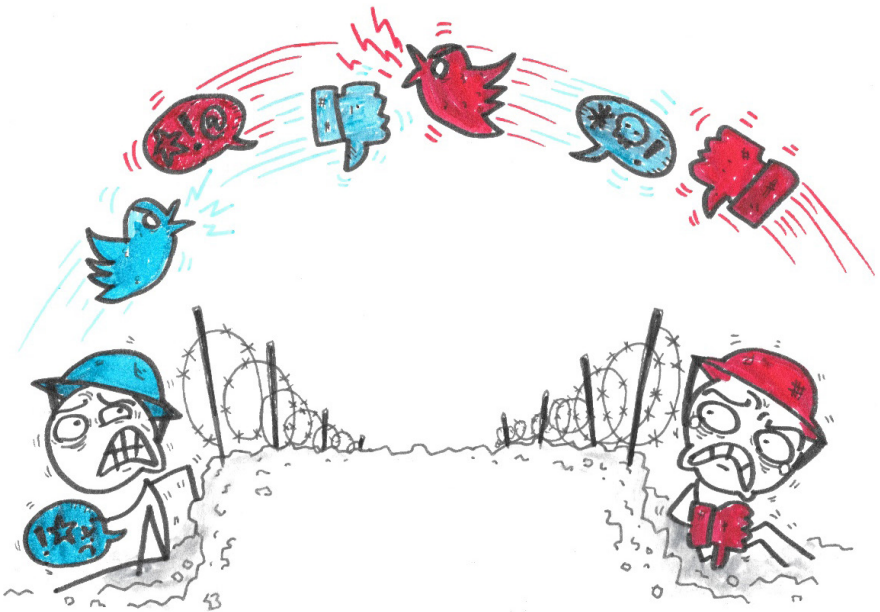
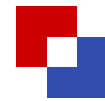


Fussing + Fighting

HOW WE DON'T GET ALONG
[AND SOMETIMES DO]

A Primer on Polarization and Social Conflict.





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1.0 _ On Polarization

Political polarization is the defining feature of early 21st century American politics, both among the public and elected officials.

Pew Research Center, 2014

1.1 What's the essence of polarization?

The concept of “polarization” comes from physics. It describes the phenomenon in which the two poles, governed by electromagnetic radiation, push one another apart. The very essence of polarization, then, is that it's relational.

Some people in describing our current public life use words such as “incivility” or “extremism,” but these terms don't necessarily refer to relationships. After all, I can be “civil” to you irrespective of whether I know you, or how you treat me. I can have an “extreme” political position, but that position only exists in relation to other positions, not other people. That's why “polarization” is the most accurate word to describe our current predicament.

Societal polarization necessarily involves how we think together about each other.

1.2 What are the main qualities of today's polarization?

First, it's personal. It's what scholars call affective. It's believing that your political opponents are not simply misguided, but are also bad people who make you fearful, angry, or afraid.

By polarization I mean ... an intense commitment to a candidate, a culture, or an ideology that sets people in one group definitively apart from people in another, rival group. Such a condition is revealed when a candidate for public office is regarded by a competitor and his supporters not simply as wrong but as corrupt or wicked; when one way of thinking about the world is assumed to be morally superior to any other way; when one set of political beliefs is considered to be entirely correct and a rival set wholly wrong.

James Q. Wilson, “How Divided Are We?” 2006

Second, it's comprehensive and identity-shaping. Today as an American my partisan political views increasingly influence my overall identity. More and more, I see myself as belonging to a cohesive group or “tribe” whose members share not only my political views, but also my lifestyle and consumer preferences.

Partisanship's power is not limited to politics ... [Our study examines] a broader trend of partisanship shaping how people make economic decisions ... Our results call for paying greater attention to potential discrimination based on partisan affiliation. To date, few social norms constrain such behavior.

“Political Polarization is Changing How Americans Work and Shop,” Harvard Business Review, 2017

And third, it’s elitist. Highly educated, politically engaged Americans tend to be more polarized and polarizing than other Americans. It seems that the more upscale we are, the more politically fearful and disagreeable we are.

For the first time in surveys dating to 1992, majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but very unfavorable views of the other party ... An overwhelming share of those who hold highly negative views of the opposing party say that its policies “are so misguided that they threaten the nation’s well-being.” [Moreover], among those highly engaged in politics – those who say they vote regularly and either volunteer for or donate to campaigns – fully 70 percent of Democrats and 62 percent of Republicans say they are “afraid” of the other party.

Pew Research Center, 2016

1.3 Have we ever been this polarized before?

Yes. Other highly polarized eras in the U.S. include the disputes over foreign alliances and the size

of government around 1800, the fight over the National Bank (the “Monster”) in the 1830s, the North-South split in the 1850s which led to a civil war, the agrarian revolt of the 1890s, the struggles over FDR’s New Deal in the 1930s, and the conflicts over Vietnam and civil rights in the 1960s.

There was no extravagance ... which he did not repeat; nor was there any possible deviation from truth which he did not make ... the Senator touches nothing which he does not disfigure—with error, sometimes of principle, sometimes of fact. He shows an incapacity of accuracy ... He cannot open his mouth, but out there flies a blunder.

Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, speaking on the Senate floor about fellow U.S. Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina, May 20, 1856

No person with the upright form of man can be allowed, without all violation of decency, to switch out from his tongue the perpetual stench of offensive personality ... The noisesome, squat, and nameless animal, to which I now refer, is not the proper model for an American Senator. Will the Senator from Illinois take notice?

Sumner, speaking of U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, May 20, 1856

On May 21, Congressman Preston S. Brooks of South Carolina, a relative of Senator Butler, attacked Sumner with a cane on the Senate floor, beating him nearly unconscious. Many who approved of Brooks’ attack sent him new canes. One, sent by merchants from Charleston, was inscribed: “Hit him again.”

1.4 What are main likely causes of today's polarization?

A. The end of the Cold War. | The West's victory in the Cold War means that (with the possible exception of jihadist terrorism) there is no longer a global enemy to keep us united as we focus on a powerful and cohesive external threat.

B. The rise of identity-group politics. | On both the Left and the Right, the main conceptual frameworks have largely shifted in focus from unifying values to group identities. As Amy Chua puts it in *Political Tribes* (2018): "The Left believes that right-wing tribalism – bigotry, racism – is tearing the country apart. The Right believes that left-wing tribalism – identity politics, political correctness – is tearing the country apart. They are both right."

C. Growing racial and ethnic diversity. | In the long run, increased racial and ethnic diversity is likely a strength. But in the short run – which means, now – it contributes to a decline in social trust (the belief that we can understand and count on one another) and a rise in social and political conflict.

D. Growing religious diversity. | Current trends in American religion reflect as well as contribute to political polarization. One trend is growing secularization, including a declining share of Americans who

are Christians, less public confidence in organized religion, and rising numbers of religiously unaffiliated Americans. One consequence is an increasingly open contestation of Christianity's once-dominant role in U.S. public and political culture. But another important trend is the continuing and in some respects intensifying robustness of religious faith and practice in many parts of the society. This growing religious divide helps to explain the rise of polarizing social issues in our politics, such as gay marriage and abortion. It also contributes to polarizing the two political parties overall, as religious belief becomes an increasingly important predictor of party affiliation. For example, among Democrats and Democratic-leaning U.S. adults, religiously unaffiliated voters (the so-called "nones") are now more numerous than Catholics, evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants, or members of historically black Protestant traditions, whereas socially and theologically conservative Christians today are overwhelmingly Republican.

E. The passing of the Greatest Generation. | We don't call them the greatest for no reason. Their generational values, forged in the trials of the Great Depression and WWII – including a willingness to sacrifice for country, concern for the general welfare, a mature character structure, and adherence to a shared civic faith – reduced social and political polarization.

I didn't vote for him but he's my president, and I hope he does a good job.

John Wayne (b. 1907) on the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960

I hope he fails.

Rush Limbaugh (b. 1951) on the election of Barack Obama in 2008

F. Geographical sorting. | Americans today are increasingly living in politically like-minded communities. Living only or mainly with like-minded neighbors makes us both more extreme and more certain in our political beliefs. As Bill Bishop and Robert Cushing put it in *The Big Sort* (2008): “Mixed company moderates; like-minded company polarizes. Heterogeneous communities restrain group excesses; homogeneous communities march toward the extremes.”

Percent of U.S. voters living in counties in which a presidential candidate won by a “landslide” margin of 20 percent or more of the vote:

1976: 25
2016: 60

G. Political party sorting. | Once upon a time, there were such creatures as liberal Republicans and

conservative Democrats. No longer. The parties have sorted philosophically such that today almost all liberals are Democrats and all conservatives are Republicans. One main result is that the partisan gap between the parties is wide and getting wider.

Across 10 measures that Pew Research Center has tracked on the same surveys since 1994, the average partisan gap has increased from 15 percentage points to 36 points.

Pew Research Center, 2017

H. New rules for Congress. | The weakening and in some cases elimination of “regular order” – defined broadly as the rules, customs, and precedents intended to promote orderly and deliberative policymaking – as well as the erosion of traditions such as Senatorial courtesy and social fraternization across party lines have contributed dramatically to less trust and more animosity in the Congress, thus increasing polarization.

It's hard to exaggerate how much House Republicans and Democrats dislike each other these days.

Juliet Eilperin, *Fight Club Politics* (2006)

I. New rules for political parties. | Many reforms in how we nominate, elect, and guide our political leaders – shifting the power of nomination from delegates to primaries, dismantling political machines,

replacing closed-door politics with televised politics, and shrinking the influence of career politicians – aimed to democratize the system. But these changes also replaced the “middle men” who helped keep the system together with a political free-for-all in which the loudest and most extreme voices are heard above all others.

As these intermediaries' influence fades, politicians, activists, and voters all become more individualistic and unaccountable. The system atomizes. Chaos becomes the new normal – both in campaigns and in the government itself.

Jonathan Rauch, “How American Politics Went Insane,” 2016

J. New political donors. | In earlier eras, money in American politics tended to focus on candidates and parties, while money from today’s super-rich donors tends to focus on ideas and ideology – a shift which also tends to advance polarization.

K. New political districts. | Widespread gerrymandering – defined as manipulating district boundaries for political advantage – contributes significantly to polarization, most obviously by making candidates in gerrymandered districts worry more about being “primaried” by a more extreme member of their own party than about losing the general election.

L. The spread of media ghettos. | The main features of the old analog media – including editing, fact-checking,

professionalization, and the privileging of institutions over individuals – served as a credentialing system for American political expression. The distinguishing feature of the new digital media – the fact that anyone can publish anything that gains views and clicks – is replacing that old system with a non-system that is atomized and largely leaderless. One result made possible by this change is that Americans can now live in media ghettos. If I wish, I can live all day every day encountering in my media travels only those views with which I already agree. Living in a media ghetto means less that my views are shaped and improved, much less challenged, than that they are hardened and made more extreme; what might’ve been analysis weakens into partisan talking points dispensed by tribal (identity-group) leaders; moreover, because I’m exposed only to the most cartoonish, exaggerated versions of my opponents’ views, I come to believe that those views are so crazy and irrational as to be both dangerous to the country and incomprehensible. More broadly, the new media resemble and reinforce the new politics, such that the most reliable way to succeed in either domain is to be the most noisome, outrageous, and polarizing.

M. The decline of journalistic responsibility. | The dismantling of the old media has been accompanied by, and has probably helped cause, a decline in journalistic standards. These losses to society include journalists who’ll accept poor quality in pursuit of volume and repetition as well as the blurring and even erasure of boundaries between news and opinion, facts and non-facts, and journalism and entertainment. These losses feed polarization.

N. The growing influence of certain ways of thinking about each other. | These polarizing habits of mind and heart include:

- Favoring binary (either/or) thinking.
- Absolutizing one's preferred values.
- Viewing uncertainty as a mark of weakness or sin.
- Indulging in motivated reasoning (always and only looking for evidence that supports your side).
- Relying on deductive logic (believing that general premises justify specific conclusions).
- Assuming that one's opponents are motivated by bad faith.
- Permitting the desire for approval from an in-group ("my side") to guide one's thinking.
- Succumbing intellectually and spiritually to the desire to dominate others (what Augustine called *libido dominandi*).
- Declining for oppositional reasons to agree on basic facts and on the meaning of evidence.

Previous causes presented in this list are primarily distal (ultimate) causes of polarization. In contrast, this

last cause is a proximate (immediate) one – the cause that most directly precipitates our holding exaggerated and stereotyped views of each other, treating our political opponent as enemies, exhibiting rancor and aggression in public life, and acting as if common ground does not exist.

1.5 What are the main benefits of today's polarization?

- In-groups (an "us" in opposition to a "them") can serve the goals of survival and success.
- In-groups can give life meaning and reduce loneliness, stress, and anxiety.
- Sharply drawn political differences can help to hold politicians and parties accountable.
- Polarization can be an effective mobilizing strategy.
- Polarizing tactics can help those with minority views win public attention.

1.6 What are the main harms of today's polarization?

- It produces policy gridlock.
- It degrades our public discussion.
- It likely contributes to inequality.
- It segregates us.
- It undermines trust.
- It thwarts empathy.
- It weakens our intellects.
- It lowers the caliber of our citizenship.

1.7 In light of today’s polarization, which side is winning?

The question is debatable, but much evidence suggests that neither side is winning, and that both political and religious polarization will continue in stalemate form for the foreseeable future.

Today, no group in America feels comfortably dominant.

Amy Chua, Political Tribes (2018)

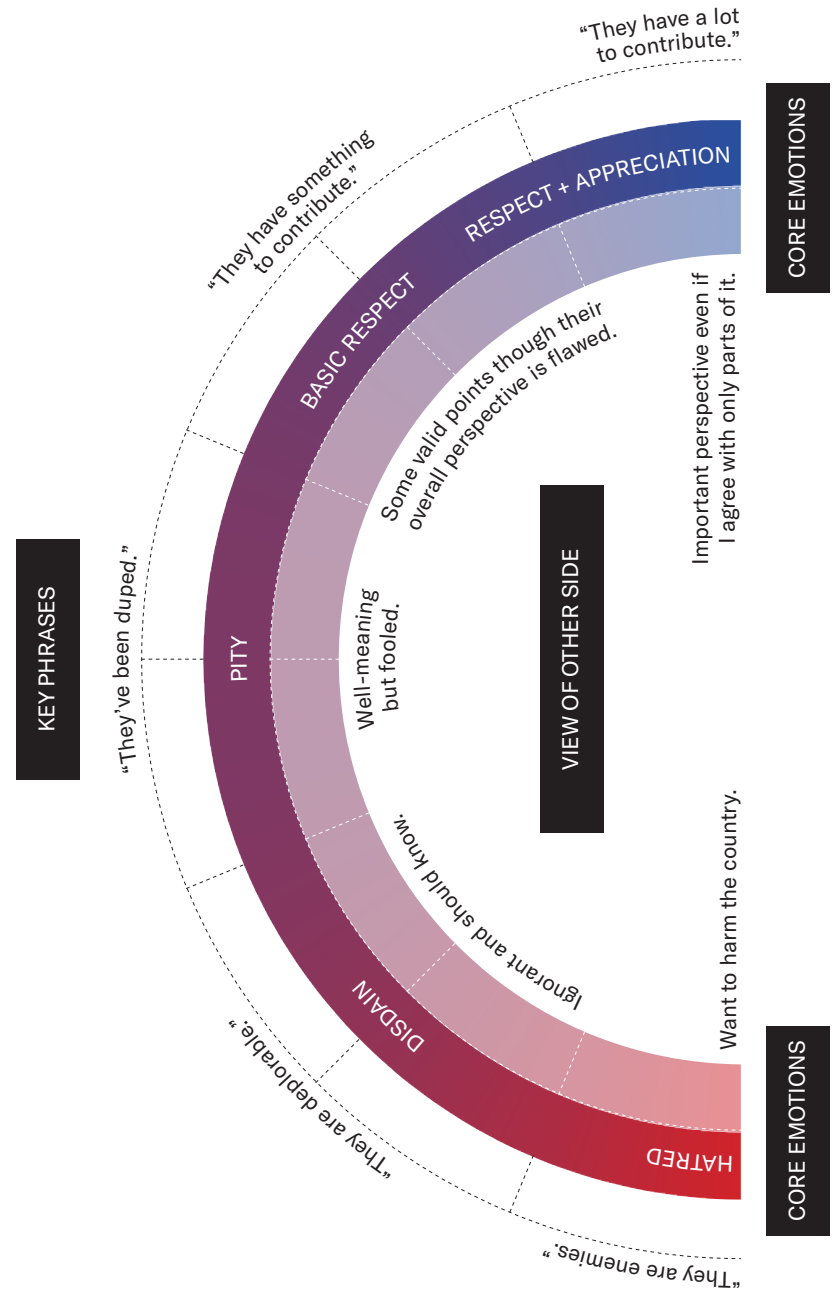
1.8 Are there groups working to reduce polarization?

- Bridge Alliance
- Civil Politics
- FlipSide
- National Institute for Civic Discourse
- On Being / Civil Conversations Project
- Village Square
- And others ...

See Figure 1 on next page.



Figure 1. How do you view the other side?



1.9 What would depolarization look like?

There are many ways to measure trends in depolarization. Here are a few:

- The proportion of Americans who feel warmly / favorably toward those in the other party.
- The proportion of Americans who describe those in the other party as intelligent.
- The proportion of Americans who do not describe those in other party as selfish.
- The proportion of Americans who do not describe those in the other party as a threat to the nation's well-being.
- The proportion of Americans who say they would not be displeased or unhappy if they had a child who married a member of the other party.
- The proportion of Americans who have regular, positive personal interactions with persons in the other party.
- Trend lines in Americans' feelings toward parties and candidates as determined by linguistic analysis of their posts on sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

1.10 What are the 7 secrets known by highly depolarizing people?

- Facts don't speak for themselves.
- Our reasons serve our passions.
- True or false mostly depends on whether you're in or out.
- Conservatives & liberals respond to different good things.
- Mixed groups make better decisions.
- Knowledge without empathy is dead.
- Being smart requires knowing that you aren't so smart.

1.11 What are the 7 habits of highly depolarizing people?

- Search for something shared.
- Search for good things in conflict.
- Beware of either/or.
- Doubt.
- Specify.
- Qualify (in most cases).
- Keep the connection going.

2.0 _ On Social Conflict

2.1 What's the essence of social conflict?

Social conflict is when groups struggle against each other over social goals or arrangements. I'm engaged in social conflict when my group attempts to resist, oppose, or coerce the will of others. Social conflict is a core feature of modern societies and appears to be a universal or near-universal feature of human groups.

Social conflict can take many forms. Some forms (such as sullen silence) are tacit, while other forms (from verbal debate to organized warfare) are open and explicit.

Conflict is related to competition, but the two are not the same. Competition becomes conflict only when the attention of the competitors is diverted from the objects of competition to each other. Social conflict, then, is when my group seeks to achieve its goals at least in part by preventing other groups from achieving theirs.

Many great thinkers have tried to identify the fundamental sources of social conflict. Saint Augustine, the early Christian writer, traced social conflict to *libido dominandi*, or the lust to dominate others. The 17th-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes traced it to man's innate desire to "do as he pleases." Hobbes' fellow philosopher John Locke traced it to humankind's limited capacity for generosity. The great

19th-century student of American democracy Alexis de Tocqueville pointed to the diminished influence in society of what he called "self-interest rightly understood," by which he meant the understanding that, in general, what's good for others is also good for me and mine. Marxists and other writers have emphasized the role of competition for scarce or valuable economic resources. According to many writers, an important engine of social conflict in modern societies is clashing moral values, or strong dis-agreements over what is good and how we should treat one another.

Is social conflict a blessing or a curse? One the one hand, we could stipulate a moral continuum, with cooperation (the best) on one end of the continuum and conflict (the worst) on the other. In this way of thinking, conflict is clearly something we should be against – the more of it we have, the worse off we become.

Another and likely fuller understanding is that social conflict is not only a universal occurrence in human societies, but is also frequently a healthy and at times necessary occurrence. After all, in many cases social progress is impossible without social conflict. Probably the most important question about social conflict, then, is not whether it exists (it does), or whether we can eliminate it (we can't), or even whether we should *try* to eliminate it (we shouldn't). The real question is *how we should approach it*.

2.2 What are the three main approaches to social conflict?

Our national motto, *E pluribus unum*, means “from many, one.” It tells us that us people from many and often conflicting backgrounds and views can live on this continent in conditions of unprecedented freedom while also thriving together as one people. It tells us neither to deny nor inflame our differences, but instead to seek to reconcile them at higher levels in order to form what our Constitution calls “a more perfect Union.”

Implicit in our national motto – implicit in the founders’ vision – is a theory of conflict. It seems that there are three basic approaches to conflict, which we can also think of as three stages, from simplest and worst to hardest and best.

In the first approach or stage, we **submit to conflict**. Conflict is in charge. Some people in this stage ignore conflict, failing to acknowledge that it exists. Others internalize conflict and thus make conflict their cause, becoming both its relentless advocate as well as its captive. Either way, polarization is perpetuated, as conflict dominates society rather than the other way around.

I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as Truth, and as uncompromising as Justice. On this subject I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is

on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard.

William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator*, 1831

A second approach is when we **seek to clarify and manage conflict**. By trying to assume good faith in our adversaries and trying to correct partial understandings and false stereotypes, we aim in this stage to achieve actual rather than inflated or imagined disagreement. This better and more difficult approach to dealing with conflict requires both civility in our treatment of one another and a willingness to acknowledge areas of common ground. At least as importantly, insofar as we want conflict not only clarified, but also managed for the good of society, this approach also requires the capacity for negotiation, compromise, and mutual accommodation.

When a broad table is to be made, and the edges of planks do not fit, the artist takes a little from both, and makes a good joint. In like manner, here, both sides must part from some of their demands, in order that they may join in some accommodating proposition.

Benjamin Franklin, Constitutional Convention, 1787

A third approach is when we seek to **transform conflict**. In this approach, we do not avoid or deny conflict. Nor do we become its pliant servant and enabler. Nor do we stop and declare victory once we have understood conflict accurately by using the tools of reason and empathy and managed it pragmatically by using the tools of compromise. In this hardest and yet arguably most fruitful way of dealing with conflict, we try to go beyond polarization and beyond compromise, toward a creative new framing – a higher synthesis – that includes what is valid and helpful on both sides, leading us, together, to a new place in the discussion. This approach depends significantly on epistemological humility, recognizing relationship-building as a valid shaper of identity and viewpoint, and a belief in the equal dignity of every person.

When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process.

In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface

of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity. This requires acknowledging a principle indispensable to the building of friendship in society: namely, that unity is greater than conflict. Solidarity, in its deepest and most challenging sense, thus becomes a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity. This is not to opt for a kind of syncretism, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides.

Pope Francis, 2014

The founders feared that the first approach to conflict would destroy the nation. (In 1861-65, it almost did.) They ordained and established the U.S. Constitution to embody the second approach. And they left us many words and deeds, including the ideal of *E pluribus unum*, to help us aspire to the third approach.

See Figures 2 & 3 on next page.

Figure 2. Hierarchy of Approaches to Conflict

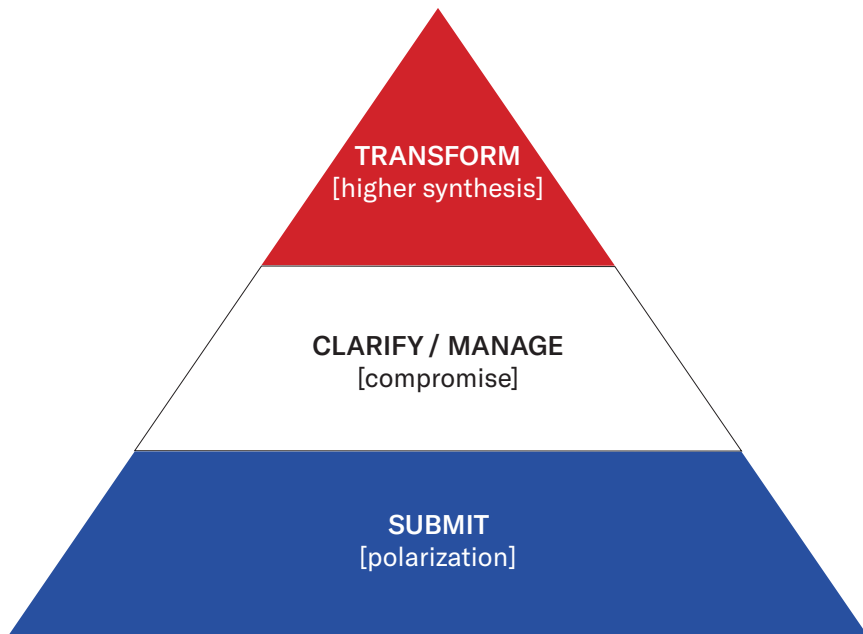
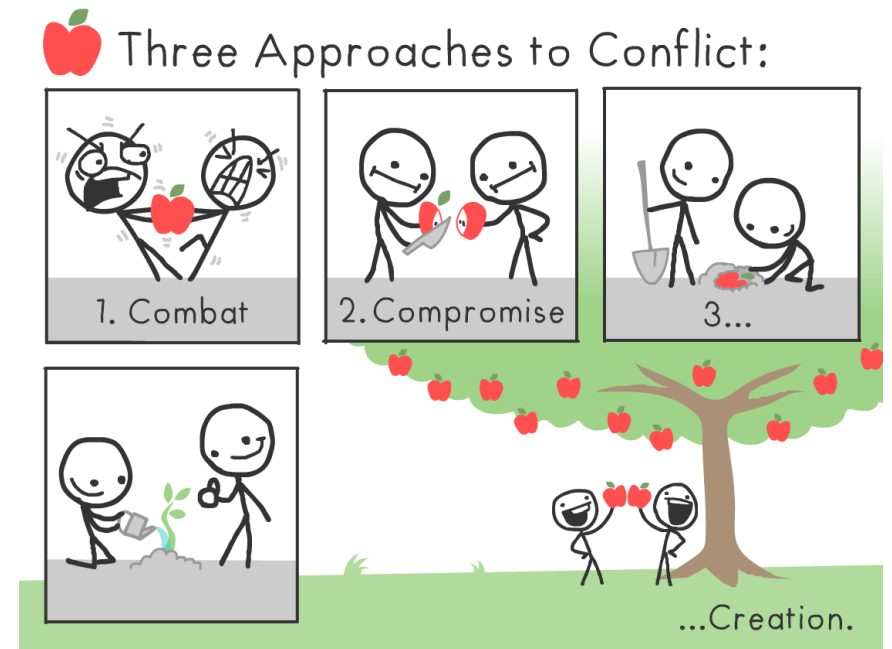


Figure 3. Three Approaches to Conflict



3.0 Questions for Reflection + Discussion

3.1 What unites us?

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861

The closing words of Lincoln's First Inaugural are probably the most important words ever spoken about polarization by an American leader. Certainly they are the most frequently cited. They were uttered at the close of the most polarized decade in U.S. history, the 1850s, and on the eve of our great Civil War, which was the result and culmination of that polarization.

Lincoln's use of the term "better angels" is striking. William Seward, who would serve as Lincoln's Secretary of State, had suggested that Lincoln close his speech by appealing to "the guardian angel of the nation." But Lincoln changed it to "the better angels of our nature." In Seward's version, what we needed would come from outside us. In Lincoln's version, it would come from within us, something "better" in the "nature" of both Northerners and Southerners.

Also notable is the term "mystic chords of memory." The sentence containing this phrase is complex and dense, so that the more time we spend with it, the more we'll discover. But if we look only for its core, surely Lincoln is saying that memory is what finally sustains the Union. It's a remarkable observation for a political (or any) leader.

Several decades earlier, in 1824, a young scholar named Edward Everett, in an oration at Harvard University, made a similar observation, saying: "Divisions may spring up, ill blood may burn, parties may be formed, and interests may seem to clash; but the great bonds of the Nation are linked to what is past." Memory is what finally sustains the Union.

The two men have more in common than this idea. In late 1863, after the Union victory at Gettysburg, President Lincoln went there to attend the dedication of the cemetery of the Union soldiers who'd died in that

battle. Lincoln spoke for about two minutes that day, using about 272 words. (From the podium he wrongly predicted that “the world will little note nor long remember what we say here.”) But the main speaker at this ceremony – at the time probably the most famous orator in the country, who spoke that day for two hours – was Edward Everett.

For reflection and discussion:

- Especially in times of conflict and division, what does the most to bring us together?
- When our differences seem overwhelming, what might still unify us? – *The Constitution? Shared religious and moral beliefs? A common language? Consensus on basic political ideals?*
- What do you make of Lincoln’s and Everett’s notion that memory is ultimately what unites us? And why do you think Lincoln called this kind of memory “mystic?”

3.2 How should we speak about the people and things we oppose?

Speak no injurious words, either in jest or in earnest. Scoff at none, although they give occasion.

George Washington as a schoolboy in about 1745, copying “rules of civility and decent behavior in company and conversation”

But in stating prudential rules for our government in society I must not omit the important one of never entering into dispute or argument with another. I never yet saw an instance of one of two disputants convincing the other by argument. I have seen many, on their getting warm, becoming rude, and shooting one another ... It was one of the rules which above all others made Doctor [Benjamin] Franklin the most amiable of men in society, “never to contradict anybody.” If he was urged to announce an opinion, he did it rather by asking questions, as if for information, or by suggesting doubts.

Thomas Jefferson, 1808

... this being, so brilliant yet so corrupt, which, like a rotten mackerel by moonlight, both shines and stinks.

Attributed to Senator John Randolph, referring to Secretary of State Henry Clay, 1826

*For we knew only too well:
Even hatred of squalor makes the brow grow stern.
Even anger against injustice makes the voice grow harsh.
Alas, we who wished to lay the foundations of kindness could not ourselves be kind.
But you, when at last it comes to pass that man can help his fellow man,
Do no judge us too harshly.*

Bertolt Brecht, “To Posterity,” 1939

To avoid public mention of any [person's] name unless it can be done with favorable intent and connotation. Reserve all criticism for the private conference. Speak only good in public.

President Dwight Eisenhower, stating his “practice which, as far as I know, I have never violated,” 1954

For reflection and discussion:

- How do you decide whether and how to criticize another person by name?
- How would you publicly oppose an idea or policy of which you disapprove?
- Is Brecht justifying or lamenting the fact that the people fighting for future kindness could not themselves be kind?
- What do you make of President Eisenhower’s practice of “reserving all criticism for the private conference”?
- What do you think would happen if political leaders today began a practice of speaking against things, but not people?

4.0 _ About this Booklet

This introduction to polarization and social conflict was written by Better Angels president David Blankenhorn for Better Angels members and interested citizens. For valuable comments and contributions, the author is grateful to Brien Benson, Bill Doherty, Randy Hicks, Ravi Iyer, Liz Joyner, and others.

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This booklet was designed by Sara Rubino and is also available at no cost in PDF and other formats on the Better Angels webpage - www.better-angels.org.

5.0 _ What is Better Angels?

Better Angels is an organization uniting red and blue Americans in a working alliance to depolarize America.

- *As individuals*, we try to understand the other side's point of view, even if we don't agree with it.
- *In our communities*, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.
- *In politics*, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.

Our activities are organizing community workshops and local alliances, gathering annually to determine national priorities, and convening red and blue thought leaders to make new arguments and show better ways to disagree.

Our rule of balance is that in all our red/blue workshops and alliances, and at every level of leadership, we are half red and half blue. Our leaders and members range from working class to affluent, and come from many backgrounds, so that our organization can reflect the country we seek to serve.

We're a dues-paying membership organization led by a small staff and many volunteers. We include our entire membership in monthly video conferences, and delegates attending an annual Convention help guide the organization. We're a 501(c)(3) non-profit led by a Board of Directors. Donations are tax-deductible.

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory ... will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Abraham Lincoln, 1861

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