even bother to change their website or hide it; you'll find a lot of words that most normal people—White, Black, any color—just do not use. Most people are not worried about organizations engaging in heteronormative thinking. We don't categorize people in that way in our heads; people are people. And so we're going to have to educate ourselves about what some of these radical groups are actually about, and then show how they are, in fact, acting along racist lines or anti-American understandings of justice.

Kevin Roberts:

That's well said about Black Lives Matter as an organization; just go to their website. And as you said, not only is it Marxist and troubling, it just shows the influence of so-called

elite education for people who are mostly White elites. And this has very little to do with African-Americans, which makes it doubly troubling, right? It keeps us from having the responsible discourse, which I know each of us in our respective roles and organizations tries to have. Mike, is there anything you would add about the Mount Rushmore speech before we move on to the next question?

Mike Gonzalez:

Just briefly that I've read all the same reports you and Matt read. I found them dumbfounding that that was the take. This morning I watched the morning news shows and they were saying that Trump's speech was aimed at the movement for social justice. No, it was not. It is very obvious in the speech that President Trump is not talking about peaceful protesters or people who have a problem with the George Floyd tragedy. He's talking about the people who say they want to transform the United States, which is what the Black Lives Matter organization says on its website that it wants to do.

It is about the people toppling the statues of Jefferson and Frederick Douglass and Washington. I had to watch all weekend as CNN called Washington and Jefferson a pair of slave owners as if this is all that Washington and Jefferson have done—the man who saved our country, who created the Continental Army; the other man who wrote the Declaration of Independence. To describe them as such over the 4th of July—we have to hold our nerve here and say no and not allow this land grab by the hard left.

Kevin Roberts:

One of the things I loved about the speech in addition to the observations both of you make is the president's idea of a National Garden of American Heroes. And the reason I love that is twofold. Number 1, to an earlier point that you made, Matt, it's really important that we tell the story of history through heroes. It doesn't mean that heroes are perfect. They're not in literature history, they're not in real life. Whoever we might make a hero in our own lives obviously was a human. So he or she was imperfect.

The point is, secondly, that rather than tearing down statues, I've long been an advocate that if there's a problematic statue, for whatever reason, build around it, build additional



statues for context, make a statement, a good statement, a productive statement from those of us in the early 21st century of what America is about. And if you read the executive order commencing the National Garden of American Heroes, you see the list. I mean, this is a pantheon of American heroes, people from all walks of life, all eras. Historical figures, political figures, literary figures, sports figures—that’s the kind of thing that I think, my hunch is, a majority of Americans are looking for. In other words, it’s a positive path out of this morass. What do y’all think?

Mike Gonzalez:

Absolutely.

Kevin Roberts:

Matt?

Matthew Peterson:

Yeah, agreed. And I think it had a characteristic Trump of going right on the attack and saying, “Okay, well, if we’re going to knock down statues, I think actually we should have a garden of statues, and we should build new ones of great American heroes.” And again, not everyone is going to be able to, nor should they, imitate the president in all respects. He is a unique personality, but I do not for the life of me understand why more politicians do not see that what he is doing now, after the last few weeks of sort of being silent, is something that people will rally behind. Because like you said, most people want to honor their country—they want to see the good in it. And I really think that there’s a lot of politicians out there who need to learn from that speech and I think how things are going to improve for him moving forward.

Kevin Roberts:

Sure. Especially as other elected leaders and some institutions, like the National Football League, continue to emphasize dividing us. And so, Mike, I’m interested in what you think about this. Matt, of course, feel free to weigh in. One of our audience members asks, “What are your views on the NFL allowing the Black national anthem being played along with the actual national anthem during the first week of the season?”

Mike Gonzalez:

I thought the move by the NFL to go back and say the way they had dealt with the Kaepernick situation was wrong, was regrettable. First of all, I'm a huge fan of sports. I deal with policy, not in politics, but I watch sports to get away, to have a moment to just retire from all the acrimony and to see men, and in some cases women, at their best. And we really don't want politics involved or to bring in these divisive issues into the playing field. Like the rest of the country, I just want baseball to come back, I want to see the NFL have a full season. I think the country needs it. And I don't think that bringing in more of the divisiveness that is characterizing the rest of our civic life into this arena is something that anybody wants.

Kevin Roberts:

Well said. Matt, anything to add?

Matthew Peterson:

Again, it just disturbs me that we're talking about the Black national anthem. Wait a minute, is the other national anthem the White national anthem? Because I had never thought it was, I thought it was the American national anthem. And I just hope that the majority of people looking at this, whatever their backgrounds, start saying this is an absurd bending over backwards to a radical group that doesn't make any sense. And they're ruining sports. I know what's going to happen to ratings. I don't know how many people now for whom sports in general and the NFL especially is something that they want to turn away from. And they want to do that for political reasons and say, "You know what, this whole thing is a sham. These people have ruined this." And that's sad because we actually need sports for the reasons Mike was pointing to, to see human excellence, which I enjoy. And frankly, I think my Buffalo Bills are actually going to be good this year.

I don't want the season to go downhill, but I don't think they're going to recover, quite honestly. I don't think professional sports are going to recover for some time. And it's not just because of the virus, it's especially because of the way they've politicized all of this. It's like, "Who is the audience for this?" I want to see the petition by the majority of, say, Black Americans who demanded the Black national anthem. This just sounds to me like silly placating liberal White wealthy types acting in a condescending manner towards the rest of America.

Kevin Roberts:

Yeah, they have. They've been acting—

Mike Gonzalez:

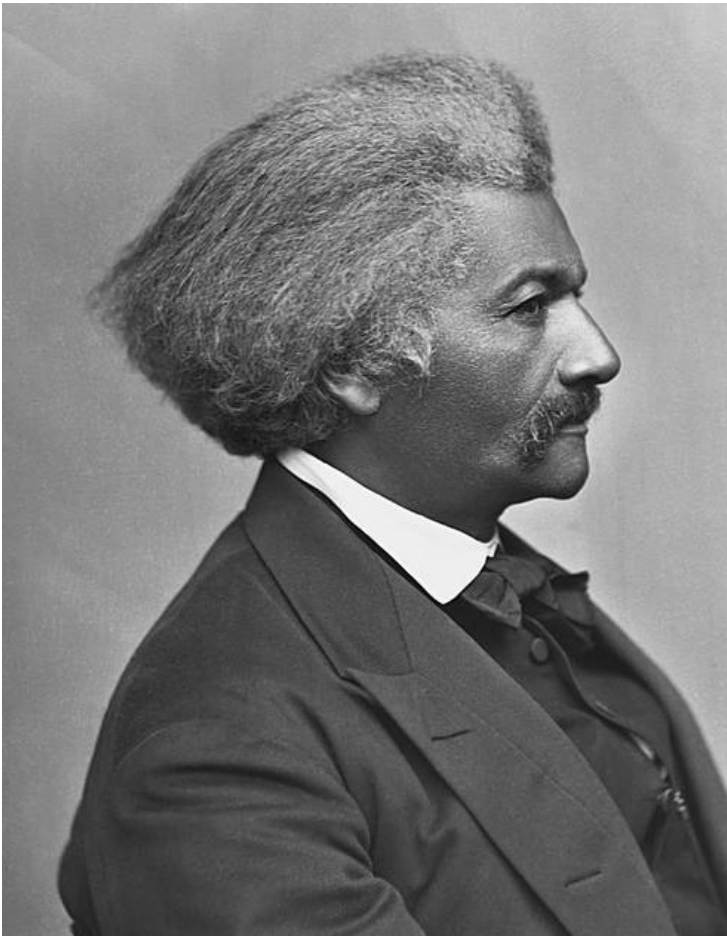
It reminds me of something.

Kevin Roberts:

Go ahead.

Mike Gonzalez:

This is another way—very graphically we understand how the subdivision of the country into subnational groups is a threat to national unity, because there is no anthem to any group. We're Americans. We really should be dedicated to the



idea that no matter our color, our ethnicity, our last name, we're all Americans. We'd be a much better country if we thought of ourselves that way. This is going back to the era of *Plessy*. Nobody wants to go back to *Plessy vs Ferguson*.

Kevin Roberts:

That's right. And for our audience members who think they detect a Texan accent in you, Mike, I'll just remind them that you were born in Cuba and have a little bit of firsthand experience with what real depression looks like. And obviously thinking about your upcoming book focused on identity politics and the harm that identity politics produces, we would be well-served to keep all of that in mind. Just one final question from our audience, and I'll let the two of you talk about this, and then I'll probably offer a response on behalf of TPPF as well.

We always want to personify civil discourse here so we welcome questions that look like they offer a difference of opinion from the three of us. So here you go. This is what an audience member says, "Black Lives Matter is a small part of the recent protests. It is a very broad leaderless protest against the police state that we have become. Our police now act like an army of occupation and treat the people of our nation as a conquered people. The protesters are fighting for liberty, not leftist ideology." How would the two of you respond?

Mike Gonzalez:

I'm not against reforming some aspects of the police departments. We should have a national conversation on police unions. In fact, we should have a national conversation on all public service unions, whether they really serve the country well or not. I don't think, however, that this is what is happening, with all due respect to the person who gave that question. I do think that the people who are behind this, the organizers of the mayhem that we are seeing, do have an end in mind. They do want to change America, they do want to transform it. They keep talking about structural and systemic problems because they want to reform the structures, they want to reform the whole system. They want a wholesale transformation.

One last thing. You referenced that I was born elsewhere. I've lived at least a year in seven countries. I was an American foreign correspondent; I lived in several European



countries and Asian countries and in Latin America. This is one of the least racist countries on earth, if not the least racist country on earth. We have racists, just like every country has racists, but this is a good country. And all you need to see is we have a very long line waiting to come in here. The line of those willing to get out is very, very short or nonexistent. That is the only thing you need to see as to the goodness of America, I'll just leave it there.

Kevin Roberts:

I think 100% of that line waiting to get out all works in Hollywood, right? Good riddance. Matt?

Matthew Peterson:

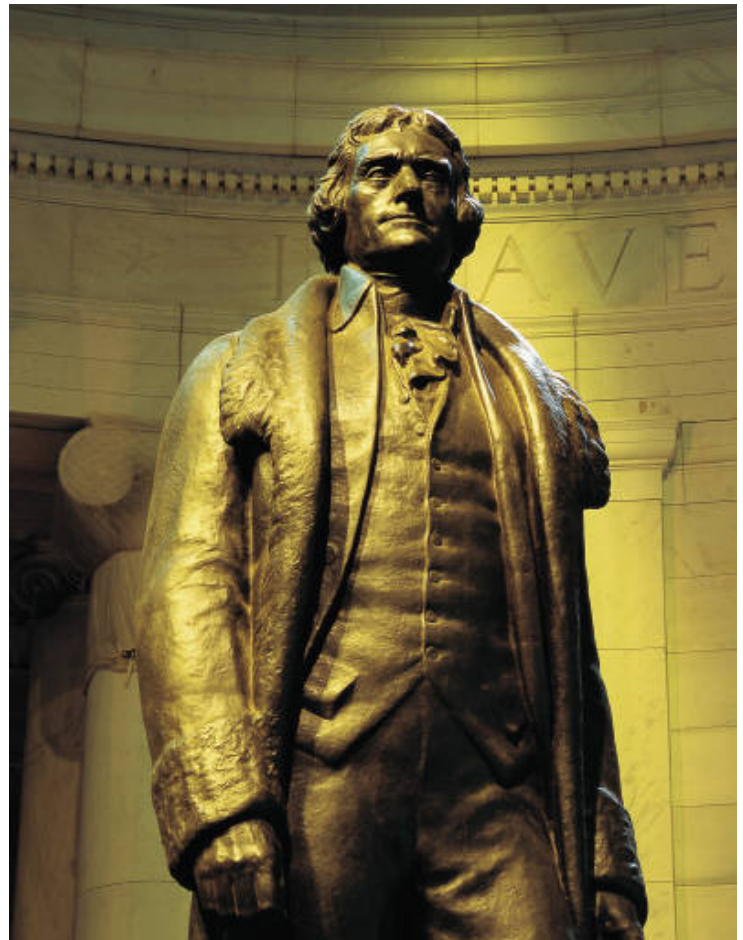
First I'd acknowledge this much: I would say it's absolutely true that police departments are not perfect. It's absolutely true that in some areas of the country, when I would analyze a city government, the way I described them is as the army in Egypt, sometimes. Because you're talking about corrupt political regimes that have been corrupt for decades and we know which party is usually in charge of them. So that you

have a one-party system; there isn't any competition when it comes to politics. So, absolutely, people are disillusioned, and they feel like their vote doesn't matter because, by the way, it doesn't, right? There's no options really; it's the same stuff that goes on for decades. So in the midst of that, the cops many times are like the army in Egypt, trying to keep order but they're kind of on their own side.

Sometimes they do things that aren't so good. I'm totally open to the public union problem as well. I think Mike's right about that. But make no mistake, this is not some popular uprising in that way. Nothing happens by accident. People don't go out and protest by accident. So there's obviously a trigger which no one is talking about by the way, I don't know why. I predicted riots in April in America. I didn't know what the trigger would be, but I figured that the likelihood of riots are exceedingly high, and the only question was whether it was before June or after June—in my mind as summer started. And the reason for that is very simple. Unemployment goes up, people are stuck in the house because of the virus restrictions, and you know what's going to happen when that reaches a certain point.

And so that condition was there, already, putting pressure on the situation. And then, every year, who's spearheading these videos and trying to make it out as if the cops are gunning down thousands of people because of their race, as if KKK members are secretly spending years in the police department to commit genocide. These are exaggerations, at least, but every year, they find an example and they push for these kinds of riots. This year, the conditions were right, the politics were right because of the election, and I think there was a lot of people out there who don't hate the family like Black Lives Matter, the organization. There's a lot of people protesting who do care about their communities, that's absolutely true. But if you look at who's driving it and who really was causing the violence which became characteristic of these events, there's no question. There's no question who's driving it.

And there's no question that this is being used politically for a national narrative, because the national narrative, somehow, is, all of this goes against Trump. What does Trump have to do with the policies in these cities, related to cops? If it was a legitimate, organic political movement, or being



driven by sensible people, you would see a lot more practical calls for change that didn't have to do with remaking what America is and always was.

Kevin Roberts:

Both of you hit the nail on the head. Just want to thank the audience member for submitting that question which obviously was thought-provoking. On behalf of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which has a long-standing police reform initiative, I'd add a couple of thoughts. The first is we have a police reform initiative first and foremost for public safety, and secondly, because we want to honor the men and women who serve us as law enforcement officers. It's the same reason we have an education reform initiative. We love students, and we love teachers. And so what we want to do is to get the police unions out of the way in the same way you want to get the teachers unions out of the way so that our public funds can be better used for public safety and education, respectively. But to get to the heart of the problem, Senator Tim Scott had a wonderful piece of legislation—it wasn't

perfect, but it was really good—that the speaker of the United States House decided to kill, all in the name of this politicized agenda, which frankly, this is not hyperbole, is frankly costing police officers their lives, even in this last weekend. That is reprehensible, and I think it's something that those of us who are right of center particularly ought to be calling out.

So with that said, gentlemen, we have had almost a full hour. We've diagnosed the problem; we've offered some solutions. We always want to conclude with some hopeful sort of encouraging words. And so I'm going to ask each of you to do that before we wrap up, and, Mike, I'll turn to you first to do that.

Mike Gonzalez:

I am optimistic. I am. This is a good country that has always come back from the brink. We're at a moment now; we're at a crucial moment, when people have to hold their nerves and not allow some very bad things to happen—and not just leaders of government, political leaders, but the media. For example, we have seen a very worrisome push towards getting rid of objectivity in reporting. People are cheering this, and we have seen heads roll in news departments—the editor at the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. We need to say we have freedom of speech in this country. We need to insist on it. We need to insist on the ability to debate each other. We need to push back against very bad policies that some very bad people are trying to get across in a rush because we're in a moment of crisis. And as long as we hold our nerve, I think we can come back from this. I really do—I'm not just saying that. Matt?

Matthew Peterson:

Yeah, I think we don't want to be Pollyannish about the situation but I agree. And the reason that I think we can come out of this is that this is to me more of a problem with leadership and corrupt institutions than it is one of the American people. The American people is divided, but a lot of people are still able to be persuaded, I think, about some of these issues, and a lot of people, frankly, just disagree with the extreme left on all these issues. So I think the key is going to be that we seek out and band together with those people who

are brave enough to speak out about it. And as exactly as you said, we have to start steeling ourselves and speaking out as we can. And that means banding together under the banner of those who are willing to call out the problem. If we don't do that, things won't go well. But I have hope that people will, and I think that the desire and frustration are there among so many Americans. And it's almost as if we're trying to figure out, "What can I do? What can I do?" And that's a failure in many respects of our corrupt institutions. But as we move forward, I think that we will find all kinds of practical things we can do. And this election, in fact, will embolden people to speak when they're actually looking at a clear choice between Biden, who's unwilling to call out BLM, and Trump.

Kevin Roberts:

It'll be an interesting second half to what has been seemingly a very long year. Matt Peterson, Mike Gonzalez, can't thank you enough for taking time for this. I know our audience members appreciate not just your time today, but the work that you've done. And to wrap up what's been a riveting conversation, gentlemen, I guess I would say that the best way to defend statues is every day to be out promoting America. And the best way to promote America is to be sure that we've read not just the founding documents of this country or some of the speeches that we mentioned today: Martin Luther King's speech, obviously, from the 1960s; last week I mentioned Solzhenitsyn's speech in 1978, which really does get to the heart of some of the problems we've experienced.

But we might also talk about other American heroes, not yet enshrined with statues and monuments. And I think that's what the president offered with his idea of the National Garden of American Heroes that cuts through the noise that the radical left is wanting us to sort of be beset by and let us make no mistake, they want us to be very discouraged. So for those of you who took the time to tune in today, thank you so much. Know that each week we will always cover topics that are relevant and topics that remind us that we were privileged every day to wake up in the United States of America. May God bless you, and may God bless this wonderful land. Take care. ★

About Texas Public Policy Foundation

The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-partisan research institute. The Foundation promotes and defends liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise in Texas and the nation by educating and affecting policymakers and the Texas public policy debate with academically sound research and outreach.

Funded by thousands of individuals, foundations, and corporations, the Foundation does not accept government funds or contributions to influence the outcomes of its research.

The public is demanding a different direction for their government, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation is providing the ideas that enable policymakers to chart that new course.

