

THE
REUNITED
STATES OF
AMERICA



HOW WE CAN BRIDGE
THE PARTISAN DIVIDE

MARK GERZON

*Bestselling author of *Leading through Conflict**

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—**Stephen Dinan, CEO, The Shift Network, and author of *Sacred America***

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MARK GERZON



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The Reunited States of America

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*This book is dedicated to those who are working
across the partisan divide to reunite America.*

*All of the author's proceeds from this book will be donated
to support their message and their mission.*

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PREFACE

WALKING BRISKLY THROUGH the room filled with almost one hundred people at small tables, I heard fragments of conversations as each of them explained why he or she had decided to attend our event. But when a young woman said that she was a national security analyst, I stopped. Since our event was about the growing partisan divide in America, I was particularly curious to learn more about why someone focused on foreign policy was here.

“My job is about studying threats from *abroad*,” the young woman said. “But I’m here tonight because we Americans don’t seem to be able to work together anymore. I am afraid that the biggest threat we face is from *within*.”

Although I moved on, I couldn’t get the national security analyst’s comment out of my mind. As I listened to others share what had motivated them to attend our workshop about bridging the partisan divides, I realized that her comment summed up why I wrote this book—and why I hope you will read it.

We want to feel safe in our country. We want to have confidence in our future. We want to learn how to deal more constructively with the differences that are splitting us apart. We want our leaders to work together to solve problems and strengthen our country.

But even candidates themselves, both left and right, say the system is broken. Washington is in gridlock. Politics is paralyzed. The pages that follow don’t just explain how and

why we have stumbled into a political gutter of attack and demonization. They shine a spotlight on heroes who are developing the tools, ways of thinking, and organizations we will need to reunite our country and rescue the American dream.

To reunite our country, we need to look beyond the two stories that dominate political discourse:

Story #1: Conservatives are right and, if elected, will strengthen America.

Story #2: Liberals are right and, if elected, will strengthen America.

With deep respect for both of these perspectives, I firmly disagree. Neither of these stories reunites and strengthens America. On the contrary—both of these stories ultimately divide and weaken us.

Tragically, these two competing, paralyzing narratives (and the two parties that claim to represent them) consume almost all of the oxygen in the public square. Whatever the issue may be, the two competing armies polarize around it, even if that results in pitting neighbor against neighbor, employers against employees, family members against family members. They may be making all the noise, but they are clearly not doing their job: only three out of ten Americans actually feel represented in Washington.¹

Fortunately, from the very roots of our culture, another narrative is emerging that appeals particularly to the other seven out of ten:

Story #3: Americans can work together with people different from ourselves to find common ground that can strengthen the country that we all love.

In the following pages, you will encounter more than forty individuals and organizations that prove that Story #3 is based in fact. It is a story about reuniting America. We not only can work together—we already *are*.

We Americans are solving problems and achieving positive results not despite but *because of* our differences. Many of our fellow citizens are living evidence of this third story. They are putting country before party. They are drawing the outlines of a new political map that connects us rather than divides us. They are forming networks and organizations that are building bridges rather than walls. They are bridging the partisan divide—in living rooms and in communities, in state legislatures and on Capitol Hill.

Story #3 does not mean agreeing on everything. Nor does it mean being “nice” or being “moderate” or “splitting the difference.” On the contrary, it may mean fighting for what one believes in—but respecting one’s adversary for doing the same. It means knowing the difference between an issue on which you are willing to listen and learn, and one where you believe you are not. Above all, it means disagreeing strongly without ever forgetting that “they” probably love America just as much as “we” do.

The truth is, 70 to 90 of us say that we are “very patriotic.”² That means almost all of us claim to love our country deeply. If we love our family, we want it to stay connected. Similarly, if we love America, we naturally want our country to be able to work through its deep and genuine differences and remain united.

This book is part of a campaign—not a Republican or Democratic campaign, but an American campaign; not a campaign for office, but a campaign for our country. It is about the people, some of whom are our neighbors, who are drawing a new political map that connects rather than divides us. It is

about our fellow citizens who are already reuniting America—in living rooms and in communities, in state legislatures and on Capitol Hill. These are, in my view, today’s real American heroes.

But let’s be clear from the outset: this book is not addressed only to the “middle” of the so-called political spectrum. It is for citizens who consider themselves on the “left” or the “right” as well.

Note to conservative readers

Do you want to defend values and principles that you cherish and that you feel are being trampled upon? If so, you will be a more effective advocate for your values if you know how to connect with and enlist the rest of the political spectrum. Reading this book will give you some new tools for promoting your beliefs, particularly with those who (you think) do not share them.

Note to liberal readers

You believe that you are on the right side of history and that you are championing all the noblest causes. It frustrates you when “right-wingers,” whether in Congress or in your community, get in the way of what you call “progress.” Reading this book will provide you with practical strategies for reaching out to conservatives in ways that will attract more support.

Note to “I’m-not-political” readers

If you don’t care about politics or are downright turned off by it, and think your vote doesn’t matter, I respect your feelings. But the solution is not to withdraw. The solution is to find another way to express yourself authentically. Reading this book will put you directly in touch with scores of citizens who, like you, don’t want to play by the old rules and who are finding more meaningful ways of engaging.

Wherever you place yourself on—or off—the political spectrum, learning how to work *with* fellow citizens who have different views and values will give you new and better choices for how to be engaged in politics. *You will be a more effective conservative, liberal, or whatever if you know how others different from you think and feel and how to reach them.*

The great orator and patriot from Virginia, Patrick Henry, called on his fellow citizens to pledge allegiance not just to the former colony in which they lived but also to the union of states that was being born. “I am not a Virginian, but an American,” he said two hundred years ago. But what does that mean today? Just as his loyalty to America transcended his loyalty to his state, how do we rise above our loyalty to our ideology or party? Does it serve my country if I just take a side? What makes us think we are patriotic if we turn against our fellow citizens who don’t share our views? *How do we love our country and still honor our own beliefs?*

In the following pages, you will meet scores of Americans who are dedicating their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to answering these questions. They have increased my ability to deal with the complex, polarized political culture in which we live. They have also inspired and renewed my faith in our country: the Reunited States of America.

May they do the same for you.

Mark Gerzon

November 2015

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INTRODUCTION

ARE WE DIVIDING— OR REUNITING?

ONE DAY, a young man named Sean Long, who had just finished his junior year at Notre Dame, visited me in my office. He had heard about an event we had hosted on a college campus that had led to students forming a “transpartisan club” that offered an alternative to the traditional left–right alternatives. Sean searched me out because he wanted to tell me *his* story and ask for my support.

“I was president of the Democratic Club on campus,” he told me. “I was sitting in my dorm with a conservative friend who was challenging some of my opinions. We asked ourselves: What would it be like to have a safe, neutral place where students could explore their differences in an atmosphere of *curiosity*?”

When Sean returned for his senior year, he decided to turn his idea into action. He and two close Republican friends thought of calling it a “club for moderates” but quickly realized that the phrase did not capture what they were trying to create. They didn’t want a club, and they weren’t moderates. They wanted to break out completely from that old mold.

With these two friends, Sean started bridgeND, an organization committed to going beyond debate and finding common ground to inspire students to take action across the political

spectrum. “We have a logo and everything,” he told me excitedly, whipping out his iPhone to show me a red-white-and-blue design of a bridge spanning the divides.

At their first meeting, they were amazed that thirty-five people came—triple the number they had expected. To make sure that these newcomers understood the difference between their network and the long-established Democratic and Republican clubs, they issued a statement:

bridgeND is open to all voices—liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican, and anyone in between—willing to talk about our nation’s public policy in new ways.

In order to participate, students had to accept three ground rules:

1. *Going beyond debate.* Not just talking, but moving toward action.
2. *Friends first.* Building trust and connection before taking on issues.
3. *Idea catalyst.* Creating innovative policy solutions around which students from across the spectrum could rally.

All across the nation, Americans of all ages are taking similar steps. From the Young Invincibles to Run for America to the Millennial Action Project, those who came of age in the Bush-Obama era recognized that they could not afford to participate in the left-right fistfight of their parents’ generation. Meanwhile, many more mature Americans, having watched the predictable donkey-elephant attack-counterattack drama too many times, have been urgently looking for a different, better way of facing our nation’s challenges. But perhaps no one

can attest to the life-and-death danger of hyperpartisan politics more vividly than our men and women in uniform.

“The first time I remember being angry about our partisan foreign policy was in 2007, when I was in Jalalabad,” former Army Captain Jake Davis told me recently. As the officer in charge of a tactical operations center coordinating day-to-day combat operations across fourteen thousand square miles of northeastern Afghanistan, he was troubled that thousands of troops and resources were being diverted to Iraq, leaving the troops for whom he was responsible more vulnerable than ever.

“Why did we start a war on another front when the one we were fighting was still unfinished?” he asked. “The important fight, it seemed to me, was Afghanistan. But we couldn’t do it right because the resources we needed were going to Iraq.”

Once he completed his tour of duty, Davis came back home and took a job with a college leadership program. He felt it was an opportunity to “close the gap between what we teach about leadership and the reality of leadership. I didn’t want my students leaving our program after four years and getting lost in the same partisan turmoil that caused all the trouble in the first place.”

After Davis participated in a workshop featuring speakers who were crossing the partisan divide, he immediately wanted to become more directly involved. “The perspective represented exactly how I thought our students should engage in the world of politics: being open to opposing views and learning to think critically about their own positions. It made a lot of our students more hopeful about how they could engage in politics in a way that felt more authentic. And it had nothing to do with a particular political position. Rather, it had everything to do with critical thought and an open mind.”

After participating in the leadership program that Davis helped design, some of his students—both left- and right-leaning—approached him. They wanted to know how they could differ with each other without becoming enemies. As classmates, friends, and in some cases roommates, they had no interest in ending up as adults attacking each other like the so-called grownups who dominated the news. Instead, they wanted to dig deeply into their differences and emerge with better policy ideas *and* stronger friendships. As at Notre Dame, the outcome was that members of Davis’s leadership program started a new extracurricular activity on campus that offered opportunities for both young Democrats and young Republicans to meet beyond partisanship and find common ground.

“The experience offers me hope,” recalled Davis. “One day, if my kids go into the military, they may have political leaders who will think more carefully and collaboratively when they make young men and women bear the burden of going to war.”



We begin our journey beyond partisanship with Sean Long and Jake Davis because they are part of the solution to the partisan divide. Like the national security analyst we met previously, they are savvy enough to know that a robust, healthy *United States of America* requires charting a new course beyond kneejerk, paralyzing partisanship.

Some of the pioneering bridge builders you are about to meet are just starting out on their journey across the divide; others have been traversing the territory between left and right for decades. Some are strong conservatives; others are longtime liberals. But all have developed a commitment to move beyond all kinds of extreme partisanship to rekindle the American

genius for problem solving, creative collaboration, and civic innovation.

These diverse pathways beyond partisanship lead, first of all, through our hearts. They begin with each of us learning to acknowledge the liberal and conservative who are *inside* us. Once we have done this personal work of recognizing our own inner diversity, then the path continues—through our families (who are often multipartisan) to the Internet and social media (with all the risks and rewards of anonymity), to our places of worship (where inclusion and diversity are often a challenge), to our communities, and, last but not least, to the voting booth.

Citizens who have not been aware of this movement to reunite America may feel, as I did until recently, a deep pessimism and even despair about the negative trends in American civil life. Over the years, I have heard many of the reasons why so many of us feel that bridging the divide is impossible.

- “Now that [Candidate X] is in the race,” a Democratic activist in a heavily liberal area of Los Angeles told me, “forget about bridge building across the divides. Everybody here is taking sides.”
- “This election year [2016] is a fundamental clash of two opposing worldviews,” a leading conservative philanthropist told me. “There is no middle ground.”
- “With more than two billion dollars of negative ads,” scoffed a potential funder of our work, “what makes you think a few well-meaning shoestring organizations will make a difference when the media is spewing out this trash?”

- “Don’t you know the districts are gerrymandered?” said one scholar derisively. “Improving civility between politicians is irrelevant. The system is broken.”
- “Look—who are you kidding?” one liberal activist for campaign finance reform told me. “When one outside funder can singlehandedly bankroll a candidate, what’s the point of trying to encourage people to *get along*?” (He said the last two words with a sneer.)
- “Thank God we’re superpartisan right now,” said one conservative colleague. “That means maybe the government won’t keep spreading like a cancer.”

Everyone, it seems, has his or her reason why the partisan divide cannot, or should not, be bridged. It’s almost enough to make a person give up and stay home. And of course, many citizens are doing just that. Not only do many not go to the polls, many who do feel resigned to voting for whomever they dislike least.

Those who believe there are huge obstacles to bridging the partisan divide are right. Big money, crazily designed congressional districts, negative ads, and polarized news channels—these are *real problems*. The scores of bridge-building, boundary-crossing heroes who you are about to meet recognize these problems, too.

Fortunately, even as the naysayers’ voices grow louder, the movement to reunite America only grows stronger. Deepening cynicism and hyperpartisanship is one of the reasons why a movement to reunite America is gaining strength *right now*. The urge to reunite the states of America comes at precisely the time when they are most divided.

REBUILDING OUR CAPACITY TO WORK TOGETHER

After traveling on many paths through this cross-partisan terrain, I have learned that one element is essential for Story #3. In order for us to work together with people different from ourselves to search for common ground, *collaboration matters*. The greater our capacity to work together, the more we as Americans can accomplish.

Facilitating and mediating across the political spectrum for the past quarter century has sensitized me to the importance of this invisible but vital resource. Adding in other increasingly dysfunctional dynamics—gerrymandered districts, money-saturated campaigns, “closed” (two-party-dominated) primaries, etc.—America is facing a political crisis so severe that public confidence is plummeting. Opinion polls reveal that more than seven out of ten Americans

- feel America is on the “wrong track”—the highest number on record (71 percent),
- lack confidence that their children’s generation will have a better life (76 percent), and
- express deep concern about how our political system is failing us (79 percent).

Finally, more than seven of ten Americans “blame our problems on the inability of our elected officials to act effectively.”¹

When the levels of public distrust of political leaders reach beyond two-thirds, veteran public opinion analysts believe that a nation reaches a “tipping point.” The country’s mood becomes “volatile and unstable.”² Voters become disgusted and

cynical and stop participating. Elected officials can no longer work together. And any effort to define a national purpose, much less achieve it, becomes virtually impossible.

Beyond opinion polls, I can tell you without a shred of doubt from my personal experience that our capacity to collaborate has sharply declined. During the Clinton-Bush-Obama administrations, what unites us—respect, dialogue, collaborative problem solving, citizen empowerment, innovation—was relentlessly pushed to the margins of public life. Meanwhile, what divides us—blame, personal attacks, stereotypes, dark money—grabbed center stage.

The problem is not partisanship itself, which can work well when there is a baseline of civility and trust (as there was, for example between Democratic House Speaker Tip O’Neill and Republican President Ronald Reagan). When two people from different parties disagree on one issue, it is partisanship. But when two people disagree about everything all the time, it’s *hyperpartisanship*. It’s not a healthy disagreement. It’s a toxic feud.

Having a point of view is absolutely normal; so is organizing with others who agree. This is a natural, healthy way of being partisan: committed to advancing our own (or our party’s) interests while ensuring the integrity of our institutions and our country.

However, when we disagree vehemently on *everything*, then reality itself can appear inherently divided. When partisanship becomes reflexive, automatic, and indiscriminating, then it turns poisonously *hyperpartisan*. Faced with this threat, to be nonpartisan, bipartisan, or postpartisan is not enough.³ As well intentioned as these words may be, they do not address the deeper dilemma facing our democracy.

Two comments, fifty years apart, vividly illustrate this decline in the willingness to work together in our political culture. During the 1960 election between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy, the actor John Wayne was a well-known, committed conservative and outspoken opponent of Kennedy who campaigned enthusiastically for Nixon. But after Kennedy won, the Duke graciously said, “I may not have voted for him [Kennedy], but he’s president and I hope he does a good job.” By contrast, a half-century later, another committed conservative, Rush Limbaugh, bluntly said of President Barack Obama, “I hope he fails.”⁴

The difference between the earlier era and today is not purely about ideas. It’s about attitude. The Duke felt that, as an American, he could still respect a president with whom he vehemently disagreed and expect him to look out for the best interests of the country. Like his counterparts on the left, Limbaugh symbolizes a shift in the political culture, a shift from collaboration to a fundamental, poisonous hostility bordering on hatred. It exists on both the right and the left, and if unchecked, it can undermine democracy from the inside out.

In the United States, where we pride ourselves on our vibrant civil society, public opinion analysts such as Daniel Yankelovich identified as early as the 1990s a profound “erosion of people’s respect for one another.” This dangerous erosion is one of the greatest concerns among the American public.⁵ Never before has the issue seemed so urgent. When Americans are asked which of our society’s moral virtues have declined most seriously, “respect for others” tops the list. More than four out of five Americans (83 percent) believe that mutual respect between Americans is eroding. (Also seen in decline are “honesty,” 78 percent; “loyalty,” 75 percent; and “integrity,” 74 percent.)⁶

As leaders on both the left and the right agree, it's time to "take the poison out of partisanship."⁷ Two Emory University political scientists call this "negative partisanship," which they define as "voting against the opposing party rather than for their own party."⁸ American political life today is a portrait of partisanship on steroids. Nothing makes that clearer than the desperate tone in a barrage of recent book titles:

Does American Democracy Still Work?

American Gridlock

The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America

Fight Club Politics

The Polarized Public

The Second Civil War

The Beltway Beast

Even worse, consider the cover of the September 2014 issue of sober, stodgy *Foreign Affairs*, which featured a drawing of the Capitol building, crumbling around the edges, above the headline "See America: Land of Decay & Dysfunction."

Because this negative partisanship has been unchecked for so long, it is no longer about authentic, heartfelt differences of values and interests. It is about hyped-up, kneejerk opposition to everything the other side stands for. So intense has this hyperpartisan behavior become that it has made *compromise* a dirty word, *bipartisanship* a relic of the past, and *public service* a quaint anachronism. The poison is turning us into a country that cannot keep its promises or achieve its goals. In every election cycle, our partisan leaders once again make promises about "unity" and "working together." But the historical record

shows that these promises are empty. Our capacity to work together continues to plummet.

This is why, for the last quarter century, I have focused not on helping candidates to get elected but on strengthening their capacity to collaborate. When I worked in divided communities across America in the early 1990s, I witnessed firsthand the fragility and preciousness of our capacity to work together. With foundation support, I led a project called the Common Enterprise, which was designed to bring neighbors together from across the political spectrum to decide *together* what their communities needed. I found progressive groups and their conservative counterparts working on opposite sides of almost every issue. Everywhere I looked, the left-right split seemed to have the nation in its grip. Finally, after visiting many cities, and listening to one local conflict after another that turned neighbors into enemies, I decoded a pattern underneath the otherwise-diverse disputes. I described these competing “belief systems” in a book titled *A House Divided*, published in 1996, precisely the time when hostility was increasing in the US Congress.⁹

From then until now, this “house divided” has fragmented even more. Before turning outward to America, let me briefly share with you what happened over the next two decades. My experience taught me, up close and personal, that part of the problem facing America was *inside* me and you—and so was the solution.

REACHING A TURNING POINT

Concerned about the paralyzing dysfunction on the floor of the US House of Representatives, a group of members from both sides of the aisle engaged in a quiet revolt. In the autumn

of 1996, they wrote their party leaders an unprecedented letter requesting a retreat for the entire institution. As a result, more than half of our 435 representatives went away for a weekend to Hershey, Pennsylvania, to strengthen their relationship and increase “civility.”

Because my work dealt respectfully with the diverse opinions present in the House of Representatives, the Bipartisan Retreat Committee entrusted me (in partnership with the Aspen Institute) with the responsibility to help them design and facilitate their historic gathering—the largest pilgrimage of members of Congress in peacetime ever. The Retreat Committee consisted of five Democrats and five Republicans appointed by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Georgia) and Minority Leader Dick Gephardt (D-Missouri). Although the House itself was divided into “red” and “blue” teams, the committee members were thoughtful, constructive problem solvers from both sides of the aisle.

I worked most closely with the two who had catalyzed the retreat in the first place: Amo Houghton, the gray-haired Republican former CEO of Corning Glass from upstate New York who wanted a united America in order to be competitive in the global market; and David Skaggs, his bowtie-wearing Democratic counterpart from Colorado, a former Marine who quoted the US Constitution as if it were a holy book. But I also connected strongly with Ray LaHood, the influential Peoria Republican who had a way of making all of us feel comfortable with each other (even when we weren’t); Eva Clayton, a tough-talking Democrat from North Carolina, the first African American woman to represent her state in Congress; and Tillie Fowler, the petite conservative Republican “steel magnolia” from Jacksonville, Florida, who would straighten my collar to make me more presentable. Completing the committee were

Charles Stenholm, the tall “blue dog” Democrat farmer from Texas who called me “son” and whose humility and homespun wisdom moved me; Jo Ann Emerson, the Missouri Republican who had run for her husband’s seat after his tragic death; and Tom Sawyer (D-Ohio), David Drier (R-California), and Ruben Hinojosa (D-Texas).

For me personally, the four years I worked with this across-the-spectrum team were a turning point in my political life.

- I felt respect for all of them, not just the ones with whom I agreed.
- I found value in all of their competing points of view.
- I was moved by their commitment to transform their conflicts into common ground.
- I recognized that they had greater wisdom as a whole than anyone alone.
- I was inspired by these political leaders to believe that common, even higher, ground was possible.

As the new millennium began, I realized that, after consulting with both sides of the US Congress, I could relate positively to anyone across the spectrum. The party-versus-party, left-versus-right posturing now seemed like old computer software: seriously out of date. The committee inspired me to move beyond my own *inner* partisanship by showing me that not only was Story #3 possible, it was essential. We can—and we *must*—work together to strengthen our country.

Don’t get me wrong: I still had my preferences during election years. When George W. Bush ran against Al Gore and then John Kerry, and then Barack Obama took on John McCain and then Mitt Romney, I had to choose whom I was for and whom

I was against. But something fundamental had changed inside me. For the first time, I cared more about *how* they won than *who* won. Even more important than which side won the election was how the sides would work together *after* the election.

By the time Harvard Business School Press published my book *Leading Through Conflict: How Successful Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities* in 2006, I had worked with conflicts at every level of our society and also with political conflicts in Africa and Asia. The more I learned, the more I realized that the Founding Fathers were right: *how we deal with conflict is the key to a healthy democracy.*

DECODING THE SECRET OF *E PLURIBUS UNUM*

On July 4, 1776, a committee appointed by the US Congress designed a seal for the United States of America. Although this design was not officially adopted, the phrase emblazoned in it—*E pluribus unum*, “Out of many, one”—lives on. I believe that today this phrase from our Founding Fathers still holds the key to how we can bridge the partisan divide and keep our democracy strong and healthy.

Like a secret code embedded in our nation’s history, the values needed to reunite America are embedded in this ancient Latin motto. The process that this phrase describes is not automatic. Between *pluribus* and *unum* is a lot of hard work. It involves opening our minds and our hearts to find common ground. In essence, it advises us to *discover the underlying unity beneath or beyond our strong and vital differences.*

The dynamic of *E pluribus unum* is the challenge of a free people, and we rightly celebrate it. The United States of America has always had partisanship, and we have always strived for

unity. *Both* ingredients are needed for a democratic republic to flourish.

What I learned about conflict is that it is most constructive, and least destructive, when it is at the optimal temperature. If it is too hot, it burns and ultimately destroys. If it is too cold, it freezes and ultimately paralyzes. What we need is conflict that transforms (or “cooks”) into opportunities for positive growth, change, and innovation. *Pluribus*, the friction of our differences, creates the heat. *Unum*, our shared identity and institutions, keeps us cool. Together, *E pluribus unum* creates a powerful dynamic that is at the heart of American genius.

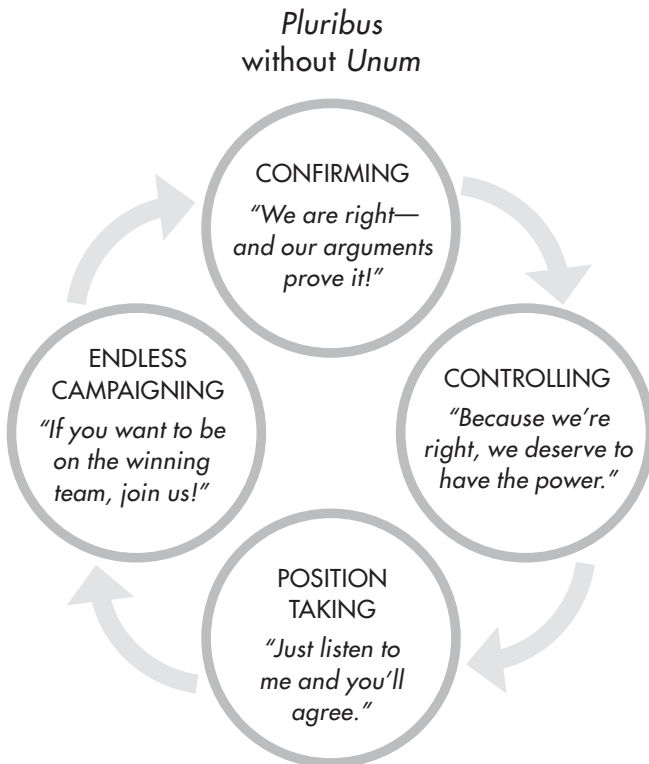
In the context of this book, *pluribus* (Latin, “more, many”) is about the *freedom* to be partisan, to think for oneself, to make up one’s own mind, and to be different. It celebrates the many, honors differences, and contrasts one view with another. It is about *loyalty* to one’s own beliefs and traditions, *passion* about advancing one’s own cause, *firmness* in taking stands on issues, and *commitment* to support the candidate one prefers. These are fundamental rights of American citizens and an essential part of being both an active citizen and a healthy partisan.

The differences that emerge from this *pluribus* cycle are part of the rowdy, messy civic life of a free democracy. Citizens, numbering three hundred fifty million, will always differ about what is “right.” We will always struggle for control. We will always take positions. And we will always campaign for what and whom we believe in—and seek victory.

This freedom to be partisan, however, is healthy when it is grounded in oneness. *Unum* (Latin, “one”) is about unity. In the context of this book, *unum* means the willingness of healthy partisans to come together and work through their differences with civility and respect. It is about identifying the whole, not

just one's own part. When *pluribus* (or partisan) is no longer grounded in connection to unity and wholeness, it can become hyperpartisan. Loyalty, passion, firmness, and commitment—these qualities become more extreme and lead to unhealthy, exaggerated distortions:

- *Confirming* ideological views that promote loyalty to one's values and maintain one's identity or traditional view
- *Controlling* the levers of power—state legislatures, Congress, or the White House—in order to advance our values, identity, or views
- *Position taking* that holds fast to a pro or con stance on an issue and resists any change



- *Endlessly campaigning* in order to defend and promote our own or our party's positions

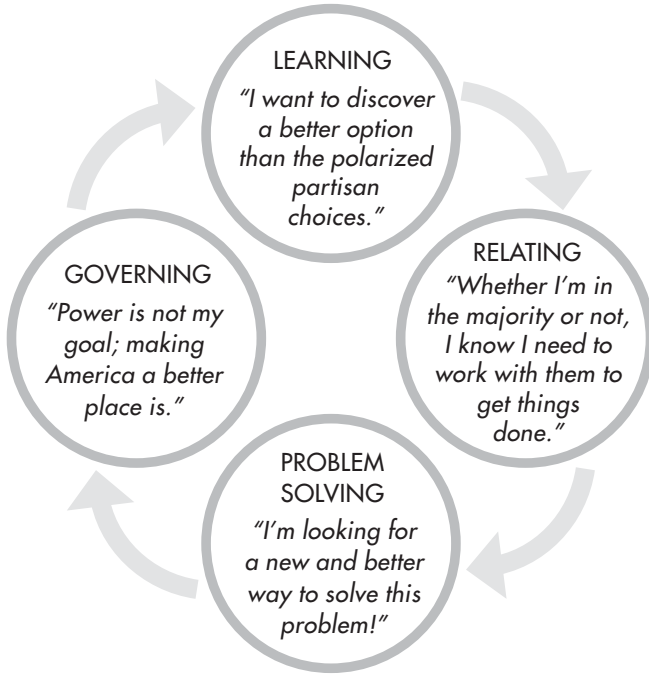
Clearly this extreme form of *pluribus* needs a counterweight. *Unum* is about oneness and the unity that comes from finding common ground. It is about connection rather than separation. It is about identifying the whole, not just one's own part. It consists of four contrasting elements:

- Rather than simply repeating our preexisting views, we commit to *learning* and actively seek out multiple viewpoints through a process of vigorous public deliberation.
- While respecting our own and each other's political preferences and the natural desire for our candidate to win, we nevertheless recognize that the *relationship* between political adversaries also matters because it builds the civic trust on which democracy depends.
- Instead of immediately staking out and defending a position, we focus on *problem solving*, which includes the kind of negotiation that leads not to some stale compromise but to genuine innovation.
- When the campaign is over, we ensure that the process of *governing* fully takes hold so that former adversaries can join together in effective public service.

Unum is just as important as *pluribus*—and today even more important, because it has been so long neglected.

When the two dynamics are integrated, democracy flourishes. We can bridge the partisan divide if we reintegrate these two powerful forces and keep conflict at a healthy temperature—not too cold (which leads to repression and fear), and not too hot (which leads to lawlessness and violence). With *pluri-*

Unum
without *Pluribus*



bus and *unum* both honored, we can strengthen our sense of unity while at the same honoring the legitimate, healthy, and vital role of conflicting points of view.

When *pluribus* and *unum* are in balance, political scientists often call it *pluralism*. It is about being different and connected. It is about being many states while remaining one nation. It is about some of us disagreeing with others. If anyone "tampers with the very secret of our sauce—pluralism, that out of many we make one," warns *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman, we are in danger.¹⁰

This is what is happening today. This is why we, the people, are taking action.

PART I

CITIZENS TAKING ACTION

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

MATHEMATICALLY, Democrats and Republicans are *not* the center of the political universe. A far larger majority of Americans are Independents and nonvoters. On the one hand, this can be seen as evidence of disengagement, dissatisfaction, and even withdrawal from politics. But on the other hand, this invisible, nonparty, nonvoter majority can be seen as a potential civic reservoir for counteracting the paralyzing, polarizing extremes. In other words, we are confronting a civic danger *and* a civic opportunity.

In part 1, each of the four chapters explores both the *danger* of out-of-control partisanship and the *opportunity* to bridge the divide (*E pluribus unum*). This civic alchemy occurs because of

the remarkable people profiled in each chapter who are meeting the crisis and seizing the opportunity. By observing and listening to them, we can learn how to deal more effectively with the partisan tensions in the world around us—and within us.

At the most intimate level, these conflicts may be inside us or within our families. At the most public level, they may appear in televised accounts of legislative meetings, election debates, or Capitol Hill showdowns. But sooner or later, all of us are bound to encounter opinions that seriously conflict and find ourselves torn between competing factions. We will be better prepared if we know the terrain. And who better to guide us than the men and women who are, step by step, day by day, reuniting America?

ONE

REINVENTING
CITIZENSHIP

*From Confirming
to Learning*



THE DANGER

Confirming what we already believe so unquestioningly that we become prisoners of our own points of view

THE OPPORTUNITY

Learning more about issues from those who differ with us so that we can expand and enrich our point of view.

SUMMARY

Reuniting America is about *learning*. We can't "know" the answer just by applying our ideology. Instead, we can learn how to harness the best ideas and practices from across the political spectrum to keep America on track. To reunite America, citizens are seeking opportunities to challenge their own assumptions, deepen their understanding, and expand their perspective on the issues that concern them. Instead of confirming what they already believe, they are learning beyond partisanship.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Mabel McKinney-Browning, John Gable, Eric Liu, Michael Ostrolenk, Roosevelt Institute Campus Network, University Network for Collaborative Governance, and the participants of the "Climate Change and Energy Security" retreat.

Thank You For Reading

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