

Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters

Roots of Democracy

Balancing Individual Interests and the Common Good

April 15, 2021

**CLOWES:** Good evening. Welcome to *Balancing Individual Interests and the Common Good*, which is the fourth and final session in our Roots of Democracy series. I'm Jody Clowes. I'm the director of the James Watrous Gallery at the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters, and it's really great to have you with us for this exploration of the cultural and philosophical roots of American democracy.

And for tonight's presentation, we're bringing together all of our expert panelists for a discussion that will weave together some of the threads we've been discussing so far. As always, I want to thank our sponsors. This wouldn't have been possible without the help of the Wisconsin Humanities, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Public Radio, the DB Reinhart Center for Ethics in Leadership at Viterbo University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and then with additional support from the Center for the Study of the American Constitution at the UW-Madison, and the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

As is our practice, I'd like to begin by recognizing that the Madison office of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation knows as Dejope, which translates to Four Lakes. And we recognize and respect the sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk nation, as well as the other 11 first nations who are caretakers and stewards of the land we call Wisconsin now.

So leading tonight's discussion will be Richard Kyte, who's the endowed Professor and Director of the DB Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership at Viterbo University in La Crosse, and he's the author of several books. And he writes a regular newspaper column, called *The Ethical Life*. So it's great to have him with us. He's here for the first time tonight.

Adrianna Brook, who received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 2014 and is currently teaching classics at the undergraduate level while pursuing a master's of education at Brock University.

John Kaminski, who founded and still directs the Center for the Study of the American Constitution in the Department of History at UW-Madison. Margaret Noodin, Professor of American Indian Studies, Associate Dean of the Humanities, and Director of the Electa Quinney Institute for American Indian Education at UW-Milwaukee.

Richard Monette, Professor of Law at UW-Madison Law School, Director of the Great Lakes Indigenous Law Center, and former chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. And Rebecca Webster, an Assistant Professor in the American Indian Studies Department at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

So Rick Kyte will be moderating our discussion tonight, and I would invite all of you, welcome, Rick, and I would invite all of our presenters to join us by video, and I'll let Rick take it from here.

**KYTE:** Well, thank you, Jody, this is just a delight to be able to conduct this conversation, in some ways a culmination of this entire series. And what we are going to do is discuss three questions that are going to take us for most of the first hour of this event. And then we'll open it up to questions from our audience.

And our first question is this. One of the enduring conflicts in our nation is between the general welfare and individual liberty. This conflict takes many forms, whether it is the construction of a new, high-voltage power line, clean water regulations, homeland security, or the current debate over vaccine passports.

So the question is, what can we learn from historical examples of democracy to help us navigate the balance among individual rights, community interests, and the common good? And, Adrianna, I would like to start with you. How do you answer that question?

**BROOK:** Sure. So I'm here to bring the ancient Athenian perspective. And I think the Athenians would probably say that they always put the collective welfare ahead of the individual interest. And one really famous example of this is the philosopher Socrates, who is an individual that was perceived to be dangerous to Athens and so was put on trial and ultimately executed.

But I don't want to give the impression that the Athenians were sort of anti-private interest because that's not always what they say about themselves. And so one interesting example we can look at is a speech by the famous statesman Pericles. And he gave this speech at the end of, or sorry, at the end of the first year of the beginning of this great war between Athens and Sparta. And in it, he's praising Athenian democracy. And this is a quote from that speech. He says, we are free and tolerant in our private lives, but in public affairs, we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.

And so in this sense, I think Pericles is saying something like, you know, do whatever you want in your own private sphere. But when that starts to impact the collective, that's when the law steps in and puts limits on what you can do as an individual. And I think that's maybe not all that different from the way we might approach this issue today.

But I also want to offer a second example to contrast that, one that maybe gets at a way that we can think about this question that maybe is not always at the forefront of our minds. Because I think that Athens also offers a caution against a sort of simplistic, you know, the collective has to supersede the interests of the individual. And I think this examples hits very close to home for us now because it involves a play.

So this is also at the beginning of that same war, and Athens had decided that its strategy, you know, to keep Athens safe in this war against Sparta was going to bring everybody inside the city walls. They thought, we've got this great Navy. We can bring in enough food for everyone. We can protect all the citizens. And they decided that they would just sacrifice all of the lands because this was the best use of their manpower and resources.

And so basically, this was putting the interests of the collective ahead of the interests of individual farmers whose lands were burned and ravaged by the Spartans. But when Athens did this, when it brought everyone inside the city, it caused a plague that ultimately killed upwards of a third of the population. And so we have this sort of failure to understand that, you know, sometimes looking at the individual interest can actually help the collective realize something, you know, in its own benefit too.

So to kind of tie all of these ideas together, I think maybe another lesson that we might draw from the Athenian example is that a sort of simplistic utilitarian approach, right, the greatest good for the greatest number is always the best answer.

What this attitude overlooks is the rights of those in the minority. And in the ancient Athenian example, we have the rights of the city dwellers superseding the rights of those of the rural population. But we can think of any number of, you know, different minority groups that might be impacted by all of the examples that you gave in your question, right, so power lines or clean water or homeland security.

And so I think what Athens' example asks us to do is sort of just acknowledge and understand and try to address the individual cost of whatever we perceive to be in the best interest of the collective. There's a tension there, and, you know, that tension is probably never going to go away. And so rather than just ignoring it, we need to lean into it and try to understand what it's saying to us. So I will stop there for now. But those are my two Athenian cents.

**KYTE:** Thank you, Adrianna. And let's turn next to Rebecca. I imagine you have a different kind of perspective on this question of balancing general welfare and individual liberty.

**WEBSTER:** Yeah. So I'm here to bring the indigenous Haudenosaunee perspective. And in a few of the other presentations, we had, I talked about how our people functioned as a confederacy prior to European contact and how that confederacy helped influence the formation of American democracy. And then in turn, a bit about how the tribal governments are permitted, or I should say, not permitted to function today. So we had quite a bit of changes in the way that we governed ourselves as a people.

And when we think of these things, general welfare and individual liberty, we think of them more in terms of rights and responsibilities with a huge emphasis on responsibilities.

So one of the things that's foundational in our people is [speaking Haudenosaunee], and that's what we call the Thanksgiving address. And we start lots of things with the [speaking Haudenosaunee], whether it be a meeting or a ceremony. And what that does is it goes through essentially all of creation, and it gives thanks and recognizes the responsibilities that everything around us has, including the people.

So we're just one tiny part of that. We're not, it's not a pyramid where we're on the top overlooking them all. It's more like a web, and everyone is connected, and we're on the edge just like everybody else.

And also, there really isn't a separation between church and state the way we think of it now because our religion, it was a way of life. And the foundation of that is to

be thankful. And that's really, that's really at the heart of it. It's to be thankful and to recognize that we have responsibilities, reciprocal responsibilities, to all of creation.

So Adrianna brought up a really good example of the plague, and that really hits home because it's something that happened. It's tangible, and you can really understand that. The tangible example I offer is the foundation and the formation of the confederacy in the first place.

So one of the things that I had talked about there is that the Peacemaker, and this is prior to European contact, of course, so the Peacemaker, during a time of war and trouble, went through the different villages and talked about how we should all lay our weapons down and that we should embrace these values of essentially peace, power, and righteousness, to talk about the love for each other and the peace of mind that we should have. And that would be the foundation of a collective government.

Well, as he was going through these villages, one of the people on the first stop had asked, well, if I lay my weapons down, what's going to happen when somebody else comes along and wants to, you know, destroy my whole community? If I put my weapons down, how do I address that?

So this is about that collective good and really taking a chance with the people that are around us, recognizing that if we do something, then they should do something in turn. And if they don't, if there's something going on where they decide to pick up those weapons anyway, then there's something else going on there, and it's really, we need to understand our relationships with each other in order to heal what's going on there.

And also, to talk about the rights of all of us in there, and Adrianna also mentioned the rights of the minority. And we also recognize that it's also, in addition, the rights of all of creation. So it's not just people that we're talking about who have rights and who should be protected. It's, you know, our four-legged relatives, our winged relatives, the waters, the, everything around us.

So but today, we're kind of operating in a system where everything has a price. We're in a colonial, capitalist economy and a government. So that will, I'll save a little bit more about that until my next question. But it's definitely a different, it's a warped version of what we are so accustomed to.

**KYTE:** Okay, thank you, Rebecca. And then we'll turn to Richard next. Could you help us wrap up this part of the conversation?

**MONETTE:** Yeah, I think I can. I spoke, I asked everybody to sort of look at an infinity sign and follow it with a couple of sticks in their hands and suggested that that was harvesting wild rice, putting half in the canoe for yourself and leaving the other half on the stalk or in the lake so that the others, the collective, would have wild rice as well and so that everybody would have it next year.

And part of that understanding is, well, we sort of get into a contest in this conversation in general, you know, sort of like who founded democracy. It sort of seems like we want to get into a contest about sometimes who's the most collective and the most responsible.

But I think we should make no mistake that the collective has always been here and is here to stay. The individual has always been here and is here to stay. The

imbalances that are created by individuals associating are here to stay. Imbalances are not good, they're bad, not bad, they're good, sorry. And, you know, the objective is simply to recognize that and to appreciate it and to find the appropriate relations and to appropriately counterbalance them. And that's how life goes on. And so that's how I would wrap that up.

**KYTE:** Could I just ask you all to reflect a little bit, because one of the themes I heard in your responses, especially from Rebecca and Richard, was this idea of gratitude, that without gratitude, it might be hard ever to come to some reconciliation of the general welfare versus individual liberty. Would you say that that's fair, that there's some, an understanding of an appreciation of our place in life, and life, in itself, is in some sense a gift for us to be at harmony with one another?

**MONETTE:** Well, I'll go first and let Becky go last. I would say very much that's the case. But everybody has to be taught and learn the same sort of ethic with each other. It's hard to suggest that you're a part of an interdependent group if it isn't, in fact, from the inside or the outside of the group. And so, yeah, we, well, now I don't mean to make a detour, and probably a difficult one, but, you know, so Becky mentioned the separation of church and state and then said we don't always see it that way. And it's because separating church and state takes one of those institutions of responsibility out of the picture of the state and society.

And so, you know, nonetheless, people believe in the same thing and yet went out and had, as hokey as it might sound, it really happened, sort of a vision quest, an individual vision quest. And so those were sort of some imbalances in the collective that sometimes rose somebody having a vision quest to the top. But they were still part of the whole always. And how that happened was with, you know, great thinking and great purpose for maintaining the whole and to maintain a counterpart individual.

**WEBSTER:** Yeah. And to, the way I think of that is very much just like what Richard just said, but also to think of the, if you flip it around back at the individual, the entitlement mentality that so many people have, and they run around talking about my rights, my rights, and I'm entitled to this. But they don't ever seem to talk about what that individual needs to do to contribute to society, and not necessarily, we're not talking about a job or how much money you make or how prestigious your career is. But if you're genuinely giving back to your community, and that doesn't necessarily need to be in the way that we're accustomed to that. It's more, where do we fit? Because we all fit, and we all have a job, and we all have responsibilities to each other.

And no one thing is more important than the other one. And we have, you know, some really great stories that go along with that to teach these lessons, to talk to our children as they grow up so that they understand their place and that they have, they're important and they're valued and they're loved and that they are, nobody is better than anybody else. And we all have, we're all in this together, you know, and that we need to make sure that what we do today, that we're leaving something even better for those whose faces are yet to come.

**BROOK:** And I can just jump in at the end here because I think Athens is very much a contrast to all of that. I think belonging to the Athenian collective comes less from a place of gratitude and more from a place of, we're Athenian, and others are not. It doesn't have this holistic sense of all of creation. It has this sense of, you know, us Greeks and them Persians, us Athenians and them Spartans. Athens got more and more closed over time. They eventually changed their marriage laws so that it was harder for aristocrats to marry their daughters to foreigners because they didn't want to dilute the sort of pool of aristocratic citizen blood.

And as we'll get to later in this panel, you know, it didn't serve Athens well. It didn't last very long. So yeah, I think that the Athenian example shows us something entirely different and not for the good.

**KYTE:** Thank you. And it also struck me when you quoted Pericles, saying that the law commands my deep respect. That respect is a powerful motivator but very different from gratitude. And that somehow, like the way in which we respond emotionally to the idea of democracy is very different, depending on which tradition we see ourselves as inheriting.

I'm going to jump now to the next question. And if you haven't read it yet, I'm talking to everybody here. If you haven't read Jane Elder's piece in the latest issue of *Wisconsin People, and Ideas*, I would recommend that you do so. And in that piece, she quotes Danielle Allen, talking about the ways in which we have failed to prepare our next generation of citizens for participation in a democracy. And she quotes Allen saying, currently, we spend \$54 per year per kid of federal dollars on STEM education and only \$.05 per year per kid on civics.

So the question is, should we put a greater emphasis on teaching civics, and how should that be done? What would a national initiative on civics education look like? And, Margaret, I want to go to you first. What are your ideas on the idea of civics education?

**NOODIN:** Thanks. So it's a very good question. I think a lot of people are asking this question right now. I think my short answer, I would connect to some of the things that we said previously, as my colleagues here on this call have referenced back to what they said as well. I talked a lot about how our language is one way to make us, help us have a model for how we might do things.

And in Anishinaabe, when we would say [speaking in Anishinaabe] is something that is a decision. It becomes our word for a treaty or a law sometimes. [Speaking in Anishinaabe] is the idea of truth. It also is used when we use, create words for legal situations or ways that we determine what might be right and what might be wrong.

And I think that what is important about that is they're verbs. They're actions. And we have to think about civics not necessarily as consisting of a set of inanimate laws or a chronology of history. It's important to know the laws. It's important to know the history and be able to recount those. But it's also really important to understand that governance is a process and that civics is something that children should learn to practice.

I think when I sort of challenged myself, knowing you might ask this question, to think, how would I do this in a classroom? I mean, I represent educators in a lot of

ways. And I often think, how do we bring some of our indigenous ways of knowing into the classroom? And repeatedly, indigenous educators will say, how can we have a relational model of success? That's where we see people thrive collectively. And yet, in our school systems, we so often set people up to think and act as if they are only individuals.

So my concrete suggestion for how we might teach civics is give that class a grade together. The grade you all earned together is the grade that everyone gets, that everyone is invested in one another's success. And you may have to set aside your views for a moment to listen to others, but you would learn how to actually be part of a process that prioritizes and respects others in a different way. It should be something that would be easy to do.

And yet, I think that it's very counter to the way we currently, you know, run most of our education system. People are tested individually. So I'd like to see people take civics classes where they are tested collectively. That would be my suggestion.

**KYTE:** Yeah, that's a really wonderful idea because when it comes to participation in a democracy, what we're interested in always is kind of whether we succeed or fail together, right? But, Richard, what are your thoughts about civics education?

**MONETTE:** Well, like I said sort of throughout this, that I think this, finding the relationships between things and balancing them has to be done purposely, has to be part of the objective. And I think it has to be part of the objective of the entire collective. And I, you know, I hope at some point, America can learn from that. You know, we've, natives, I think, have learned a lot from America, and I think we admit it. But, you know, we're told civilization was coming, and we're kind of still waiting, right? I mean, this is what we got here.

We think it's time to learn back from us. I mean, I'm a native Nowak(?), grew up in this reservation. I'm sitting here right now. And yet I come into this society, and I think of some of the greatest things facing this society in the world right now, the relationships between artificial intelligence and natural intelligence. And you can see the way I'm going to set them up as a relationship and how they might be balanced and how we might be allowing them to get imbalanced because of the imbalance you're talking about, the STEM, obviously, the artificial intelligence and the civics, forgetting about some of the natural intelligence, thinking about the relationship between those things and keeping them balanced.

Another big one is obviously the, you know, the homeland security versus individual privacy issue we're facing. And so we have governments infringing on our privacy. We have companies infringing on our privacy. They sometimes want to be in partnership with each other and share information back and forth. Sometimes they don't want to, depending on what their interests are, monetary and otherwise. What are we saying and thinking about? And what are we teaching about?

Are we showing how those things are counterbalancing each other and thinking about how they relate to each other, how far apart or close together we should have them? Are we saying, who would you rather have keeping your data and your information, a company or the government? And people will say, neither. Well, you know, as long as we keep saying neither and keep our heads in the sand, they both are

doing it, right? And this has to be taught. This has to be talked about from ground one, from just that basic sort of idea about harvesting wild rice, to something as intricate and as important as these ideas of balancing artificial and natural intelligence are becoming to our survival as a society the way we know it today.

**KYTE:** Thank you, Richard, and we'll follow up on that in a minute. Adrianna or Rebecca, do you want to jump in here? Do you have any thoughts on what you think we should be aiming for with national civics education?

**BROOK:** Well, I can't really say anything from the sort of Athenian perspective because I don't think Athens has a good answer here. You know, there was no public education in ancient Greece, and it was basically just for the rich and privileged. For myself, I think that one of the things that I've learned in doing my own work in my master's of education this year is that authentic experiences are a great way to learn things.

And so I think that a civics education that sort of has us sitting in desks in rows in a classroom would be less effective than going out and doing something. And what that something could be, I think, depends on context, and I think, you know, you could get really creative with it. But I think adding that element of doing, of participation, of embodied civics education would be a step in the right direction.

**KYTE:** Like what Margaret had suggest, that it has to be something that's an activity, not just learning a set of facts.

**BROOK:** Exactly, a verb, a verb, an action.

**KYTE:** Yeah. John, I see you've joined us.

**KAMINSKI:** Yes.

**KYTE:** And we're talking about this idea of civics education. Do you have some thoughts on what that should look like?

**KAMINSKI:** Oh, yes. I've been associated with the Center for Civics Education in California for, oh, now it's been 25, 30 years. And it's a wonderful program. It involves both middle school and high school. And it has a, well, both a, very similar to our country, it's both a republican national, that is, it has state contests and a final national contest every year. And it's based upon a curriculum that they've developed with textbooks and things of that nature. And this is done over the course of a semester that they teach in. It's astounding.

I mean, the enthusiasm that's there among the teachers and among the students is just an amazing thing. We've had a little bit of setback given the pandemic and the lack of personal contact that we've had in the past. But this is a phenomenal way of teaching, and it's just, you see the dynamics of it and how enthusiastic the students are for learning. Obviously, the learning that they get in the classroom is limited. We're looking at their long-term life experience. And this has been tracked over this last 25, 30 years to show how long-lasting their involvement is.



Now the amazing thing is that there are many students that take part in this, many teachers that take part in this, but there are more that don't take part in it. And I understand how that happens in that this is a big commitment. But there's a real sense of learning and life experiences when they are involved in something like this. And to a great extent, it needs a lot of content knowledge that many of their teachers, I think, don't have. And therefore, we're looking at professional development.

And so professional development starts at the collegiate level, getting that kind of teaching to the middle and high school teachers so that they can impart that to the students. And so this is a program that is sponsored by the Department of Education, and it was struggling for its very existence only a few years ago. But it has been re-funded now.

And so I think that that program can well be a model that others can be based upon and can develop and get the, at the base, which I think is teacher development. And the teachers need to have a greater knowledge and a willingness to participate in this kind of advanced programming for their own students.

**KYTE:** What age is that program for?

**KAMINSKI:** It has, it started out as a high school program, but they also have middle school. And they have competition for that. You don't have to compete if you don't want to compete. But they do have competition for middle and high school levels. They do have a program for elementary school as well, but I don't believe they have a competitive end-of-the-semester program for that. But the program that I'm most familiar with is at the high school level.

**KYTE:** Right, yeah. So any, I would just invite anybody that wants to follow up on that before we move on to the next question, Rebecca?

**WEBSTER:** Yeah, I did just have some thoughts on, you know, civics education in general. And if you really think about the old adage that history has told from the viewpoint of the victor, coming from that perspective, I think our entire educational system is inherently flawed because you're not going to learn about my history in your classrooms. You're only going to learn the whitewashed version of history and the whitewashed version of facts.

So I used to teach a class called Lies, Lies, something about educational, the educational system, at University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. And it was a really great class. And we used the book called *Lies My Teacher Told Me* as part of that system to talk about all of the different things that we, you know, we learn in school that are really just a warped version of what really happened.

So I think that civics education is just one of those areas of all of them that you really don't get a true perspective from that, except that one single perspective. So yeah, so it was so troubling to our family that we pulled our children out of school, and we homeschool them so that they do have an opportunity to learn our history, our civics, right alongside with the civics that, you know, they're expected to know by being American citizens.

**KYTE:** Well, let me ask, because that brings up a question that I've heard that really challenges this very idea of us reinvesting in kind of a national civics education that any kind of robust, both history and depiction of what government is and how it's supposed to operate impinges so much on different people's identities that there's no way of reaching any consensus. And so that one of the reasons we don't have a robust civics education anymore is because we can't agree on what is to be taught. And I would just be interested in your thoughts on that.

**WEBSTER:** Well, start somewhere. Don't just keep regurgitating the same stuff you've been regurgitating since the early 1900s. Literally, the things that are in the textbooks are so warped that it doesn't even reflect even that. It really needs a lot of reform. So and of course with, you know, what, 573 federally recognized tribes, you're not going to get every tribe's representation in there either.

And then you throw in all of the different ethnicities that, of the people that now make America home, we all come with different perspectives. We all come with different histories and different stories. It just kind of would be nice to have some other representation, other than just, you know, the white European colonizer version.

**KAMINSKI:** I think one of the important things is to go back to the documents. My entire career has been spent in looking at documents and saving documents. I, our center looks at primarily the ratification of the Constitution. So it's a very short time period, only four years really, looking at the Constitution itself and the Bill of Rights.

But we've collected copies of over 70,000 documents from all around the world, really, primarily in the United States and historical societies, libraries, newspapers . . . pamphlets, everything you can think of. We have copies of, I say, over 70,000 documents. And we publish those in various forms. That material is there to look at.

And obviously, it's from the people who wrote the documents, whoever they happen to be, whether they be statesmen like Washington and Adams and Madison, or whether they be a farmer in the back country, whether they be male or female. Obviously, we have more males because they participated more in the struggle. But we do have articles written and pamphlets written by women at the time and see how their involvement is.

There's very little on Native Americans. We don't have much. They weren't involved in this debate at that time. And so you could certainly argue that the documents are flawed, but that's all that we have is those documents. And we have to take them together. They're different points of view that the documents recommend. And we've put them together in a logical fashion, hoping that people can draw their own conclusions today from that documentary heritage.

**MONETTE:** I guess documents are important. But when you have a tradition of oral history that is every bit as informative and apparently increasingly proving itself to be more right than all the documents, you know, we've got some difficult conversation that, I mean, I'm leaving documents behind. My goodness, I hope they don't find them 2,000 years ago and believe, 2,000 years from now and believe them.

You know, this conversation is, they can quickly become one of those, oh, come on, moments. Everybody wants to, you know, own the roots and seeds of democracy, the Egyptian pharaohs, the ancient Israelites, right, the Greeks and Goths and everybody.

But certainly, we have to, one of the ways we have to be able to start in this country is that the newcomers who came here likely shared ideas with the people, not 2,000 years ago, but the people whose eyes they were looking in at the time and spending significant amounts of time, and not just bringing ideas from Europe but seeing those ideas here. I mean, they got here. They stumbled upon fields filled with corn and squash and beans. They found clothes made of cotton and shoes made of leather. You know, we don't learn this stuff. Commerce driven by salt and copper and you name it, we don't learn this anywhere.

They found libraries, and we see a remark by some diarist of Pizarro or Cortez, you know, libraries every bit as great as the libraries in Alexandria. And your kids are not taught that stuff. And it's just this big, you know, sort of vacuum in their heads about the founding of this country. They found some of the largest cities in the world. And they, some of the most complex ones, including one just six hours south of Madison, that when I ask kids in Wisconsin if they even have ever heard of it, they haven't. And why is that we don't even want to teach them about that and go there and look at how mathematically correct their pyramids were and their sun dials, all of which is still there in part?

And you all probably have never been there. I don't know. I don't, but maybe, how many, who's been to Cahokia and gone and actually looked and tried to understand? It's six hours away. You don't tell your kids anything about it, right?

And so I think part of that's what Becky is talking about. I mean, the king here, they found cuisine. They found philosophy. They found art. They found science. They found government. They found culture here. And that culture is in the dirt by some of our ancestors' umbilical cords buried there, by their skeletons buried there. They took a life, they gave a life. When you take something, you leave something, whether or not you do it on purpose. You leave some tobacco behind at least as a matter of symbolism. Understand your relationship with the land you're in. That didn't come from Europe. I'm sorry, it just didn't. I don't see it.

The king was the sole proprietor. The king was the king. The king was the court. The king was ruled by divine right. You know, the king was everything. That's not what we've had here. And what we had here worked and worked so well that when the Europeans, all these smart folks got here, they couldn't see governments right under their noses because it was so finely attuned with the nature and their relatives around them. They couldn't see private property right under their noses. They all wrote, well, these people don't believe in private property. Yeah, we believe in private property, right? You just couldn't see it because it was so finely attuned with each other, right?

And that needs to be taught to your people. This needs to be taught to American children before it's too late. We've had a good deal of learning what everybody else wanted to teach. It's time for everybody else to learn a little bit. And it can be taught. Sorry.

**KYTE:** Richard, I want to jump on to the next one, but I want to, one of the things that makes our history so interesting is when we really look at the conflict and, in some ways, the disagreements that our understanding of that history still generates. And we might have disagreement about it, but certainly nobody falls asleep when you're having a good argument.

And so like these are things that I think are worth sharing in part of civics education, that if we're going to bring many people together into one, we have to understand some of the conflicts that gave rise to here we are today.

**MONETTE:** But we've got to want to be fair about it, including with ourselves. I learned from tribal elders that America's greatest genius, and then they balance, so and America's greatest folly is perhaps the greatest separations of powers of all. They've brought this republican representative form of government that separated the peoples from their own government, something to be extremely proud of and something to be just a little bit ashamed of, right?

And so this is what we deal with here now. And we think that's out of balance a bit. We think we can teach people how to think that through. But people got to want to, they got to want to hear that, right? I mean, you know, I mean, this is good, but . . .

**KYTE:** Well, let's jump to this question of being out of balance because that's what my next question is about.

**MONETTE:** Yeah, and I'm not going to answer that . . .

**KYTE:** Okay. Well, I mean, we planned this discussion almost a year ago we talked about doing this. And of course, it evolved. It took some different forms. But then in the meantime, after we have this all planned out, we get January 6th and the events at our nation's capitol. And that, of course, is on everybody's mind when we start talking about the roots of democracy.

And the event of January 6th also took place after a long period of increasing cynicism about democratic institutions. And of course, you'll all seen the polls on the declining trust in American institutions, also in the court system and in elected officials. And so what I would like to ask you next is do you think that democratic form of government is inherently fragile, and if so, what can we do about it? And, Rebecca, I'd like to turn to you first.

**WEBSTER:** Sure. So I'm just reflecting back on those events of January 6th, and they really shook me to the core. They shook our whole family. We pulled the kids out of school that day and brought them up into the living room, and we sat around, and we watched, and we discussed. And we had opportunities to say, what's happening here in our government? What is, what is this that's going on?

And as shook as we were, we weren't surprised because if this had been a Black Lives Matter protest or a Water Protector protest, there would have been a whole lot more action on the part of the police. And we've seen that time and time and time again. And I really don't want to turn this into a race-baiting issue, but we have to

recognize what's happening here on its plain face, how the police and how the government are responding to these different types of groups of people.

And so we see that their government says it represents everybody, but I think it clearly doesn't. And we may think that one party is more empathetic and helpful to minorities and the environment. But really, at the root of all of this, in my opinion, I think is money. Money is clearly more important than the people and then the environment because, like I was talking about earlier with that first question, that I think we're in a colonial capitalist economy and government. And I would argue, we're not even in a true democracy because politics are driven by money. Companies can literally purchase candidates. And those candidates stay in the pockets of the big business.

So when the interest of those companies coming into conflict with the interest that those individuals campaigned on, the interests of the big companies often wins out. The people and the environment end up losing time and time and time again.

So I would say we're not, we're not in a democracy right now. So we're driven in something that's, you know, this colonial capitalist government. And with recognizing that, I would say that democracy at its core is not inherently fragile because if we, as a people, recognize our individual responsibilities to each other and to all of creation, and we acted on that, and we did so in a responsible way, recognizing that our actions today have impacts on the next seven generations to come, they impact those faces that are still in the earth, that are not yet born, then we would be at a position where we would have a strong government. We'd have a strong community, and we'd have a strong base.

So I think one of the things that we can do to address that is one of the most obvious choices would be campaign finance reform where money can no longer purchase our government.

**KYTE:** Thanks, Rebecca. And, John, I'd like to turn to you next. What do you think of this question about the fragility of democracy?

**KAMINSKI:** I don't think there's any doubt that democracy is a fragile . . . and the founding generation certainly believed that and were pretty much opposed to democracy as a noun. What they favored was a democratic form of government. So certainly, they believed that the interests of the people should be recognized. But they had a real fear of the people if there was too much democracy. And in fact, that was Elbridge Gerry, who was a more traditional, old-world thinker in the sense of fear of government. He, in the Constitutional Convention, used the phrase, the excesses of democracy. That's what we have to watch out for. And I think that is certainly there.

And I believe that some of the democratic institutions that we have incorporated into our system have come along with some hard times here. And we have to rethink some of these institutions that we have in our government. For instance, the Electoral College, now we can look at the reasons for that, whether those are still applicable today, with the modern technology today that we have and how we can count the votes and that we're having such trouble here about voting, who gets the right to vote and what the restrictions are. Well, those are things that we have to work out if we're going to have a democratic form of government.

When we look at the primary system, I used to be asked almost at every presidential election, afterwards, do I favor to oppose the Electoral College. Well, my response almost always has been that my real fear in our system is the primary system, which the, which Wisconsin was very instrumental in establishing. But what we see now is that the primary system has given rise to the extreme elements in both parties. And if you're not part of that group, you're not going to be nominated for an office. And that then guarantees that we have extremes being represented in the government, which means lack of compromise and lack of progress.

And so I think that there's something to be said for revising our primary system. Now exactly how that's done, I don't know, but I see that that is a real problem that we have. And in the guise of democracy, we're getting extremism here. And all this comes back to, I think, the primary point of view, which is that human nature is flawed, and we have to realize that. And there's no doubt that the founders believed that a virtue was extremely important in having a democratic government be successful, having a republican form of government successful. And so that's a difficult issue to resolve.

How do you extract virtue and make it work for individuals and then incorporate that into our processes of government, the Electoral College being one and the primary system be another. And so I think these are elements that we have to try to address and determine, how are we going to revise these systems of our government to work in our era that we have today, where the voice of the people can be heard? And it's just a question of how do we extract from that what is the good of the whole.

**KYTE:** And when you say virtue is a part of it, is this something that is, say, a natural, national responsibility then to teach the kind of virtue that will lend itself to the sustainability of democratic institutions? Or is that something that's more the responsibility of families or communities?

**KAMINSKI:** I'd say both.

**KYTE:** Okay, thank you. Adrianna, I want to turn to you next. Did the ancient Greeks think that democracy was fragile, or did they, and did they fear, as John mentioned that the founders did, did they ever fear too much democracy?

**BROOK:** Absolutely. I think Athens is sort of a classic example of the fragility of democracy because in the course of a century, they built up this radical democracy. They became an incredibly strong military power, and they built an extensive empire. And by the end of the century, they had had an oligarchic coup. They'd lost the war, and they'd lost the empire. And a lot of the sort of famous voices that survived, and Plato stands out here, you know, point fingers at the fickle mob.

You don't want a democracy because the people will make stupid decisions, and they'll get swayed by persuasive rhetoric. What you want is a benign dictator, and that really is going to lead to the best outcome. You want a philosopher king.

But I think maybe what Athens' example shows better is not that democracy is inherently fragile or more or less fragile than any other form of government. But I think what it shows us is that what's uniquely fragile about democracy is that the weak spot is the citizens. And this ties into what both John and Rebecca were saying about virtue,

about individual responsibility, that if the citizens aren't playing their role, then the democracy falls apart.

And so if we think back to that moment in the plague that I was talking about earlier, a lot of people sort of point to that as a sort of beginning of the end moment for Athens because, among many others, Pericles, this great statesman who had led Athens for decades, he died. And really, none of the demagogues that stepped in to try to fill that power vacuum were ever able to fill his shoes. And so this is sometimes represented as a sort of crisis of leadership, right? Athens didn't have the right people at the helm of the ship of state.

But I don't think it was a failure of leadership. I think it was a crisis of faith in democracy itself. And there was this great piece in *The Atlantic* last year in March, just as the pandemic was coming out, by Katherine Kelaidis, called *What the Great Plague of Athens Can Teach Us Now*. And in it, she talks about how the plague was what really, you know, eroded the Athenians faith in their own democratic system. And quoting from her article, she says, self-government requires self-confidence. A democracy is unlikely to survive, and the people have grown unsure of themselves and their leaders, laws, and institutions.

And so the second part of your question, right, if democracy is fragile, what can we do about it, I think the Athenian example suggests that at the very moment when we start to doubt democracy, we have to double down on our faith in democracy. And of course, things are a lot more complicated now than they were back then. We have . . . capitalism, and we have big money in politics. We have foreign hackers swaying elections, right? The sort of direct relationship between individual voter and making decisions collectively, that just doesn't exist in the same way that it did. We have elected representatives. We have intermediaries now.

But I think fundamentally, the Athenian example reminds us that we, the citizens, right, are the last defense against all of those threats. And it's only when we lose faith that we can actually do something about it. And that's when the fragility of democracy really shows itself.

**KYTE:** So do you think that this response, if we, say, double down on this idea of democracy and express a greater confidence in it and, in some ways, invest our lives in it, does that help us to address some of these things that Rebecca and John said can be corrosive of democracy, like the influence of money and, say, a primary system that polarizes us?

**BROOK:** Well, I think if we believe that those structures are immutable, then, yeah, we're in trouble. But if we believe that reform is possible, if we could believe that we can, you know, get big money out of campaigns, if we believe that we can revise the primary system, and that what makes that happen is citizenship, right, sort of lobbying for change and voting strategically to try to accomplish these things. And it's not simple. But if we don't believe that it's possible, then that's the beginning of the end.

**KYTE:** Rebecca, I have a feeling that you were suggesting that, until we get money out of politics, we can't get the kind of confidence we need in democracy in order to restore it. Is that what you would say in response, Adrianna? Or would you agree with her that

if we, that our own confidence in the form of government can be a way that we reduce the influence of money?

**WEBSTER:** No, I don't think people are going to do that based on their confidence alone. I think you really need to get money out because the way, our representatives aren't even representing the people. And I've been watching some of the comments come through in the Q&A in talking about the money and the politics and who's winning and based on who's spending more money. It's still not that. The point is that we have these big companies purchasing candidates. And the candidates are no longer representing the will of the people or the environment. They are representing the interests of the companies.

**KYTE:** Okay. I'm going to turn this over to our audience. We've got a lot of questions that have been coming in. And I think, John Greenler, you were, you've been looking at those audience questions. Do you want to go ahead and share one or two with us?

**GREENLER:** Yeah, thank you. I've been, yes, this has been a great conversation. I've been trying to track both the conversation and the comments that are coming through in the Q&A. And most importantly, we still have a lot of time, so if you do have a question, I would really encourage you to, you know, to put it in that Q&A box. Let me just read this one comment because I thought it was an interesting observation.

As one who supervises social studies teachers, I have observed teachers at all levels using culturally responsive curricula and teaching. For example, I know a high school teacher in Fort Atkinson who presents the compact among the five nations as a model of the U.S. Constitution. For another example, I know the teachers in fourth grade in Sheboygan have integrated the works of Anishinaabe leaders. So I think it's just, you know, great to hear that there are some examples out there.

Coming back to a question, it's very serendipitous that I should be listening to this conversation today as earlier in the day, former Governor Scott Walker was on public radio bemoaning, quote, unquote, cancel culture and the lack of conversation about different ideas. But the ultimate conclusion he wants people to develop is one where people align with him. Unfortunately, the, quote, unquote, other side wants Walker to align with them. And so to what strategy should we turn when we become deadlocked?

**KYTE:** And, Margaret, we haven't heard from you for a while. So I'm just going to single you out.

**NOODIN:** That's all right.

**KYTE:** When we do seem to be deadlocked on so many things right now in our society, what recommendation do you make for ways of addressing that?

**NOODIN:** Yeah. I mean, I think even this conversation is one where we can see that we have a large audience of listeners, and there are views on both sides. There are a lot of ways to look at everything. And I guess I would go back to that notion that, as other folks have brought up, we have systems in this nation, and some of them were



really based on the encounters that were originally taking place when people came here and realized that they were entering into the economies that existed here, that there were ideas of civility and civil behavior that existed amongst the folks.

I mean, our story, as it is often told in schools of Thanksgiving, is one of civil behavior, one group of people helping another group of people. I think that that story always bears further investigation and should be told from the viewpoint of the nation, the specific nation that actually lived that history in the 1600s. But this was a story that happened over and over all throughout the time of nation building. There were people who went into a territory, the state of Wisconsin is no exception to that really.

It's a good example of people in this space coming here and finding that they had to work together, whether they were settlers or whether they were people who were indigenous, you know, holders of tracts of maples, wild rice, things that represented complex economies. And they had systems for how they would deal with those. So I think it also circles back to the idea of civics, right?

So education and knowing your own systems that you have set up, whether it is, you know, a system of having elders who will advise when things are deadlocked or whether it is a system of setting up protocols for how everyone listens to one another, how they make decisions.

In 2017, in Wisconsin, it was determined that everyone should, before they graduate from high school, take a civics test. And that civics test is the same test that people take to become citizens of the United States. And some of the questions on that exam are, what are the longest rivers in the United States? I think that's great to know. But there are also things like, who is your representative? And I think those are the things that we would find a lot of high schoolers not really knowing what to do with that information or how to act on it or how to negotiate things.

So I would say that, if you ask what to do when we're deadlocked, we need to have systems that have ways of negotiating, that have, you know, recognition of all the different cultures across the globe that have had ways of doing this, and then depend on them. Use them in ways to give people equal time to be heard.

And I think that for us, my initial comments about civics instruction was imagining that we start this much, much earlier. To give a high school senior a civics exam before they graduate, it might make them more likely to vote when they turn of voting age, but it might not if it was brought up at the tail end of their public education, and that's, you know, all that was said about it.

So I appreciate some of the comments where we have good teachers doing education that is inclusive, you know. But I know, I also appreciate, you know, what Rebecca said about her own kids having to face a lot of misunderstanding. I know that happened with my kids as well. You would often have your kids go and hear a different system than what they grew up learning.

So to solve deadlock, I would say it has to be sustained, a long time support of systems that provide equality. I mean, I guess I didn't say much before, but I had a bunch to say now. I guess the only one other thing I would add here is when Rebecca was talking about money being a problem, and I think even money, it's the growth model. It's the wanting more. It's the model that we require an increase. I mean, think of it, anything in the observable world, if it continues to expand, you have a problem,

right? So it goes back to the idea of balance and respect and responsibility. So you called on me, and that would be my thoughts.

**KYTE:** Thank you. And I know we've got a lot more questions coming in, so, John, I'm just going to turn right back to you and say, do you have another one for us?

**GREENLER:** You bet, yeah. This is great. I really appreciate folks sending in their questions, and please continue to do so. Yeah, and I'm actually kind of looking through them. I'm not going through in order, just trying to pick ones that are really going to be best for our conversation here.

Another one that popped out for me is, back to, quote, common or public good, as Americans, should we value this belief more in the past, and if so, what happened? In other words, what eroded this value, and when did it happen and why? Thank you. And what can we learn to get it back?

**KYTE:** Any thoughts on that?

**WEBSTER:** Yeah. I was thinking maybe it's not something new, but it's something that we're talking about now. So I really want to just echo what Margaret was saying, is equal time to be heard, right? It wasn't that long ago that people of color were excluded from these conversations.

Within some of the folks that are on this call, within your lifetimes, people of color were excluded. So I think that, you know, we're here. We're going to take up all the space we can. We're going to tell our story. We're going to tell it from our perspective. And hopefully, by having some of that balance in perspectives, that hopefully we'll eventually get to a point where that's recognized, and it, you know, shakes up the system a little bit, as it should, because we've long, too long we've been comfortable with the way things have been going. And I think that people are responding.

**KAMINSKI:** Well, one of the problems with that, however, is we see what's on the media now, and government seems to be incapable of stopping some really weird ideas that get there. And these ideas, Kellyanne Conway called them alternative facts. This seems to be an acceptable norm nowadays that there is no facts that we can follow. There are alternative facts as well.

And in the culture that we have, which is filled with conspiracies and those willing and eager to latch onto conspiracies and a government that is fearful of doing anything to limit the, I don't want to say advertisement, but limit the furtherance of these conspiracies for fear of being labeled as anti-democratic. This is a unfortunate world that we're in, and it seems as if it just gets worse and worse.

I think that it is a problem that faces us that needs some direction from the top. It's easy to look at the bottom all the time, but we need some direction from the top as well to see how a balanced approach to the facts and the stories can be told that we might accept. But we seem to have left that behind. And I don't know how we really get back to that even keel that is so beneficial for a society.

We're at a point where there are fractional elements in our society all over that are saying that there is no one common good. There are those who advocate a

common good are advocating their point of view, and it's not the correct point of view. And so this is the world that we're living in right now where conspiracy is just rampant. And I don't know how we solve that problem.

**MONETTE:** So the word democracy seems to connote at least some measure of equality. And I personally don't think you can have equality in the public sphere unless you have some equality in the private sphere. And that common, in the old common good used to be a pretty small common. And like Becky said, it's gotten to be bigger. But I don't think that we've addressed the inequalities and the reasons for them.

And certainly a capitalist society is going to have inequalities. I mean, if capital is going to accumulate somewhere, it has to de-accumulate somewhere else. But that's not really the kind of structural inequality I think she's talking about, and certainly not the kind that I'm talking about. And I think for America to get back to an understanding of the common good and civic responsibility, I think we have to understand its history.

And nothing was more ironic to me than to start reading these stories about people from January 6th. And one of those stories were now, oh, they went back and found them at their home in Wyoming or Georgia or Maine, and they were all back on their farm. Not everybody has got a farm, right?

But I've driven across North Dakota and Utah and California and Oregon and Georgia and Virginia, and you name it, and highways and byways and gravel roads and side roads. And you know what? You can turn left and look, and you can turn right and look. And you know who owns the land? A white man does. Ninety eight-plus percent of this private property in this country is a white man.

And I'm here as, in a reservation in North Dakota surrounded by people who think that they are victims and don't realize how entitled and lucky they've been as they sit out in Williston, North Dakota, you know, just sit, not paying their property taxes because they think that's demon government imposing on them.

And all of a sudden, they discover oil, and they're a millionaire, and we're supposed to think that they won the race somehow, land that they got for free from my grandparents, or taken from my grandparents. And that all has to be addressed somehow, I think, before we start to rethink the common good in America. There's just a whole lot of balancing and rebalancing that needs to be done at a lot of levels.

**KYTE:** I think we have time for one more question, John.

**GREENLER:** Sure. Yeah, this, I think, is a forward-looking question. So do you have recommendations for organizations working toward changing the Electoral College system, the primary system, gerrymandering, etc.? How do we move forward, is kind of the more general question that I see coming through here.

**KAMINSKI:** The traditional way of handling this would be to have a constitutional convention. We've only had one, really, in our history, and that one threw out the old Constitution and created something brand new. That one violated its instructions and took on its own reason for being and did not attempt to revise the problems of the old and just correct those. But it threw out that old government.

And so there is this big fear that if a constitutional convention is called, how do you limit a constitutional convention? The very nature of a constitutional convention is that it is a constituent body of the people. And if you believe in this concept of democracy, the people can do anything. And therefore, you cannot limit what a constitutional convention would do.

And so that's one of the problems facing calling a constitutional convention. Can it be limited to correcting the problems that are perceived before that convention is called? If you get over that, and if you trust this constitutional convention, that they would do a good job in solving some of the problems that we have, then that might be the best way to go.

I don't see any kind of corrective effort being made in Congress. Congress can do very, very little today. It's blocked at coming up with any significant change in how government acts. And so I think constitutional convention is the best way, but it's not necessarily a safe way. And I don't know that we can trust the delegates that we would send to the constitutional convention to come up with a good solution to the problem that we're, the problems that we're facing today.

**KYTE:** Anybody else on that one before we wrap up?

**MONETTE:** Well, the constitutional convention in 1780s was held when the center of America's population was roughly Frederick, Maryland. And so the Native Americans came out with . . . dimension. If there were a constitutional convention today, the center of population is not Frederick, Maryland, and the population has shifted dramatically, and the whole balance has shifted dramatically.

And frankly, Native Americans I don't think would be quite certain at all how they would emerge if this country had a constitutional convention. And at least some people, I think, that's part of the design.

Let me say one last thing, and then I promise I won't say anything else. Yes, we need civics. You know, I tell natives, sovereignty is not something you have, it's something you do. Democracy is not something you have, it's something you do. It's not fragile, but it's not infragile. In some ways, everything is fragile. But everything is related, and everything is alive. And those relations are fragile. And this requires a work.

But, you know, Wisconsin can be proud of one of its best thinkers, who would, or attribute his thinking to Native American, but he sounded a lot more like one than most of the writings I've seen from Europe, and that's Aldo Leopold. Here's what Aldo had to say. All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise, that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to cooperate. And that's what we need to teach and learn.

**KYTE:** Adrianna, a final word from you?

**BROOK:** Yeah. So I've been fairly quiet in this conversation because as a Canadian, in a lot of ways, I feel a bit out of my depth in this conversation. We have a lot of the

same things going on on this side of the border. But, of course, it's all, you know, it's all got its own particulars.

But I guess thinking about that question of like where do we go from here, I guess I don't have the answer. But maybe the question that I'm leaving with is, what are the ways that we can get input from the people that are not our current ways of getting input from the people? We have voting. We have the Constitutional Convention. We have elected representatives. We have social media. We have, you know, big media. And that's not, in a lot of ways, the ways that the citizens have of weighing in are distorting that picture.

And so I guess what I'm wondering is what are the other ways to get people to contribute, right, to get the individuals to come together as a collective voice, not that that would be simple or fast. But it seems that the ways that we have of giving input as citizens aren't working. And so how else do we tap into that strength of the democracy, which is the people themselves?

**KYTE:** Rebecca and Margaret, could I ask you each just about 10, 15 seconds, just a final thought?

**WEBSTER:** I don't have a whole lot else to say than what we've already covered. So I think this has been a really good conversation. And I'm, you know, just want to emphasize the importance of relationships and what we can contribute and help out with other people instead of turning it around and a little bit more egocentric and thinking about what our rights are. So I think that it's something that we all need to work on. And if we could do that, we would be in a whole lot better place than we are right now.

**NOODIN:** I would just agree with all of what everyone has said. And I think the emphasis on engagement is really critical when we talk about democracy. I think everybody brought it up, each in their own way, that this is action. This is responsibility. This is something where we have to actually connect with others. And the problem is that recently, we've seen more people disconnecting with others, or connecting with only those like them. So anything we can do to, you know, rebuild a network would be rebuilding our democracy, I think.

**KYTE:** Yeah. I, you know, this is, I think for so many people this year, it's been such an interesting year because we're going through something collectively that our nation hasn't been through together, a collective disruption of this sort, for a very, very long time, probably since World War II.

And usually, like at any other time that brings us closer together, and yet we see more disunity, more polarization, and more conflict than we've ever seen. And that causes a real crisis. We're saying, well, if we can't come together in a country in a time like this, when can we?

Last year, around this time, when we were, you know, we had all been planning to do this event, and then we were canceling things, part of the, one of my responsibilities as part of this whole initiative on Roots of Democracy was going to be

hosting a conference in the fall on civic virtue. And I was busy calling up people and telling them that we were canceling the event.

And I remember that afternoon, after doing some of those things, I was looking around my office here, and I found a shoe box. And I was just going to spend the day putting stuff in my office in order. I opened the shoe box, and I found it had a whole bunch of photographs and old letters and things that my mother had put in there and given to me. And it had been sitting in my office for a couple of years.

And I was going through it, and I found an obituary of my great grandfather, who died the year before I was born. And I read through this little, it was just a little, tiny newspaper obituary, and it mentioned in there that he was a long-time columnist for a newspaper in North Dakota. And he had lived in Melville, North Dakota, a town that no longer exists. There's still a road sign there, but there's only one house. I don't think you can call that a town.

And I tried to find it online, and I couldn't. And the archives in North Dakota, the state archives, were closed. But later in the summer, they opened. And so I ended up making two trips to Bismarck, North Dakota, looked through the North Dakota state archives. And what I found were 20 years of weekly columns that were, in a way, documenting his life but also the life of this small town, Melville, North Dakota, through the Dust Bowl, through a prairie fire that destroyed half the town, in which the town never recovered from, through the Great Depression, and through the onset of World War II.

And it was a town that the whole time was dying. And yet, it was a documentation of the people who lived in that town and their commitment to one another and their belief in one another. So that here, after all these terrible events that have taken place, they're working together and raising money to build a new town hall because they believed in their community.

And it occurred to me that in some ways, maybe we need to change our expectations of what accounts to be successful in a democracy, that there's something rewarding about the act of participation itself, whether or not we get the rewards we seek. And there's something noble in a life that really invests itself in a community and believes in the idea of sacrifice for others and for the common good.

And it just seemed to me throughout this next year that that's a way of looking at a life. It's a way of looking at what we think of America as being, as being a country in which there's still possibilities to commit to one another.

And then I was really cheered this past week when I read survey of this latest generation, the generation is at their teen years. And their number-one desire, of all the things that they could hope for in the world, their number-one desire is a desire for belonging. And I think that's a good sign if we have a country that is built by another generation that says, what we really want is a place to belong.

So, Jane, I am going to turn it over to you to wrap this up. Jane is Executive Director of the Wisconsin Director of the Wisconsin Academy, and I want to thank you so much for bringing us all together for this important series of reflections on the roots of democracy.

**ELDER:** Okay, wow, thank you so much. I'm a little overwhelmed at your wrap-up remarks there, Richard. And I'm looking at all the faces of people who have been with

us throughout this effort. I just want to thank all of our presenters and our speakers but everybody who's been participating around the country. And we know we have folks in other continents who have joined us in this very important conversation. And with each one of these events, the group has gotten larger and larger.

And everybody who's participating tonight is part of a conversation with hundreds of people who care about this topic, who are eager to learn, who are eager to find the way forward. So I just want to thank you all for being part of this. So thank you for joining us as we explore some of the threads of history and culture that have helped us form and frame many of the guiding values and principles in the American democracy.

We hope that you take ideas from these discussions into your conversations with others about the state of the American democratic experiment and what we aspire for it to be in the decades to come as the United States approaches its 250th year as a nation in 2026.

I hope we've raised many questions for you about rights, responsibilities, participation, and decision making, and balance, and much more, that you will consider as an active participant, an architect in building our democratic systems.

We welcome your ideas about ways to further explore this topic, so please respond to our post-event surveys or drop us a line, an email. Obviously, with these four sessions, we've just scratched the surface of a really powerful topic that we're thrilled to be part of and can't wait to see where some of these conversations go. And again, my personal gratitude to the panelists who shared their knowledge and wisdom with us in these discussions, your generosity of spirit, your frankness, your tolerance, your openness on a wide-ranging set of topics.

It's been just a privilege to work with all of you, and I hope this isn't a conclusion of our working together. So thank you all again for being part of this conversation. I grew up in a family that had the phrase that democracy was not a spectator sport. And all of you joining us here today tell me your part of the leaning into this conversation and doing the work that it takes to help us build community, share and understand our complicated history and what it means for our lives and our relationships with each other and the environment, and what it means for the future.

So extraordinary privilege for us at the Academy to be able to bring these conversations to you. And again, deep appreciation for everybody who's taken time out of your very busy lives in this very strange and complicated year that we've been through to make room for this conversation. We very much look forward to hearing from all of you again, and thank you again for joining us. Thanks.