



Library podcast

What Every American Should Know

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[00:00:36] But most people don't spend most of their days talking about the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Most people are talking about today what Aaron Rodgers did to say that he understood why Colin Kaepernick was getting blackballed in the NFL and why that wasn't OK. A lot more people are talking about cap. And Aaron Rodgers and are talking about the 14th Amendment the United States Constitution and so if you want to understand what it is that both hold us together and devise a simultaneously you have to have a bigger sense of the culture you have to understand how to be literate in a bigger culture about 30 years ago a guy named E.D. Hirsch who at the time was a professor at the University of Virginia wrote a book very thin academic volume called cultural literacy. And if it weren't for the fact that it had this appendix at the end the book would have just been well respected and reviewed in academic journals and kind of forgotten. But he had this appendix at the end which listed five thousand things every American should know. Right. He and a couple other professors came up with this list of 5000 things and this was just at the start of what became the culture wars in the United States just at the time when we began to debate about multiculturalism about political correctness so-called about this deeper question of who is us. And so his book in particular that appendix landed at a moment where this country was both primed and ready for an explosive debate. About what is the culture in which we're supposed to be literate.

[00:02:07] And that appendix propelled this book to the bestseller list. This guy who was this Tweedy University Virginia professor ends up in People magazine. Everybody was talking about this book in the late 1980s. And so. I used that book as a starting point to say you know what. We look back on that. E.D. Hirsch did was he walked right into this culture war and you had one side of folks who were the old school Alan Bloom William Bennett folks who wanted to assert an idea of America that was rooted in whiteness in European ness and they looked at this 5000 item list that E.D. Hirsch had written and it was filled with a lot of dead white men. And so they said We love this guy we love this list. This guy's on our side and meanwhile once they did that folks on the other side predecessors of many people in this room multicultural activists people who were trying to diversify curriculum diversify classrooms diversify our culture said well if people like William Bennett and Allen Bloom like this guy and like this list we must hate it and so. This book and this list got boxed into the category of.

This is on the retrograde side. Of the culture wars and what I did a generation later looking back on that was to say you know what. Now that you look back on it now that some of the dust is settled. A couple of things become a little bit clearer. Number one E.D. Hirsch said this at the time but nobody hurt him because a narrative had been built.

[00:03:37] What he said was hey I'm a progressive I vote Democrat. I created lists this list in order to ensure that people who are cut out of the language of power in this country could have greater access to the language of power. I wanted to codify this list so that people who were in control couldn't just hoard it for themselves right. And I looked at that and I thought you know what. That was the right instinct. That was the right instinct to crack open the code of power in this country cultural power economic power political power the language the lingo the slang the references. Right. So that you might see in a news analysis two weeks or three weeks after Charlottesville you might see in the newspaper today someone open an article with a sentence one hundred and fifty two years after Appomattox. This nation remains a house divided right. Just that sentence that little sentence requires you to know a whole bunch of stuff you got to know that Appomattox was the place where that dis unionist traitorous white supremacist General Robert E. Lee surrendered to the government of the United States to end the civil war. You got to know that that reference to remains a house divided is an echo of a speech that Abraham Lincoln gave before he became president where he said that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

[00:04:59] Half slave half free and that it would become all one or all the other. Eventually you have to know these things about our inheritance. If you're going to be able to read that sentence I don't mean read the words you can read those words but if you really want to read the culture behind this that sentence and so in my reconsideration of Hirsch and his list what I said was he was half right. He was right that an ever more diverse country needs to have a transparent book list code a way to open up for everybody who might be on the margins of cultural political and civic power a way for them to claim access to that power but where he was wrong. I said where he was wrong was that that list was entirely backward looking number one and did not reflect the actual diversity of both our past and our present. And secondly where he went wrong was that that was just the list that three really smart dudes made up literally in an ivory tower somewhere and that we had an opportunity today because of our diversity and because of technology to make this a project for us all to be authors of.

[00:06:11] And for us all to crowdsource a new list for 21st century America that actually captures the full breadth of the culture of the political references of the history of the real history of the people's history that we claim in this city in the state and in this country and that we could do that in a way that was open to all thanks to the Internet and so I wrote this piece and the response to this piece was so well such a wave of yes and a wave of how do we play that Carrie and I and some others created this simple project which began with this Web site. We hyphen ask Dawn what every American should know dot org and we didn't ask people to make a list of 5000 we just invited folks to make your Top 10 what are 10 things you think every American should know throw that list in and we will put that list into the pot and what you'll see on that Web site is an aggregation of our collective crowdsourced wisdom knowledge faith belief yearning and hope for what American culture and identity would be. So when you go to that Web site you'll see what's currently in the top 10 and some of it is what. E.D.

Hirsch would put there to the Declaration the Constitution. But then you've got other things there that probably weren't in the mix thirty years ago the Trail of Tears white privilege is one of the top ten items right now. Reconstruction and the ways in which we are trying to reckon again trying for the third time to do reconstruction in this country. Right. And so that is the genesis of the project. And so in interveners has talked about this list that she invites you throughout this evening and afterwards to be making and contributing to jot it down in piece paper now or think about it when you go home. Go to our Web site and add your list to that collective wisdom.

[00:08:02] But the idea for this project is not only to create a wonderful crowdsourced list but to use that list as we were using it tonight as an object of community convening an object of conversation and a chance for us actually together to reckon with that question of who is us and what are we trying to be. So that's the context I wanted to offer you and to give you a sense of both the history of this project but also I think the incredible opportunity we have right now to be authors not only of a crowdsource list to be authors of future history to be authors of the ways in which this country records itself and recognize itself and expresses itself.

[00:08:45] So with that let me actually invite our great panelists to come on up to the table here. And as we all come up I will introduce them and open up a conversation with all of them. So come on up folks so DeVita mentioned in passing the names of our panelists but I'd like to tell you a little bit about each of them and then what we're gonna do is actually I'm going to ask each of them to say a word about something on

[00:09:26] The top 10 list that they made for this evening and that will kind of be the way we open up this conversation from there. I suspect enough juicy stuff will come out of that that we'll have an opportunity to have a free flowing free flowing conversation. So at the far end of the table for me we're joined by Jamil Solomon who is a US based rapper artist performer filmmaker cultural catalyst. He's been featured on All Def Poetry and Stranger in Cairo radio and elsewhere and a regular presence in cultural and civic spaces here in our community. Next we're joined by E4 Scheer who is a rising Yes. APPLAUSE As a rising and I emphasized rising sophomore. At the University of Washington who I got a chance to meet a few years ago when she was still a student at Rainier Beach High School. And she is a. She's getting a lot of love here because she has already at a young age a great track record as an activist educator and civic catalyst. She was as a student at Rainier Beach responsible for a movement that was successful to push for orca cards.

[00:10:42] For those of you who aren't satellites listening there free transportation for low income students. Applause and similar work.

[00:10:50] Next we're joined by Charles we a who many of you know by his voice in print and otherwise a film critic for The Stranger filmmaker in his own right cultural critic and creator Zimbabwean born and someone who has thought deeply about the ways in which our culture and our politics intersect with one another here and globally. Next we're joined by Safari on a day who were

[00:11:27] Like a superhero introducer by day works at the Seattle City Council. And by night or every other waking hour is board chair for the Washington Bus. Which yes the Washington boss a hand. Great organization in town that sparks young people to get engaged in civic and political life here and then at last but not least you Bo Barton who is a yes. As a poet extraordinaire and someone whose voice. And work and creativity. Are

[00:12:03] Shaping our community sense of itself and also a playwright and producer director of sorts.

[00:12:09] Okay well well. And uh and a real leader both in the arts world and in the transgender community here in Seattle. So let me actually get this ball rolling by if we can rewind back to the list that I had

[00:12:30] Real briefly. So my list that I did which this was a list from 2015 when I first wrote this essay. So I haven't updated lately but you'll see that the only thing that I want to mention there about my list is that is what I put number one on the list which is whiteness because I feel like

[00:12:51] And again every day's news is confirmatory evidence of it that the thing that this country has to do is actually wake up and that most of the people who have to do most of the waking up are people who in Tallahassee coaches phrasing believe themselves to be white and who imagine themselves to have an identity that comes with honor and privilege of whiteness. And I think that until and unless we are able as a society but particularly led by. Our friends and neighbors and fellow citizens who believe themselves white to have that kind of reckoning we're not going to get anywhere deal with where we've got to go.

[00:13:30] So that's why I put that first on my list. But actually I want to I want to just kind of go down the line here and start with Jamil and your list so let's bring up his list here and Jamal you know your list is interesting on so many levels but one of the things I'm particularly my I was drawn to initially was your number eight item hyper local grassroots resilience. Why and what did you mean about that.

[00:13:53] Thank you for asking me that Eric. Appreciate you bringing me out here. Actually I will say this this preface I already wanted to change my list the moment I made my list. I'm sure most most of you have gone through that so I'm somewhat ashamed that some things are not on this list but hyper local grassroots resilience. Um well I think at a time like this nothing is more important than community resilience than grassroots organizing than people having a sense of neighborhood community not just a sense of ethnic or cultural community. I think that's important. Typically that is geographic in nature as well but I think it's time for us to know each other's neighbors to want to know our neighbors and to build resilience and what I mean by that is specifically food clothing shelter water the basics. I think a lot of our consumerist mad culture that we live in is because we don't have these simple communal bonds that give us the satisfaction of being a human being on earth. And so we buy our way out of it and that doesn't typically work out. So if we can just get to know each other and build those simple bonds start working on simple community projects. I think that will that will be the foundation of the revolution in America. That's great.

[00:15:06] Thank you.

[00:15:10] For your wisdom if we can bring that up next. Well it was similarly interesting and

[00:15:18] I don't know if there's a particular item on your list that your particular excited to share. I have one or two that my eye was drawn to but I won't actually give you a chance to say if there's something that you want really wanted to talk about.

[00:15:32] Thank you. So for me I guess a lot of things on my list are concepts and ideas rather than concrete moments in time. And I think that's very intentional because anybody can go online and memorize facts and like history dates like quote unquote have a history lesson. But it's really like for me in my personal experience it's the translation of these events in history right in modern times and I understand.

[00:15:56] Oh yeah right. So for me it's really this translation of these past events to modern times and understanding of the why that makes you civically literate which is why a lot of my things are concepts and I guess one thing I really want to touch on quickly is just add up as Native American born schools because that's what they will call at the Times at the time but so like everybody probably knows it. That's where schools like after children's mothers were raped then the fathers were killed. That's where they were set to be stripped of the culture of the religion of identity right. And a lot of people brushed it off as a sin of the past. But if you open your eyes you understand that it's happened now in our modern educational system. You have kids who go into the schools and they're taught when to sit read a set that taught what to learn about. That's like oftentimes like the history curriculum is not culturally sensitive so it's kind of like they're learning about people that don't resemble them. So then they start to lose themselves. And by the time a child goes to the K tough system they come out and they're no longer themselves like they're fragment of who they are to fit into a society deems acceptable you know.

[00:17:06] So that's why I had that up then I also want to be down to like them. Another thing I pulled on my list is just the school to prison pipeline. So that just direct understanding of how like our school system is very selective to certain people. And that leads to certain students falling out. And that leads to certain cities being targeted by we know black and brown students are suspended expelled discipline rates marginally higher than their white counterparts. And now leads them into the only other only other option really basically how society set up which is jobs like that there a chance phones even Washington State we have the Becca bill which puts students in court dates which can lead to job just simply for missing school. What they are addressing the reason why they're missing school. Right. And that leads to the prison industrial complex like nothing really works in isolation and nothing nothing is his to quote unquote because we're still living in it right now. So that's why I made up my list.

[00:18:10] Thank you for it. It's really so powerfully put.

[00:18:17] And I love the way you feel that you describe how the choice you made to focus on concepts rather than facts or figures because a in this age we can all find our facts and figures you know on Google but that the concepts are the containers in a way that are gonna be filled with these facts and figures and the other thing that he said in connecting School to Prison Pipeline to some of these other concepts is a point that I think can be made more broadly about both this project but also about our challenge and opportunity here which is that everything is connected. And when you pull on one part of the web of concept or fact or history or something on somebodies list it will link up to or force you to excavate someone else's an item on someone else's list. And that is the spirit in which we're kind of seeing how we're like it or not our histories or our denial of history is entwined. So Charles your list is an interesting combination both of the conceptual and the kind of concrete events and historical facts so to speak. My I was drawn to several items but no your number five item the speech before MLK is I have a dream speech about the bad check take them I can explain what you meant by that and why why that's on your list.

[00:19:38] That's me.

[00:19:40] That's a really important event for me. We often talk about the march in 1963 about the dream speech and even Republicans can sort of dance to the debt to the Dream speech everybody loves dreaming and but the fact is before that happened he gave a very bland if you may say very I once a bland it's not the right word I'd say very word worldly right of speech about how African-Americans had got a check from the government and they went to the bank and it turned out to be bad right.

[00:20:28] And so they were actually marching about money.

[00:20:31] And it's really important when you consider that in 1963 the US was going through an exceptional economic growth period and it was not missing on many people particularly of color and particularly black because in the 1960s and beginning in the 1950s big the expansion of the white middle class occurred. And so you had all this affluence being transferred from the very top of society. You remember it's not simply that the middle class white people got money because they were smarter or better than anybody.

[00:21:17] They got money because essentially the 1 percent were crippled by two world wars and also the crash in 1929. They were just simply weak. And after the Second World War the government could tax them heavily. Right. I mean the tax rates for the super rich were high. And in this tax rate you found the money that was transferred to the white middle class and they expanded dramatically. These are the people who vote Republican right now sadly to say they have no idea where they bloody came from but they came from the fact that. Whites at the very top were taxed heavily. That is the source of all this wealth in the suburbs and that is under water right now in large parts of Houston. So basically Martin Luther King Junior knowing what was going on went and said hell we want some of that money too. And where is it. And in fact they never actually quite got to delivering it to black Americans. And the and my second list goes into the. And it's pointed out prisons became the

solution to not giving or or being faithful to this check to black Americans. And we are still in that situation today.

[00:22:45] So anyway that's the way that and it's one of these examples too where the what I love about your focus on that is that it kind of burning away sort of the rhetorical haze around.

[00:22:57] King Right and everybody likes to talk about dream language and and the vision of interracial healing and love from that speech.

[00:23:08] But part of your burning away of that is to say beneath that before that preceding that is this hard claim for. Call it reparations call it justice. Call it a fair shot. Call it participation. Right. And and that is what's interesting about that item and suffering on a you know there are your list ranges from truly the. The magical and mystical to to the hyper concrete. But one thing that maybe is both intent is intangible and yet super powerful is your number seven item javascript.

[00:23:47] Well why why is javascript on your list of things every American should know. I've recently been dabbling in JavaScript

[00:23:55] Possibly thanks to my partner but I think that and I so I so I work in politics and I've worked in politics for eight to 10 years or so you know. Got a degree did the whole school thing. Did graduate school I mean a ton of debt. And I find myself in a place where I'm wondering what skills do I really have. Like what can I actually do for someone else. And javascript is something I'm started to learn. Because if we look at our market if we like it in Seattle you know where the jobs are. I think it is something that we can find online. There are resources you could go home today and go online and start learning.

[00:24:42] And it is and it is a super valuable skill.

[00:24:45] So I think there are things out there maybe someone in this room and I don't presume one way or the other who doesn't even know what javascript is just say a half sentence about what is the language of the Internet. And

[00:24:57] Did I get that right. But it's really coding for coding so you can be a coder if you want to.

[00:25:04] I learned this recently and I think that you know it's like taking things back into our own hands. I think my list started with white supremacy because I think that's the framework they were operating within. But how do we find liberation. How do we find resiliency and it's about 4 v javascript is about taking it into my own hands and really doing something for myself.

[00:25:24] Spoke earlier about E.D. Hirsch and how he insisted that no his intention in creating that five thousand item list 30 years ago was to open up access to what he call the language of power. He was talking about a language that was you know very literary and historical. Knowing cultural references knowing titles of songs knowing historical facts or figures or what have you. And that was

you know as befits an English professor very focused on that kind of text. But what I love about the javascript example is reminding us that the language of power today is also about literally the tools and the currencies through which people exercise economic power. And so if you speak the language of JavaScript you have access to the main engine of wealth and wealth creation in our society in the 21st century. And that's a very interesting take on what every American should know. So I think you know your list as well so so rich I was really pleased to see that number three item on your list because when I quoted James Baldwin earlier it's from an essay a stranger in the village that's in Notes of a native son. But I'm interested if your number six item ten principles of disability justice what it is that for those who don't know what they are but also you know why you feel like that is a must know in American life.

[00:26:53] I think that there's a lot we can learn from the disability justice movement specifically around how hetero patriarchy hetero patriarchy and white supremacy like all correlate into this way in which we believe that there is a particular type of body right that there is a regular or normal or template version of what is to be seen or heard and also how we understand segregation because with disabled folks I find something I learned is that disabled folks are a segregated part of our society without us even realizing it. Right. So I think that the 10 principles of disability justice I might go over them is one intersectionality to leadership of the most impacted three anti capitalist politic for commitment to cross movement organizing five recognizing wholeness six sustainability seven commitment to cross disability solidarity eight interdependence nine collective access and 10 collective liberation which is all these are all things that I think that we should be incorporating in all of our movements right. So like I personally believe that you know let's start with disability justice if we're also doing that.

[00:28:04] You know a leadership of the most impacted so what's interesting if I may just take a look at the list.

[00:28:09] What's interesting about the list of these principles of disability justice is that they absolutely can be applied to a variety of different social justice movements with maybe one or a couple of exceptions they might also be applied by folks who are trying to create a kind of wholeness coming from a conservative worldview. Right. So if I think about people who identify as Reform conservatives or people who are sincere practitioners and faith communities they recognize too that leadership of those most impacted commitment across all movement organizing recognizing wholeness sustainability. They may not use those words but the ones who are effective are are applying those principles right. And I think this is one of the things that is very important about all these lists right now is the ways in which all of them are in a sense accessible to all. One of the things that is you know notable just as a strategy that was interesting that Hirsch pointed out when he wrote that book cultural literacy as he quoted at length from the original declaration of the Black Panther Party and those of you who are familiar with that with the text of that original declaration it takes it not literally not word for word but almost entirely from the preamble from the Declaration of Independence. It uses the language of the declaration against the country that wrote the Declaration.

[00:29:46] Right. And his insight there was that one of the most effective ways to be to drive radical change is to claim the most conservative objects and tools in your service. Right. And I suppose the same might be true the other way around. And one of the things that is interesting about our times right now is how all of these everybody's sense is that even if people couldn't articulate it the way that you know you just did. And that's why people have this visceral what's why we have visceral contests over monuments right now and over symbols right. People recognize the power and things that aren't necessarily stated outright in the ways in which they can claim them. And so thank you all first of all for just walking us through some of your list and we will return. Feel free as the conversation unfolds to talk about something else that was on your list that you were really fired up to want to go deep on. But I actually want to just crack open a more free flowing conversation here and either I want to start with you actually because I'm interested just from a you know from the perspective of a younger generation right now who you know you're not only a digital native you're a you're somebody who both in your own family look family's life.

[00:30:57] But just generationally you've grown up with a sense of identity that crosses borders the sense of identity that crosses time and nationhood. Right. And so when you think about American and defining American what you even apart from these top ten lists what comes first for you. Is it our pop culture. Is it something you know is it a matter of legal rights. Is it like what is the first thing that gets animated when I say American for you I tried to actually speak into the mike this time. Yes

[00:31:35] I guess when you asked me that question the first thing that popped into my mind might think of America is just like when nexus like Stogel right because like when I consider all parts of who I am identities what I like as you can obviously tell I'm black I'm a woman I'm Muslim. And like if you have a conversation with me be here if you pick up on that accent a little bit you realize that like I wasn't born in the States you know. I'm also an immigrant. So like all these identities kind of intersect into what was talked about earlier by intersectionality and is this like getting into America is very like I want to say difficult but I feel like doesn't like put justice to how it feels. But it's like this insane feeling like China fell to a place where for so long you were taught that like you don't belong here and you're constantly taught that like even in the past and now I with the current the forty fifth like Evy what everything he says probably has touched on every part of my identity so it's kind of like it's hard and I've been stuck. But also on the other hand that taught me a lot about resilience and understanding that like just because a space is not necessarily for you you can put yourself you can build yourself into that space. And also as you start to understand the history behind that space you realize that America was really built by people who share identities like me and it's continued to be structured by folks who who had the same identity as me and also it's kind of like a multi edged sword.

[00:33:05] So you know this idea of I mean intersectionality itself is a is that though it's not well practiced in the United States. It is itself a fairly American concept. You don't hear people in China don't talk about intersectionality. To the extent that we do and they don't know how to live or practice it. We may not know how to live in practice it but there are people now trying to force the question right. And one of the ways in which she force that question is through the rhetoric of politics and through these language you know these concepts. But another way Jamil is of course through art right. And for you as an artist someone who works in various mediums. How do you think about the

ways in which both you use art and how we can use art. To make visible and kind of visceral some of what he is talking about here in terms of how everything is both intersectional and hybridized at every turn you know number 10 on your list is hip hop right. Which is of course the epitome of that. But how do we use art in a time like this.

[00:34:14] Do we have any artists in here. Raise your hand if you're an artist. Everybody should have their hand raised.

[00:34:20] That's great.

[00:34:21] Well for the podcast we only have maybe about I don't know 10 15 percent of people raise their hands which was a lot.

[00:34:26] But everybody should have uh you know art is very personal. I feel um but we share it.

[00:34:33] It can be a cool it's a collective experience for me the reason why artists so powerful is because it has the ability to transport you to another reality that hasn't existed yet but has the potential to exist. We can start to envision the dream that Martin is having literally bodies starting to draw it or starting to write it or put it into a poem. And if you're into the woo woo. Number seven on your list with astrology as I

[00:35:03] Am a Pisces moon. So we're coming back to that. Don't believe me that's it.

[00:35:08] So you know when you think about it what was I talking about. That was way. Well but if you think about the fact that you can envision something and it becomes to some extent a vibrational reality. And it becomes more and more of a physical reality when we start to believe in it and start to build it together obviously you know it takes action. So I believe for art um you know the capacity to innovate to create to imagine. Um and then to have the bravery hopefully to to make that. Dream come true.

[00:35:43] So how well have you um either as a filmmaker or a performer I mean how have you been trying to do that.

[00:35:48] Uh in in highlighting some of the social movements and activism going on in our community in our country right now.

[00:35:54] Um well recently uh. Yeah. Uh I dressed up as Jesus for like a good year. Which was awesome. It was really great. I kind of looked like um I guess um whatever the the prototype or whatever it might be considered um and that was a performance art piece. But it was like a social justice uh performance art piece. And so I'd walk around like Jesus looking like Jesus and I'd interact with the City Council I'm like hey look my dad's pissed you know um I was I wasn't gonna come back.

[00:36:29] I was doing well up there but you guys really made me. And what it does is it's it's a huge it's he's a huge symbol. It's art. But what it also does in Charles there was some time I saw me and uh and he saw me in a train and put me on a stranger looking out.

[00:36:43] But what it does it it it um. What's the term it when you have armor on and then you do this disarm its arms.

[00:36:54] Yeah exactly. It disarms people. It disarms people when I was up at the of the city council dressed up as Jesus Christ Jesus H Christ and telling them that my dad was pissed and you know my birthday's coming up it always gonna up like. Council members who would not interact with me as an activist who they've known me for ten years as all of a sudden we're receptive to me.

[00:37:19] They're open to the idea that I was talking about and then all of a sudden I could use this performance art piece to slip in. Hey you know urban gardening is great. We need more urban gardens in our neighborhood.

[00:37:29] I think we fell for one. If I'm not mistaken let's form right back.

[00:37:33] So I feel art has that capacity that's recently what I've been doing I cut the hair because it's hard to live up to that guy. Um. But it was an experiment and I think that's what we can do with art. We can experiment and then we can test it out and see what we can create to get in.

[00:37:49] Thank you. Um uh Sarah. Because uh um. Uh astrology was brought up uh um I am curious why you know number six on your list what was astrology. But I think more more more than just kind of unpacking that. Um you know you work in politics you work uh um for a member of the city council right now and it's a very you know it's a concrete environment or policy choice to me either budgets to be uh uh made and so forth. Um. Uh. Uh how much uh before you get to the astrology piece um how much would you say that and book on the basic level of what every American should know is is just the fundamentals of how to get your member of city council to pay attention to you.

[00:38:31] Um and one tactic might be dressing up as price up as Jesus Christ but I bet you've seen some other tactics as well.

[00:38:38] You know say some stuff about just that part of um civic power and the language of that and what we all ought to know about moving our elected representatives.

[00:38:49] Sure. I think I get phone calls every day from people wanting different things. And I think it is so important. I mean ideally as someone that works for an elected I think ideally people know kind of the basics like what the city council does or what we have jurisdiction over. But I think it's it's a lot to ask and I think that in some ways it's kind of our role as elected to make that accessible because it is such an ivory tower in its own way similar to like higher education. I think coming to City Hall is intimidating and I think that it can be. And I think that. It's really our job to make it accessible and to kind of explain things to people. I think it's really my role to walk people through if they're having a

problem you know how to how to get it solved dressing up as Jesus. I think it made us see when we were wrong.

[00:39:45] But I mean personal stories though. That's that's that's the key. I think that we're all human too. I think that our elected officials are are often in a tough spot. I find myself I think the thing that I struggle with the most especially is like a woman of color working for an elected who happens to be a white older male is kind of straddling that line between always wanting to bring in my community and my people and giving them access to the system when it when I'm kind of working and holding holding the line and I guess. For some of that I may not always agree with

[00:40:23] But wanting to meet and be as inclusive as possible. It's a struggle I think every day.

[00:40:29] And so I mean I think one of the things that if you were to if I were to rewrite my list.

[00:40:37] Actually listening to one of the things that I would put on there is just that the core question almost of almost all civic power you think about trying to get council member Tim Burgess to do X or Y or trying to get Mayor so-and-so or a member of Congress whoever it might be to do something is understanding this two word question who decides who decides right that is the core question of almost all civic life and civic power. And when you said Ideally people would understand what the council has jurisdiction you will have no idea what the council has jurisdiction over. People will go to a member of Congress for stuff that the school board shorts all people go to a city council member for stuff that the county should solve. And so part of the most basic opportunity for us as Americans particularly right now is to just get fluent in that question who decides. Right. But I think your way of phrasing which is that you wanted to. You're always trying to bring folks into the fold to have access to understand who decides that you see that's part of the responsibility is really powerful. Charles I fear for you. I don't know if you'd phrase it this way but it's almost the same job description that you have. Right I mean in in your life particularly I think about what you do writing in The Stranger decoding a lot of what's going on in our culture in our economy. You're not just writing about art or performance you're looking at the built landscape of the city and you're noticing trends that things aren't getting that they aren't getting remarked upon much less legislated on. Right. And you're you're making the invisible visible for folks right. How you know in a role like yours where you've got the power of the pen. How do you go about trying to illuminate for more people culturally as well as politically their own part of the answer to the question who decides stuff.

[00:42:36] I think to answer I'm not going to answer it. Come on over.

[00:42:42] I'm just way too lazy tonight. It's the it's the end of the day. And I just I just feel like you know it's a great question and I'm just like Oh my God that's just a lot of work to think about right now. And I have I really do feel like Yeah there's there's a lot of stuff we should really think about and so forth and so on.

[00:43:05] But you know I try to do a quick thing and I try to think this through very quickly just very rapidly but oh here we are. Here you are already doing this very quick. This is two things I want you to

sort of like when you were decoding is central to me because one is in a way I mean I said mutation okay I've lost semiotics but anyway I like seminars which is decoding and it's true because you know there's a whole thing about where what does something. Why is it we have us believe certain things and and the truth is ignored or the truth is none not seen and so forth and so on and that's a big problem with us in the USA. Right. And so I have to always like to point out because in a way I wasn't really brought in a world where brought up in a world where things just made sense so easily.

[00:43:56] Right. I was born in a world where I was I was told I came up into consciousness and I saw that suddenly everybody who was black was poor and everybody who was rich was white. And that made that was confusing. I could understand why did blacks fail right.

[00:44:15] And so you have to like say well I got to answer that question well I have to accept the state of things right is one of the two. You left one or two things right. So that's the that's the a sense. So you have to like always at the essence of the thing things so you start decoding one thing and you realize you've to decode everything else everything else has to be exposed. Everything else has to be revealed because you realize it's not just simply white and black it goes all the way down it's men and women it's blacks and blacks it's everybody has you have to like explain why does someone behave in this way right. And you can find out you know. And why do you think in certain ways right. Why do you think something like for example Ebony says to me everybody come in here this is like oh America you said you do linking whiteness from America. Right. Which is kind of a surprise to me because I always thought the USA was a bit of an African country.

[00:45:13] I mean I know that you know it's not like that kind of thing we like Ben Carson comes out and says like oh yeah they're they're immigrants too. No it's just that. America was actually shaped and defined by a lot of black people. And it's hard for me not to see it as another African country. I mean I just like it as I would see Brazil right. If I went to Brazil I'd say Oh my God there's a lot of black people here right. That culture has been imprinted by these people. They came from Angola right. And you know we just I mean Latin meets a shocking that everybody has the image of Merle

[00:45:49] Monroe as America. But I hear Billie Holiday as America quite equally so.

[00:45:57] And so to me it's as European and as African a country as you could ever imagine.

[00:46:04] So that's the thing. So they get the decoding parties always tripping. What is this immediate thing and finding what is the richer and the deeper and the and the. And the more I think the more the more reliable the more consistent codes so that. Well if this is you and you're feeling lazy I can't wait to

[00:46:33] You know buy the book but to pick up on something Charles are saying not only about decoding but about seeing things as they actually are right.

[00:46:44] I mean the second item on your your list was the Doctrine of Discovery. And I think I know where you're going with this but I actually would like to hear you unpack it a little bit particularly in this

context of decoding for folks the ways that we always talk about ourselves as a as a place and as a nation.

[00:47:03] Yes.

[00:47:03] So I guess the reason I put the Doctrine of Discovery is a lot of the things that I put on in there is just like sort of uncovering this idea of what America is right. And so the Doctrine of Discovery is basically say like legitimizes the fact that we took. Land away from people who were already here. Right. And so like it somehow legitimizes the fact that because they were non Christians we could just take this from them. No big deal right. I shouldn't say we because I don't. Anyway so I think that that was one of the reasons why I thought it was so important to put on to put on the list is that there are so many things within our history that we have quietly done and or have put names to that we don't take responsibility for and are still to this day not and using this like you know we still use the Doctrine of Discovery as a way of claiming things or owning or owning land in this sort of way back when idea that anybody who was not a Christian was a heathen in this way.

[00:48:04] And therefore the act of taking was actually an innocent act of discovery rather than a culpable lack of taking. Right. Exactly. And so I actually want to stay for a moment with your um I don't know inadvertent use of wheat because it's very interesting kind of gets to the very heart of what we're doing here right. Because so you said it then you were a little bit ambivalent about it then you kept saying we. Right. And so as someone who in the first place is using is very conscious of pronouns unpack we for me and how you feel comfortable or uncomfortable with it when you talk about both the good and the bad and the ugly of what this country has been.

[00:48:49] Sure so I think that that the intersections that I live at So like as a black and brown person that is also American. There are things that I have to take responsibility for and I have to show up to those responsibilities where we shows up where I hesitate is because I live as an oppressed person in this country. There are things that I have no control over at all. However I do receive some privileges as an American person right. So I think that we shows up for me where I'm like

[00:49:17] I'm part of this country I receive the privileges of it in some ways we sure. And then in other ways as a black and brown person specifically as a transgender black and brown person there are things that I also don't receive. Right.

[00:49:32] So in those ways yes we there's a way that I've often thought about this which is that Americans and of any kind of any background like to use that we on the on the things that you can be proud of.

[00:49:47] We were the first to put a man on the moon.

[00:49:51] We were the country that at D-Day turned the tide of the Second World War and save the world from Nazi ism right. We did that. And yet I think one of the the lessons of this moment right now is that if you're going to claim that side of we you know whether or not you had by race or by

presence or by gender anything to do with that then you've got to also say we enslaved African-Americans we decapitated decapitated native tribes we oppressed and continue to oppress all manner of people.

[00:50:26] Right. And I think the use of the we right now is well it's very interesting it's a good space to be to be occupying and I like the way that you were you know in and out but also able to articulate why and when and on what terms you're in and out in and out of that circle. Jamila it seemed like you wanted to add something.

[00:50:46] I was just going to mention to you you spoke about the Nazis. We stop the Nazis Um but if you study the Nazis they actually studied us they studied the American South. So did the apartheid regime of South Africa.

[00:51:05] We actually have been setting the trends of oppression and a lot of these circumstances and I think it's interesting how we put in context and narrate us as like the global hero right. Well we're two or one here we come. You know World War Three You know you're weak.

[00:51:23] Yeah.

[00:51:24] But in reality I think I think we're the lone superpower we're the empire and we're pretty much just destroying everything that we can including what's going on within our nation and other empires take notice to that including the Nazi regime. So I think it's important to try and put that in context because I was raised to believe that we were the heroes

[00:51:48] That Captain America and you know red white and blue and here we come and they made me memorize all those damn songs up up and away. And you know all that right in public school and now that I think about it I was like they were indoctrinating me.

[00:52:03] I mean can you imagine being Jewish and World War Two era and singing you know Nazi fight songs and being told this is this is what it's about. This is the true freedom.

[00:52:13] This is the real the real empire here. That's what we're still being taught. We're in the Empire still. We're still an empire.

[00:52:22] Um so I think it's that this kind of hits me in context we don't really see that.

[00:52:26] I think sometimes if I'm curious just again from um thinking about your family's migration story um and you were describing to me actually just before the event started how um your family that's here is actually uh for the most part heading over to the Twin Cities area to Minnesota. Um and uh. And so just even within the United States uh migration that I imagine is uh connected to different networks of um uh you know fellow immigrants and so forth. Um for you uh. Describe for us kind of your arc of um learning or kind of absorbing or rejecting some of these doctrines that we've been indoctrinated with in American life and identity. Like what were you first exposed to. What did you

decide to hold on to you. What did you expel in these kind of great myths that this nation likes to tell of itself.

[00:53:26] Oh thank you for that question. The big one is kind of what I've been wrestling with kind of like my whole life I guess for me is kind of like a three part equation kind of how I like to tell people. Um it's kind of a combination of passion a combination of need and a combination of community because like so um I'm generally honest like a hundred and seven percent passion about what I do passionate about social justice passion about learning like I love reading books I love learning history I love learning things that are going on now you know all over the world.

[00:54:02] So that kind of led to a door of awakening for me. You've now out of education and then the second part of that equation was need. Right. Like my identities don't exactly give me the comfort of being lax about social justice about what we're talking about now. So like who I am I can't just sit back and just watch things unfold because all the things that are unfolding are like directly affecting me or the people I love or the people who who who kind of resemble me in a sense or. And the last part of that was just community. So I've been very blessed just growing up having my immediate family select my siblings my mom but also having like the family that developed in your beach while all over there right now too. So just having that community constantly their presence and teaching me and and learning from them which is why intergenerational leadership is on my list as well so just learning from them all those three things kind of add up and that's where I kind of vibe became passion about what I do now.

[00:55:04] What do you know now about how to navigate this country that you didn't know when you first entered Rainier Beach High School one thing if I could do it all over again.

[00:55:17] I realized that you can't do it alone like there's no way whether you are the strongest person whether you just feel like you've had you just way whether you flag you can attack it alone there's absolutely no way you can and I wish I learned that early on because I entered winning Beach High School thinking like I had a pretty easy Middle School of out the top. I was like I had pretty decent grades in a loving family home but I was really studying for anything I was very privileged in my identities even though they're not exactly private gyms themselves. I was privileged in that sense but then I went to any high school and I realized that like I'm not going to get to any door whatsoever without my community

[00:56:02] As Charles was one of the.

[00:56:06] One of the myths that what you know that that idea of I can't do it alone really touches on one of the deep core American myths is the myth of rugged individualism right. And this is an individualistic country and this is a country of not just the cowboy myth but the idea that this is a place of self-reliance and for you as somebody who you first came to the States as a young child you've been back and forth and so you've had an interesting bi focal perspective on on these kinds of fairy tales that we tell ourselves here is the individualistic the rugged individualist myth one of the big ones for you that you see as as needing being punctured or is there something that's even deeper bigger

for you that you say no this is this is the first one I'd like to bust apart here in United States that one is a real one for me it's one I really despise I I can't stand the individualist myth of it this is destructive power is is considerable and we are um I mean you know how do you put this uh the American the whole terrifying thing with Americans OK OK here's what.

[00:57:27] Here it is.

[00:57:28] Sorry sorry sorry I have to search these things out right. It's like I have to go to a shelf and find this box and have to open it and make sure it's the right one. So I've found the box and this box is in Tacoma of all places. And I open this box and it says Tacoma inside of it. And what happened in Tacoma Tacoma at a vote for its bus service. Right.

[00:57:54] And everybody was asked to give like a little bit of a penny to sustain a 28 million dollar bus service which kept a lot of poor people circulating in the city. But somehow taxing or being taxed was like un-American and so forth and so on and so you had like what fifty five percent of those voting no against you know something very obviously useful to the majority of the people in that city who are poor or in the middle of the spectrum.

[00:58:32] And the question you have to ask is why in the world that so many people believe they were rich you know because only a rich person in the world would ever think that tax thing is horrible right.

[00:58:44] And we only a rich person they're right. A rich person is correct. Being taxed is awful right.

[00:58:49] But why would somebody who's like living in a house with I intervene with a forty thousand thirty thousand dollar a year job believe taxing is the cause and the horror of their life. Right.

[00:59:03] So you have to say oh they adapted their oppressors world view right.

[00:59:09] They adapted their Press's vision of how things should work out. The rich man and the rich woman is right to say taxing is horrible right. But if you say that and you don't have lots of money you've just simply adapted that opinion of your oppressor.

[00:59:30] And so when you look at individualism it makes a bloody lot of sense to be individualistic. If you're rich again. Right. It makes a lot of sense. That is I'm going to go on it on my own. Well of course you can. If you've got 10 million dollars in the bank. That is not a problem but if you've got ten thousand dollars a year right or nothing in the bank that that that philosophy is empty.

[00:59:56] So you have to say so that's what I said is that you've adapted the individualistic philosophy clearly in an add up an adoption of of a world view that most makes no sense for most people in the USA.

[01:00:13] And that is the suffering on one of the word that comes.

[01:00:19] Yes.

[01:00:23] Charles you know the word that pops in my mind that is central to the work of government whether in your day job or to getting people involved in civic and political life with the Washington bus you know both of your hats that you wear. The word that popped my head as I was talking was this great American word Liberty.

[01:00:44] Liberty.

[01:00:45] And I was you know Charles is talking about the rational self-interest of the rich. I mean I forget who said this line but you know in America both the rich and the poor have total liberty and freedom to live under bridges.

[01:00:58] Right. This idea that liberty is a language that we use to rationalize a bunch of inequities. And and yet and yet here we are. And those of us like me who are descendants of immigrants are here because you know my parents actually did believe there was going to be something valid in an idea of liberty and something that from the context of the choices they might have had in a communist China or in Taiwan that there was a there was content to that idea. Right.

[01:01:32] So for you and your work how do you I guess how do you bust through the cynicism that surrounds a word like Liberty right.

[01:01:41] Because I think we live in a time right now where people hear a lot of people maybe in this room hear liberty and there is a bit of an eye roll and there's a bit of a oh that's kind of corny patriotic talk or that's what the Tea Party talks about or that's what you know something else. And and yet. There is something there to claim right. I mean in a bunch of the things on Bowe's list and talking about you know the history of pride. Black lives matter.

[01:02:07] You know these are liberation movements right and liberation has at its at its heart the idea of liberty properly understood. So how do you particularly young people bust through any cynicism that might surround this idea that Liberty actually means something in 2017.

[01:02:24] It is very hard because I think that I think that the main question that I you know I think I spoke earlier about struggling with and of working in the system. I think there's this struggle between working within or do you work out side of the system to make it better. And I think that there's actually a question that was asked by a professor of mine in graduate school the first day of class she said the end of the year I'm going to ask you if you'd rather work inside or outside of the system and you have to tell me the answer. We had to go around the circle and I think everyone said I'm going to work outside the system and we're a bunch of social workers at the time and so I definitely work in the system probably more than anyone else in my class. There are a couple of us that work in government or politics and I think that that idea of liberty of true liberation I think I will say cannot necessarily exist in what we have right now. I think that. The white supremacy that we exist within.

[01:03:25] We're nowhere near breaking out of and I'm and that is a very cynical thing to say. But I think every day that we have to struggle wherever we are and whether that's passing policies this year we passed a soda tax which is a regressive tax. And I had to work on that and help pass it. And it was hard because it was you know working with the collective of organizations that were like This is really regressive and this is going to hurt people of color lower income people who you know are targeted by advertising and all of this. But looking at the flip side what can we do with that money. What how can we put this into better action. And so that's my role and that's kind of the role I see you know with voting voting made my list because I think even though I believe it's really going to be really hard to kind of come to a laboratory place through the system I think we have to we have to do that work. And it's important it's a piece of our history.

[01:04:25] So you know the same question of inside system outside system even apart from the mechanics of whether you work in or outside of traditional government or politics. I think there's the prior question of who do you think of as your inspiration or parts of your playbook. Right so if you think about today the transgender rights and identity movement right you can think about the ways in which there's a lineage to other liberation movements right in the 20th century certainly right. Civil rights gay rights so forth women's movement. I'm wondering how how far back do you draw that sense of connection. Do you do you feel an affinity with the movement for abolition in the eighteen hundreds and if you rewind further do you feel a sense of affinity and even kind of philosophical identity with the founding generation with the revolutionary generation. Do you see your cause as descended from that fight or do you feel like that that's that's a bridge too far for you.

[01:05:23] Well I think that Well the interesting thing to me is that I think that our oppressors use the same tactics from all of those times right. So segregation and making it against the law. And like all of these things and like making sure that it seems like like we're again with the heathens idea right like where it's like we're this heathen idea and it's just and putting us against each other and within the LGBTQ movement we're also putting cis gay folks against trans folks right. So let's divide and conquer right. And so I think that there are things to learn from that. But I think that one thing that we overlook too is that within all of that is like we can understand all of that stuff but we do have to realize that our environment is changing. So we also have to change right. So we are language also has to change and the way in which we we interact with folks has to change as well. So the way we're engaging as well. So I think that yes there are things to learn about the taxes the tactics that our oppressors use as well as we need to change our environment and change our language and all of this and keep up with what's happening now.

[01:06:27] Do you see the. Do you think of the generation of Jefferson Washington Franklin as do you think of them primarily as in the category of your oppressors or do you think of them in the category of people who though they were hypocrites actually had wrote a playbook that you can use.

[01:06:47] I do. I think I don't think I've ever thought of

[01:06:54] Thomas Jefferson or George Washington as anything but my oppressor just to be totally real.

[01:07:03] Go have you have. So if I were to invite you as I am doing to you contemplate that

[01:07:17] Is there is it is it. No that's a no go zone I can't see anything in in that inheritance or in their

[01:07:25] Their deeds choices and actions that I could not only learn from it in a negative sense but actually kind of take and say this is gonna be a model for how I try to move as a as an activist or a social artist in the world today.

[01:07:39] Oh I think that the only thing that I take from that is like how do I learn how to tackle my oppressor in a very interesting way is like what is your way of thinking. Right. So like part of my job in my day job is that I do cultural competency trainings for a lot of different agencies and so I have to find ways of making what I understand and know to be true about gender expression and gender identity and sexual orientation a way for somebody else to understand right. So I have to find the different stories to tell and I have to find the ways in which to interact with that person and engage that person. So yeah like if I had to like do a trans cultural competency training for George Washington Yeah I might like. Study the way he thinks right.

[01:08:25] So I'm pretty sure you've just written your next poem or something. That's a first for sure. So actually in a few minutes in about five minutes we're going to have some turn and talk with your neighbor on some of these questions.

[01:08:40] But I actually do like to do a lightning round of just for each of you quickly to say one other thing on that was on your list or maybe that you'd like to have on your list and just kind of say what that was and why. So let's actually go in reverse order something else from your list that let's like just say a word about quickly.

[01:08:57] Sure. One thing I'd like to talk about is neurodiversity and the idea that there is water normal or healthy type of brain is of like neurocognitive functioning is like absolute fiction.

[01:09:09] That's all neurodiversity. Okay great.

[01:09:11] Suffering from astrology is on my list because who did not watch the eclipse. And I am fascinated by astrology because it is both very personal and also the president that we have right now was born under the LEO Eclipse and it was so significant like Newsweek had an article about it.

[01:09:31] Every American doesn't need to know that. Oh God sorry. I

[01:09:39] Don't know what the eclipse means the shadow side. I'll give you a minute to do your research because you're still reading. So the eclipse the significance of the eclipse is that it shows your shadow side.

[01:09:48] And so we are seeing some astrologers have said we're seeing the shadow of the racism that exists in our country.

[01:09:55] Charles So something else from your list that you'd like to point out. I. So let me ask you about one of the items.

[01:10:11] Let's do it this way. Yeah. So basically we live in the 21st century. We have a crazy president. Well here's the point here's my point. I would say very quickly I wanted to talk about which is basically Obama was this black president. He came in and he did stuff pretty okay. I mean sure he was competent and he disproved something that was very clear to me it was argued for many is that blacks were incompetent or blacks were stupid or black with this and that that was done with after Obama. And so the group of white Americans decided to put in Trump to say OK it's not about competency it's just about being white.

[01:10:56] That's all. All right. So so so far black intelligence.

[01:11:01] We just got a white guy who was just white. So live with that. Fuck you all. Before us something from your list. I

[01:11:14] Had a follow up after that but I guess I'm now want to. I will quickly for my list is just a concept of reparations finally taking a step back as a country and realizing that is not enough to just talk about all the wrong doings we've done but actually give back. Well that's one to two whether that's 40 acres and a mule you know whatever it is. But finally given back what we owe a long overdue like we turn back library book G.M..

[01:11:41] Applause You know there's a lot of items on my list that I would talk about. And there's the items that are not on my list that I'd like to talk about. But

[01:11:55] I think what I would like folks to know right is a question is actually this book title you.

[01:12:04] You're more powerful than you think. I think that's the important part.

[01:12:08] Think you know your thoughts create your beliefs and who you are in your story of who you are as an American. What is America. Who is America.

[01:12:14] Who knows. Um so I think we're more powerful than we think we are.

[01:12:20] Each one of us and if we were able to grasp our potential as individuals our communities would be empowered and then our nation can be empowered as well. Thank you.

[01:12:33] So what we're gonna do right now actually we're gonna stay up here but for the next four or five minutes I'd like you to turn to a neighbor or a couple of neighbors and actually talk about

something that you would be putting on your top 10 list of what every American should know and we'll do that for a few minutes and then we'll come back for a Q and A. Coming from us to you okay folks let's say. This is a conversation that can keep going but we're gonna. We're gonna come back here for our final

[01:13:02] Ten minutes or so. I may have your attention. We've got a couple of microphones that we will move around here so that. You can be in the position of answering questions. So. I believe what we have cued up here is for suffering Honore

[01:13:21] Jamil and Igbo each to pose a question to all of you here and anybody who wants to take that question or speak to that question. Raise your hand we've got a couple of people with mikes here so suffering Honore. Do you want to ask you a question first.

[01:13:39] Yeah. I have a written down on my paper. All right.

[01:13:43] So my question is how do we work toward a collective liberation which you mentioned when there are so many different ideas of the most important things Americans should know.

[01:13:52] And I know that a lot of us kind of sit on it probably a certain side of the political spectrum but I'm wondering how we how we bridge that gap.

[01:14:00] So how do we work toward collective liberation. And if I could just unpack the question in a moment because to your last point about this is a room in Seattle and so it probably skews heavily one way ideologically but I think the idea of collective liberation means that these kinds of movements unpacking dismantling white supremacy liberates people who are white. It's not just for the liberation of people who are not white. Right.

[01:14:27] It liberates everybody to be in fact fully human and not to have to walk with shields and swords up and defenses up in different ways and so this question of as suffering is asking how do we work toward collective liberation when there are so many different ideas of the most important things every American should know and people have contested notions of what symbols or pieces of history matter most So who here is move to want to speak to that briefly and right here we've got I don't know where we've got a microphone in this idea please tell us your name comes the most important thing is to educate children the time they're five or 10 years old they're more impressionable of that time of their life than any ethic that tells us that our educational system in this country is a mess and you liberate people when they're young it's very hard to liberate people once a 10 or 20 or 40 or 50 year old and it's much easier for a 10 year old to grasp what humanity is all about than it is for someone who's gone through the 60s or the 80s. You know the whole Yuppie Bullshit. Um liberation starts when you're five years old one other thing you want to say. Did you intentionally exclude a white woman or a white man from the panel. I don't blame you for doing that but I'm wondering if that was part of your part of the whole putting together this this event I DIDN'T ACTUALLY QUITE HEAR THE SECOND PART.

[01:16:05] Yeah. YEAH. OKAY. YEAH. YEAH

[01:16:11] Yeah. SO. YEAH NO I hear you. It is I think as I won't speak for DeVito but I will sort of paraphrase what Davida said at the outset of this evening's event which is that Seattle Public Library I think has made a particular strategic decision in public programming in this time right now to put an emphasis on including and highlighting voices that are not often at the center of public civic conversations. And so I think that's right. Did I paraphrase that fairly divided

[01:16:48] Ok. Also the White person that was asked at the stranger sent Charles so that's

[01:16:56] Brutal honest truth here. Yes OK.

[01:16:58] I just wanted to toss under the end of that. Like that dude was 100 percent right. Like that's how we get out of this situation. Each one teach one. Some people in this room are actually like free. They can leave here go to a book they want to do and a bunch of us are gonna go to work or go to sleep so they can go to work or go to some other thing that that is keeping them from being who they want to be. Each one teach one. Somebody taught me how to do things so now I don't have to do other shit and I can go and be happier in my life and those places that I would have been encumbered by by by restrictions if we want to get out of this everybody learned goddamn javascript. This woman is gosh darn correct. And if you want some help. Literally there's the Internet. We're in a library. There's hella computers. You don't have an excuse if you don't. If you're not free. It's either because somebody didn't teach you and they're an asshole but mostly it's your fault. Thank you. Also also let me just say this how else we get free is not just like learning how to be functional in our society like how to make things or do stuff for other people but how to actually be a functioning member of our society. They asked you to like that. People are here asking you like hey go learn about your society and you know help people had all kinds of different historical stuff on their list and everything like that. And that's all Yeah. Learn that stuff. But who decides like how your health care gets handled who decides what police get to police your neighbor like you know to me like you are effective you can be effective in your society stand up be counted and each one teach one.

[01:18:33] Yeah I think that's it. Stand up be counted. Each one teach one. What. Thank you. Tell us your name.

[01:18:40] A real nigga from Compton. OK so one thing that I would mention actually and I want to thank again actually Carrie Hopper from from our team at the Aspen Institute for putting on this event and yes please.

[01:18:57] In working with DeVito to put on to put on a series of events.

[01:19:00] But one of the things that one of the spinoff projects from this what every American should know project that we've been doing with support from the Carnegie Corporation is a thread of this discussion focusing in particular on immigrant communities whatever. And in both directions what every immigrant needs to know about American life but also in the other direction what every

American native born or not needs to know about immigrants in the immigrant experience and wanted. And so we've done a few of these sessions around the country focused in that way. And one of the things actually back to our friend from Compton's last observation was that one of the most basic common things that you heard in these conversations with immigrant immigrant communities about what every American should know wasn't about the historical stuff and it wasn't about even the conceptual stuff. It was no it was no how to get your health care. It was no where to get your driver's license. It was know how to work in networks to be able to get employment. It was it was about learning the system of both economic and kind of identity recognition. Right. And. And. Well and the Internet. Yeah absolutely. Right. But kind of knowing how knowing how to know how to get this stuff includes the Internet. So I think there is a lot that. We've learned from these immigrant focused conversations about whatever what every American should know starting at age 10 or younger. Right. About how to navigate the systems of power and the systems of resource allocation here. So our next question comes from Jamil. I don't if you have it there in front of you but. Yeah. OK.

[01:20:37] So please post it to the to the yes I will. I also want to just clarify I'm actually 4 percent finish. I did my DNA test. I know why folks claiming their shit like I'm Native. You know I got like 2 percent. I mean I got a little white I mean so represented here. Right. I always thought you were kind of scan any power. All right. Here's my question. You guys really forget everything everyone ever told you.

[01:21:03] What's the community you would create and what would you be doing in it.

[01:21:09] Please. Microphones right next to you. Oh there's a microphone right. I take the microphone please.

[01:21:15] The operation starts in the womb. Right away you are becoming a separate individual. When you come out you need a community that will also be with you. When I see a lot is with this we are all doing it on our own here. That's what we need is to remember that your child from the time it comes out is already being influenced by its environment. And you don't wait till you're five or four and go to school and then come to me and I'm going to teach you how to get along with other people. I can tell right away who's had parents who from the very beginning remember they are separate from the person that they are going to be spending a lot of their life taking care of. If you don't want to do that job then don't have children. That's all I want to say and that's where the community comes in. When your community is telling you that. Like my mother she said hey we're going downtown Chicago so we can see some people that look different than us back in the 1950s. I knew my mother wasn't perfect but boy did I get a lesson right. And if you live where nobody else is living it looks like you and you are being told that you are so special and nobody else is special like you. This is what's really going wrong with our country. OK we got to get rid of drop. All right thank you

[01:22:58] So that I like that answer. I mean that actually answers quite directly Jamal's question of forget everything.

[01:23:03] You know what. What kind of community would you and that question of a community in which you stop thinking you're special for unearned reasons. Right. Um whiteness is one that's out there but maleness is another.

[01:23:17] There are plenty of other things that endow specialness in our society and unearned unfair ways that um that you unpack hopefully from an early time. Well anyone else like to speak to Jamal's cause. Yes please. Tell us your name. Mariah.

[01:23:36] Hi. I'm just Santa. And um I live by this main motto and it's from the Black Women's Club movement. Think of the 1950s and I tell my boss I tell everybody this is I. I lift as I climb so that the higher I go

[01:23:55] Um the more I bring up people with me and in the corporate world that's recommending people for jobs or that's putting people in touch with um contractors or vendors that you know. So I want to live in a world where we're all lifting up as we climb. Um I. I think a lot about taxes since I mean a certain tax bracket. And I'm like well do I really want people around me to be sick or be uneducated or not have access to driving lessons or or a proper driver's license. And the answer is no because I live in a community. I don't live in an apartment by myself. I live in an apartment with many other people because it's an apartment. But I live in a neighborhood and I live in this city and I live in this state. So I just ask that everybody continues in whatever you're doing to lift as you climb.

[01:24:51] Thank you. Thank you. So

[01:24:57] Imo that's in some ways as interesting segway to the question that you were going to pose as Oh yeah. Okay great. Oh great. Okay. So why do you pose your question and.

[01:25:12] Sure. So as a poet I like to filter things down. So like when we ask the question like What Every American Should Know Like what does it mean to be an American right now wants to wrestle with that.

[01:25:26] Okay.

[01:25:31] I think it means to be deeply uncomfortable with ourselves um coming from privilege you have to we have to we have to we just have to stand here and I don't know except what is not acceptable just stand in this place that we've landed and not own it. Cringe to it. I try to run from it. I try to run from it and try to. I said I wasn't going to talk because I'm a talker.

[01:26:06] I would like to I'd like to take attention you know and it's like I feel like my job today in this world is to listen thank you.

[01:26:21] Anyone else like to answer this very poetic distilled question.

[01:26:26] Um hand over on this side.

[01:26:28] Oh all right. Oh great. Fantastic. So um really speaking to what you just said. Uh like I feel that confusion like I don't know like I'm black right. So I'm American but am I because like there's a lot of American things that I don't claim but I was born here so it's like all of these questions that you just have to keep asking yourself and depending on who you talk to or you know where you live or where you're from there is like a right answer and there's a wrong answer right like someone defines that sometimes the community you're a part of. And I think it's just it's chaos. I don't have any really positive thing to say about it because it's just confusing. Like what. Like what do you do. Like you can seek the answers out right you can come to things like this you can really try to seek out and find people who share your same viewpoint like somewhere in Nebraska. There is a group of people on a farm somewhere and it's like you're struggling too. So you have to be aware of their struggle at the same time be aware of your own and how they are plays. It's just it's chaotic.

[01:27:34] It's confusing.

[01:27:38] So America is like having an identity crisis is what I'm learning.

[01:27:42] Call to me being an American right now and it was just an idea that's been mentioned two or three times by various members of the panel is one it's the learning how to carve out your own space whereas in our history it might have been idealized as the rugged individualist but I think now as our conscious evolution continues and we become more emotionally intelligent we become more connected to everyone who's different from us. And we have to learn how to negotiate this social contract as an American. We have this unique opportunity to enact the true ideals of our Constitution and it's through this chaos and that shadow like a party that astrology the shadow side shadow side stuff is real. We are being revealed all the. All the struggle that has been pushed to the side and ignored until now and lied about is finally being shown and it is uncomfortable but it teaches us and out of this chaos it is by the act of learning how to carve out your own space while respecting the space of others that we are going to organize it and act a better America.

[01:29:02] Thank you very much. So let me say a word of synthesis here as we close and thank our panel. It is I like the way you sit still. America is in an identity crisis right now. Right.

[01:29:17] And but I think that instinct to sit with it rather than run from it rather than pretend it's not there to start to sit in it to be in it is an instinct that I think we together have to commit to because we're in.

[01:29:36] We are feeling identity crisis because we are in the midst of incredible flux not just the demographic ethnic racial flux but the fact that we're that this is happening at the same time as radical nearly unprecedented levels of inequality in this country that make everybody feel a deeper sense of scarcity and zero sum this. And I've got to get my piece someone else is going to take my piece. Right. So it's kind of the worst possible time for us to try to reckon with that shadow side and yet it has to happen. Right. And I think the watchword that I would say if we were to and I know this will be podcast and I imagine someone from the library and certainly from our team in Aspen will write up

some distillation of this evening. But if you were just to kind of put together and thread together not in a mosaic but in this kind of jazz may launch some of the ideas and feelings and stories and concepts and facts and symbols that were talked about tonight you get a pretty good picture not only of the America that's emerging. You get a good picture of what of the way we've got to be right. A lot of our debates about American identity are this false choice between whiteness as a monoculture and everybody else is kind of subordinate to that or this notion of multiculturalism that every group has its own container and its own set of stories and heroes and what have you. And in fact what we have felt and seen here in the course of this conversation and certainly with the wonderful way in which all of you have been answering the questions that the panels posed to you is actually a different word it's not monoculturalism and it's not multiculturalism it's what the great some sort of forgotten cultural critic African-American cultural critic Albert Murray called Omni culturalism America is about omni culturalism. We are we are it all we are the good the bad and the ugly all at once swirled together turned into kind of mixed tapes and lens and again jazz hybrids.

[01:31:42] Right. And that

[01:31:44] Sometimes sounds great sometimes it comes out like Billie Holiday and beauty and pain and other times it's like right now it's just noise and it's really hard to decode that noise and make sense of it our job right now and the reason why we've come together here is to remind each other that we're not alone in trying to make sense of that and that we can together Turn that noise into a different kind of music for the future of this country. So please join me in thinking our panel in the library and

[01:32:12] Ask me citizenship in America at any program. Thanks to all of you for coming here tonight for this conversation.

[01:32:22] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.