From Stereotypes to Metaphors

We are each a unique synthesis of the endless differences of the many and of a shared humanity. Lilliana Mason, political scientist at the SNF Agora Institute in John Hopkins University, observes that the traditional "stacking of identities on top of one another into what she calls a mega-identity has reinforced our basic human instinct for inclusion and exclusion, and that helps explain the tribal politics we see today."[1] An intersegmental or feminine model of power-sharing that builds solidarity across horizontal relationships more so than climbs vertical rungs of identities, on top of one another, is promising. It parallels the intersegmental strategy used in the #Me Too Movement when victims of sexual harassment and abuse across many segments of society demanded their charges against abusive power be regarded as credible and the individuals who abused power be held accountable. It also parallels the arguments Rev. Barber makes about bringing together "low-wealth people of every race, creed, color, and sexuality" to combat poverty. High school students as well as the elderly, bystanders, and family members of formerly slain victims of gun violence join in braving a cold and steely indifference to protest mass shootings. It further parallels interfaith movements across the nation that seek to respond to today's complex needs by embracing what speaks to the best *across* people's different beliefs in order to work cooperatively in service of a shared humanity and our common home. Given that today both traditional and social media whip up frenzies about crises about to happen–even before they actually do happen!–the sea of public opinion often rages before all data becomes available. If we want a level playing field that treats individuals fairly, it would seem each person must become more responsible for his/her own mental habits, responsible for remaining more open and fair-minded, treating others the way we ourselves want to be treated. I am politically unaffiliated because given the extremes in both parties, voting as an independent is the only way that makes sense to me. Robert F. Kennedy was someone I very much respected. He was strong to the point of being unafraid to speak of our nation's weaknesses. John McCain was also my idea of a good senator.

His experience as a prisoner of war gave him a perspective few others have, and he used that difference to think independently. The experience helped in some way to form his ability to distinguish what was worthwhile and gave him the courage to stand up for his values rather than cave in to the pressures of groups or of money. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Liz Cheney are other strong advocates for the American people. But after a year in which fewer than a handful of Republicans spoke out against violence and allowed the nation's social fabric to be shredded because speaking out would have required them to care more about truth, the party's credibility seems bankrupt. As Max Boot remarked, "A lot of Republicans have failed the character test, endangering people's lives to score political points."[2] That, despite 61 court cases, most with Republican judges, who found insufficient evidence in their favor. There is little interest in going back to the "values" of a party that a majority of its members themselves–when put to the test– failed to uphold. They should not be demonized, but there is the matter of character, of what we stand or do not stand for. In their zeal to rally every diverse element into their party, and as we see from extremes between progressives and moderates, Democrats have become stereotyped by dominant identities such as race, gender, diversity, or a minority status whose political interests sometimes overshadow our shared interests for the country. Extreme positions are sometimes needed, and college students favored Bernie Sanders, as do I, because they find him authentic. But more so than any labels and stereotyped groups, recognition is needed of independent thinking at the intersections of multiple and varied categories that acknowledge differences while also respecting a common and shared American society. However, even if we adopt ways to redistribute power-sharing more fairly, or create a more even playing field, the problem remains less one of identity politics, of race, or of gender, than that of power, less one of whiteness or even a male patriarchy than that of stereotyping and/or holding power over others. And even those who might want a fully egalitarian and diverse society need to be realistic about achieving utopia so that such movements do not themselves become oppressive. Common humanity seems a more elemental identity than identity politics, but the greater good of that common identity is often determined by those with the power to define a particular version of utopia. Writer David Brooks accounts for the intolerance in the thinking of politicians from both the right and left, seeking more power: "Orthodoxy is…enforced by social pressure, nowhere more intensely than on Twitter, where [there is] the specter of being shamed or 'canceled.'[3]

On the other hand, "most progressives assent without difficulty to the stifling consensus of the moment and the intolerance it breeds—not out of fear, but because they want to be counted on the side of justice."[4] Speaking on behalf of ordinary workers, President Biden made efforts to reintroduce compromise, an economy driven by the middle of the political spectrum, and for appointing and then working with a cabinet that does indeed look more like the rest of the country. He placed more African-American female judges on appellate courts (11) than all his predecessors combined. [5]It remains to be seen if Americans will work with each other to translate his now pared down vision of the Inflation Reduction Act into success for the country infrastructure, in dire need of being addressed. If evidence is carefully examined in specific situations, conservative, moderate, and progressive thinking can intersect until reasonable solutions–even best practices—emerge (see, for example, the Governors Association under "4c. Mental Health"). But this reconciling or honing of ideas into service of a majority balanced with the concerns of minorities is the opposite of what defines today's Congressional gridlock—or refusal to keep open minds. Like many colleagues, unaffiliated voters, and friends, I would like to see the two parties phased out and term limits made mandatory for independent thinkers of new or coalition parties. If one considers that the fight for independence was a fight against power as an inherited privilege of royalty, then clearly, too many in Congress feel entitled to the advantage of incumbency and to "re-inherit" their positions again and again, with frequent time off, and regardless of failure to make progress in solving the nation's problems. Furthermore, members of Congress seem to want power limited when it concerns them–the Senate caucus chair is limited to two consecutive full terms. What they recognize as good for themselves should also be implemented for the good of all. In 1995, the Supreme Court ruled in U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton that "state governments cannot limit the terms of members of the national government."[6] But public support for term limits remains high, particularly in the "seventeen states where rotation in the legislative branch has withstood court challenges."[7] And there is no reason why other states cannot simply encourage the idea that after two terms of public service, we'd like to hear from new voices who might also want a chance to serve and contribute their ideas.

It's time to give younger people a chance to bring their voices to the table—not seeking personal publicity, hiding behind someone, claiming to be "outsiders," or wanting to demonstrate how obnoxiously brazen they can be. Bringing preconceived conclusions to the table preempts examining issues from all points of view and weighing evidence before drawing one's conclusions. What follows is the see-saw of polarized politics digging us into deeper and deeper ruts and holding us ever more rigidly in the grip of its gridlock A study in 2020 by the Millennial Action Project and Lugar Center shows that "future caucus members and others under 45 years old are the leaders in reaching across the aisle on legislation."[8] We do not need people more interested in personal scandals than issues that affect all citizens, nor those intent only on blocking everything the other side tries to do—as Mitch McConnell announced when Biden took office–or who refuse even to bring to the floor for debate issues the American people are overwhelmingly in favor of, such as barring members of Congress from owning stock, enforcing ethics codes, and implementing term limits for the Supreme Court. Another factor that works across the board to entrench ready-made stereotypes is the way laws today are written—which is by and for lawyers. What Sen. Tim Burchett (R-Tenn.) acknowledges is not really all that funny: "We've got a lot of lawyers in the House. They don't actually speak English."[9] And his motives may or may not have been to advance his own political goals, but West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin is correct when he writes, "If I can't go home and explain, I can't vote for it; it goes to the heart of what representative government is all about."[10] Laws that purport to be of, for, and by the people should not be written to facilitate more litigation, but rather to facilitate the common person's understanding of them. Laws written for and by lawyers are not laws written of, for, and by the common people. How have we gotten so off course? My guess is by sending too many lawyers to Congress, along with lobbyists. Lisa Graves, Co-director of Documented Investigations, states *USA TODAY's* reporting in 2019—a year before the pandemic began– "proves what many people have suspected, which is just how much of the democratic process has been outsourced to special interests."[11] In 2019, a report was published on a two-year investigation into bills to detect similarities in language.

More than thirty reporters from *USA TODAY, the Arizona Republic,* and *the Center for Public Integrity* working on the project found during an eight year period that "at least 10,000 bills almost entirely copied from models were introduced nationwide."[12] Rather than writing laws for common people, Congress uses templates for ideas worded as special interest groups want them worded. At the time of the report, "more than 2,100 [of these copycat laws had been] signed into law."[13] Model legislation copied allows special-interest groups to get laws, such as recent voting rights or abortion laws, passed at state levels. "Charles Siler, a former external relations manager for the Goldwater Institute and who now works for a political action committee, says, "Such bills are a fast way to spread ideas because with little modification, lawmakers can adapt them to their state."[14] For members of Congress, then, copycat laws are often "an easy way to get fully formed bills to put their names on, while building relationships with lobbyists and potential campaign donors."[15] But…these "copycat" bills undermine democracy. They have been used to "override the will of local voters and their elected leaders"–in some cases even to dictate to city councils and county governing boards "what they can and cannot do within their jurisdiction."[16] Writers of the *USA TODAY* article found models are often "drafted with deceptive titles and descriptions to disguise their true intent."[17] "The Asbestos Transparency Act was written by corporations that wanted to make it harder for people exposed to asbestos to recoup money in the courts.[18] The "HOPE Act," introduced in nine states, was written to make it more difficult for people to get food stamps."[19] Copycat laws should cause national outrage and a demand for immediate change. Fourteen years earlier, *Readers Digest* also ran a report about Congress not even reading the bills it passes![20] Not writing and not reading the very laws for which everyday citizens are held accountable makes a mockery of one's role of representation. What are members of Congress doing with their, or rather with our time? Time for which we pay them and give them generous benefits to represent us, and not merely lobbyists and campaign donors. It is also manifestation of an antiquated system. Laws should be written concisely and transparently–for the common person to understand.

The huge "omnibus" bills that are passed without ever being read are a disservice to American citizens who, if ever in court, are told, "Not knowing the law is not an excuse!" On the other hand, fair-mindedness is not advocacy for the abuse of any individual or group. When the #Me Too movement went viral in 2018, part of what made the transgression of women's rights impossible to ignore was the way sexual harassment and abuse seemed everywhere–in entertainment, schools, business, government, the military, women's gymnastics and soccer, and is still surfacing today. We say that everyone deserves to work in a harassment free work environment. But it was not until the #Me Too movement that previously "acceptable" treatment of women was called into question. What changed is women speaking out to demand professional respect, and joining with people across different social groups and generations in solidarity to support a goal many in society realized was long overdue. In August, 2021, an investigation by New York's attorney general found Andrew Cuomo had sexually harassed eleven women. Cuomo told an audience: "In my mind, I've never crossed the line with anyone, but I didn't realize the extent to which the line has been redrawn. There are generational and cultural shifts that I just didn't fully appreciate and I should have."[21] The grimace of pain that lined the former governor's face as he stared at the audience was wrenching. As I watched him speak, I had a sense that Cuomo perhaps *did* know where today's line is drawn. After all, two years earlier, in 2019, he had consulted with #Me Too representatives before signing a bill that actually strengthened a woman's right to report sexual harassment. It may have been that Cuomo the man knew where the line is drawn, but perhaps Cuomo the politician had succumbed to the belief that his position of power was not subject to a line drawn for merely ordinary men and women. The lure of power seems to make those it envelopes feel they are insulated from laws that are fair for the rest of us–just not for themselves. Hubris is power exempting itself from the rule of law, much as the ultra-rich exempt themselves from paying taxes despite their use of the nation's common services and resources. In her exposé of Facebook, Frances Haugen, provided documents to Congress that provide a parallel with the kind of power that exempts itself from the rule of law: "Facebook," she said, "routinely makes exceptions for powerful actors."[22]

In her essay "Powerful men, their enablers, and victims," columnist Connie Schultz writes, "Every story about a fallen, powerful man includes a cadre of enablers who protected him from public exposure, until they couldn't."[23] The attitude Schultz describes of powerful men being enabled by those around them is markedly similar to that of the former president who, even before taking office, enjoyed ridiculing and demeaning women, despite the fact that more than one came forward, accusing him of sexual harassment and abuse. After debating him, Carly Fiorino called attention to Trump's character—character that is revealed over time by words and behavior.[24] In a sense, the public itself–his audience–served as his enablers—by making repeated excuses for his crassness and "locker room" vulgarity, not because they found the man otherwise moral, but—and sadly–because they found his disrespect for others … entertaining. In American folklore, such an entertainer is a guise for the trickster figure. My guess is that few on the receiving end would say, "Yes, that is the way I want to be treated or the way I want my wife, or my daughters, or my mother treated." Another example of power viewed as exemption from the rules is found in a comment reported by Walter Isaacson in *Frontline*'s episode "Elon Musk's Twitter Takeover." The program documented a time when twitter was "where the conversation was happening." Isaacson says, "Elon Musk has one rule that guides him, which is never be constrained by the rules."[25] Our thinking is often shaped by social and media programming that depicts our principles primarily in terms of consumption habits. For example, a Jeep ad during the NCAA Final Four basketball games states, "The thing about freedom is…freedom has no limits."[26] Although this sounds thrilling and makes us all want to go out and buy a new Jeep, it is also false. Participating in a free society requires recognizing the equal handshakes upon which a foundation of trust has been built up in a society. If I come to a red light, I need to respect your right to drive through on a green light. Unlike ads urging us to spend without restraint, there are limits to freedom in a free society. Being fair-minded recognizes the delicate balance to live and let live. Individual freedom exists in relationship to the freedom of others and ends or becomes contested when one's freedom infringes on the freedom of others. Individuals do not have a right to "exempt" their freedom from the freedom of others if we wish to live as equals under the law.

Otherwise, we are children saying, "If I don't get my way, if I can't get everything I want, then I am going to cause trouble (run the stoplight, stir up violence) or … I refuse to play with you" (I.e., more gridlock). It is precisely because some individuals see their power exempt from the rules that govern others that we need to strengthen the checks and balances we have in place—regulatory bodies, rotation of terms, clear rules against insiders' knowledge when investing in the stock market, against gerrymandering, etc. Bipartisan, ethical accountability each step of the way should insure all are treated fairly—not just those demanding attention. It has been said that "justice is a process, not an outcome." When the process, or steps to insure all are treated fairly are bypassed, then we forfeit justice in support of hubris. And because people do not easily give up their power over others, the best guardrails against abusing power is for all citizens to practice and seek fair-mindedness. An argument I've heard against such accountability is that then we would have only dummies in office. This is the same argument members of Congress make who resist a ban on stock trading because they say it effectively punishes the more intelligent for their decision to enter public service. But neither argument holds water. The only "smart" people are not those who lie, invent Ponzi schemes, and make behind the scenes deals. Plenty of intelligent, fair-minded people are willing to serve others for the purpose of…doing just that. It's called altruism, and since we teach it to young people, we might model it more ourselves. In a televised production near the end of 2020, Global Citizen included a statement that being white is not needing "to matter" because whites have power.[27] Often the white male is seen as an oppressive patriarchy upon which pivot almost all of our social ills. Although there is enough historical evidence one can find in support of that stereotype, the stereotype itself has become its own means of oppressing younger white males, and even evidence that is found has as much or more to do with power as it does with race (white) and/or gender (male). Focusing solely on white power does not account for those at the lower end of economic and class distinctions, once called the underdog or the "little man." The little man has much in common with others who are also less powerful, such as poor women, poor Blacks, poor Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, etc.

Thus, the stereotype disregards internal diversity within the white race. It replaces positive contributions by white males with singular focus on the historical privilege white males with power have enjoyed over those without power. The stereotype also disregards many positive attributes and accomplishments—setting up a government, building a highway system, other engineering feats, the national park system, establishing libraries, bringing faith and literacy to many, those who eventually walked with Martin Luther King Jr., helping serve underprivileged families and communities, advancing scientific quests, and some really great music—to name just a few. In no way does the above excuse abuses of power that have also been rampant–such as using Black and Asian minorities as slaves or indentured servants. It is, rather, to argue for a more complex view of the white male, a complexity we might want applied to ourselves. Surely some of these white males must have tried to govern with integrity and respect for the rule of law? Surely some sought to pass on the best of the citizenship that a country continually renegotiates. This does not mean they were not flawed characters; but rather, like us, they had both strengths and weaknesses that defy simplistic categorizing. There are also numerous instances when white males, regardless of their own status, joined other groups to help with causes. The 19th Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote, was ratified with a last minute vote by state Rep. Harry T. Burn.[28] The large, diverse crowds of protesters over the death of George Floyd included white males.[29] After the mess some made in the initial riots, white males were among those who came to help clean up.[30] In Flint, Michigan, Chris Swanson, the sheriff in Genesee County, took off his riot gear and joined protesters in a show of compassionate solidarity.[31] A white officer with the Sacramento Police Department shook hands with a protester and took a knee as another show of solidarity with those desperate for the abuse by some police being acknowledged.[32] Capitol Police officers did so as well.[33] And long before Black Lives Matter, Bobby Kennedy spoke of understanding the grief of African-Americans after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., because he had experienced similar grief over the loss of his own brother. Then too, in 1861, all white men started a new party that resulted in choosing Abraham Lincoln for the presidency.

Historian David McCullough finds evidence not of only one (white power) or the other (white pariah) side of a cultural stereotype, but rather both: older white males may have thought they were envisioning and then accomplishing western ideals; newer generations see oppression in the resulting imperialism.[34] Today, power historically enjoyed by white males has led to a power grab by a minority of white supremacists who are reluctant to cede that power to the culture's increasingly diverse population. But even this group is less about whiteness or males than about fear of the other, due to an inability to reconcile with what they feel is threatened, that is, fear of losing a privilege they equate with freedom, a privilege they see as giving them power over others. Yet white extremists are also human beings whose fears, like those of others, can change. Chris Buckley officially joined the White Knights of the KKK in 2014. As a youth and later in the military, he was molested and bullied and learned hatred and anger.[35] Buckley speaks of being vulnerable as a child who had not dealt with early traumas, then looked for a way "to feel strong and dominant as an adult."[36] He says white supremacy gave him "a sense of purpose," that filled a void.[36a] But like young women who find online perceptions of perfection do not always match the unhappiness felt inside, so too, Buckley describes his life in the KKK as "a miserable cycle of perpetual violence and hate, fueled by drugs and enhanced by the media's rhetoric against us."[37] Parents for Peace worked for a couple of years to get Buckley sober and helped him find his "way back to who I was before the hate consumed me."[38] Buckley now states that because of the love and compassion other community activists showed him, "I was able to move forward in my life and give back." He believes, "Through my own intervention and in helping others, I have found that treating those issues requires getting help, in part, from someone who has lived the same experiences–recognizing and isolating the root of hatred…comprised of "mental health, substance abuse, and early trauma or grievances."[39] CNN host Anderson Cooper invited a former Q'anon believer to be his guest and discuss that person's former belief that Cooper ate babies. Rather than discounting people viewed as enemies, Cooper *opened up* the possibility of discussion, and in so doing, the former believer in a conspiracy theory apologized to Cooper for her misconception. That show demonstrated genuine communication taking place wherein the parties had to think outside stereotypes that had kept them apart.[40]

David Brooks observes the way some of our better values were demonstrated during the Civil Rights Movement: "Through epic acts of self-discipline, the nonviolent civil rights marchers in the 1960s forced their foes to reveal that if there were to be any violence and anarchy, it would come from the foes. That's how the movement captured the moral high ground and won the mind of the nation."[41] Brooks' insight is timely as new data from the 2020 census reveals "an increasingly complex portrait of American identity. The numbers of Americans identifying as more than one race jumped" 276%, from 9 million people in 2010 to 33.8 million people in 2020.[42] "In acknowledgement of the diversity of languages spoken in the United States, the Census Bureau disseminated materials for the 2020 Census in 59 different languages other than English."[43] In contrast to identity politics and the stereotypes they encourage, many today are part of multicultural coalitions. The popular program Roots, in which guests have the history of their DNA traced, as well as services such as Ancestry.com, show that almost every person's heritage descends from a mixed lineage. This change identified in the 2020 census is also apparent among college students who, when surveyed, remark they simply do not care to "identify" themselves with one or another stereotype, and so they mark "other" or "multiracial." Because they do not care to see their identities through a single lens; they refuse to be reduced to either-or fallacies, to "us vs. them." Rather, a kind of *solidarity* among diverse identities is also moving a new sense of identity center stage: an identity that draws from the riches of multiple individual affiliations and diverse heritages but also focuses on a common humanity. The most diverse area of the country is Hawaii, with an increasingly complex citizenship, due to migration patterns and interracial marriages. As far back as a generation ago, journalist Steve Olson argued that although it does not eliminate all ethnic and racial tensions, the mixing of peoples in Hawaii is a great model of cultural blending. He argues that although we are genetically linked, racial identification may also be a matter of choice. For example, some Hawaiians associate with "'communities of descent' that have become more like a professional or religious affiliation."[44] Olson argues that a person has "some measure of control" over these markers[45] and therefore, "our DNA is too tightly interconnected to use biology to justify what are essentially social distinctions. Our preferences, character, and abilities are not determined by the biological history of our ancestors; they depend on our individual attributes, experiences, and choices."[46] Olson's insight seems upheld by The American Medical Association (AMA).

In December, 2020, it "officially recognized [even] race as a social construct."[47] Which leads to the observation that "the more we are tested, the more we see how connected we are."[48] According to the 2020 census, "almost 1 in 5 Americans, 62.6 million, are Hispanic," but like Hawaiians, growth comes with rethinking a "'mixed ethnicity.'"[49] Terms and categories used to describe Latinos often change according to circumstances. One young man said people don't think he's Latino because "he doesn't look much like his Mexican parents," but "I took the DNA test, and it does really look like a map of Napoleon's plan to conquer the world…blood from everywhere."[50] **Those who come to America from Mexico or other South American countries also find themselves *between* cultures or with hyphenated identities.** A young man acknowledges "he flips between his Mexican and Chinese identities," and 'it feels great' to embrace both sides of his heritage." [51] Pew Research Center says that around 62% of Hispanic adults surveyed "believe having darker skin hurts their ability to get ahead in the U.S." Others have gratitude towards the country that hosts them, but still want connection to the roots where they were born.[52] Seeing beyond identity politics to the more complex but holistic identities of individuals is comparable to the dilemma some scholars found with affirmative action. According to Gail Heriot, law professor at the University of San Diego and a commissioner on the U.S. Commission for Civil Rights, "You can't prefer one race without discriminating against another race."[53] I cannot be superior if you are not inferior. In contrast to perceptions such as this, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was one who wanted the dignity of all Americans recognized only as "us," along with core American values of equality, fairness, and agreement to disagree. Graduate student Coleman Hughes also rejects the "us vs. them" paradigm in favor of considering people as individuals, then finding "principles on which to base a multi-racial society that are fair."[54] As a result of rulings by the Supreme Court in 1978 and 2003, admissions practices at colleges were still considered "race conscious," but were then viewed more holistically in that race was only one of many lenses through which a person was considered.

After interviewing a number of college admission officers, OiYan Poon, an associate professor of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois, found that admission officers understood "merit is much more complicated" and therefore wanted to see a "more complete" picture of what students had done with the resources they had.[55] On June 29, 2023, however, the Supreme Court ruled affirmative action unconstitutional. Harvard and North Carolina Universities were found to have "discriminated against white and Asian American applicants by using race-conscious policies that benefited students from underrepresented backgrounds."[56] "Chief Justice John Roberts wrote the majority's opinion saying the student must be treated based on…experiences as an individual, not on the basis of race."[57] Colleges and businesses now have to find other ways to introduce diversity into their institutions. According to Jeffrey Selingo, author of "Who Gets in and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions," we tend to think of admissions as based on merit, but students are accepted to schools for multiple other reasons such as athletics, legacies, gender, or full-payment.[58] President Biden proposes a new standard under which students who qualify to apply can still discuss overcoming adversities in their lives due to multiple factors, of which race is certainly one.[59] As has long been proposed by Rev. Wm. Barber, poverty cuts across racial lines and forms solidarity among the less advantaged "little guys." As a result, Richard Kahlenberg, of Georgetown University, views the recent Supreme Court decision as "a victory for low-income and working-class students of all races."[60] Kahlenberg predicts schools doing more outreach to "promote racial diversity," will become "more economically diverse as a result."[61] Instead of seeking out diverse, well-off students, he notes that in seven of the ten states "where affirmative action was discontinued … they were able to get as much Black and Hispanic representation as they had in the past using race."[62] This is because due to the "enormous wealth gap…by race and ethnicity in America,"[63] Black and Hispanic students are disproportionately included in admission policies that seek to be economically diverse. A more realistic or three-dimensional view of human beings, that of individuals at the complex intersections of multiple identities, is an attempt to avoid being attenuated or flattened into one dimensional profiling, into being seen through only one lens, which too easily relies on stereotyping.

If we consider 1.the genetic inheritance of individuals, 2.their chosen social affiliations, and 3.what those individuals do with the resources they have in the circumstances into which they were born, then we may be able to assess the complex matter of merit more thoroughly, more reliably.. This is not to say the concerns of racial minorities are not equally important to a common citizenship of individuals because minorities represent those distinct elements that comprise our more complicated identities seen through lenses at the intersections of which, we locate our individual uniqueness. For example, Abigail Echo-Hawk, chief research officer for the Seattle Indian Health Board and the director of the Urban Indian Health Institute, has found that native women are murdered at a rate ten times the national average, but data on missing Indigenous people and Alaskan Natives is underreported, because if race and ethnicity has not been collected, the data in such cases defaults to "white." In Echo-Hawk's research on 71 urban cities in 29 states, 95% of missing women cases of Indigenous people and Alaskan Natives were not covered by the media—in contrast to the "intense attention" given to cases of white women like that of Gabby Petito in 2021.[64] Although keenly aware, then, of the need for uniqueness factored into the treatment of people, Echo-Hawk is also realistic about what is needed for change: "It's going to take the entire community of the United States to come together…with us."[65] **That coming together of the many across distinct boundaries is the solidarity championed by Rev. Barber, the #Me Too movement, Interfaith groups, and others.** In another example, Latino activist Jacob Azevedo has founded a "multiracial mutual aid group" with volunteers who offer to "accompany older Asian Americans who may be fearful on walks and errands in Chinatown."[66] Of particular note here is that the "multiracial coalition of grassroots groups and independent activists … have come together to organize … initiatives that both support Asian Americans and illuminate the systemic violence that afflict(s) all racial minorities."[67] Alvina Wong, campaign director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network in Oakland, California, reaches this conclusion: "What we know from history is that we won't be able to solve the root causes of crime and violence without each other."[68] This example of cross-racial solidarity and "relationship building …embedded in the DNA of Bay Area activism," has fostered a "deep level of trust between grassroots organizations that have fought for one another's causes for years."[69]

When we act in concert and work on behalf of each other's needs, we can rediscover the trust needed to be and act as neighbor to each other. We become unafraid and willing to share power. Cited in an op-ed by Jason Lalljee, John Lewis offered advice for Americans who seek to "set aside race, class, age, language and nationality to demand respect for human dignity: The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed."[70] Shortly before the pandemic disrupted our lives, a wonderful art exhibit at the National Museum of African Art in Washington vividly communicated the idea that our identities are metaphors—located at the hub-spoke intersections of *both* differences (spokes) and similarities (hub of a common humanity). The exhibit, "World on the Horizon: Swahili Arts across the Indian Ocean," focused on territorial intersections of Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.[71] This area, writes Holland Cotter, arose from "occupation of East African soil by seafaring merchants and middlemen from foreign lands, in short, producing "a crossroads culture," that is perhaps similar, Cotter says, "to today's immigrant culture in America.[72] Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique were centers of "long distance trade and multi-directional cultural change," and the language of the area belonged "to no particular group or place."[73] Cotter examines the "awkwardness of history" when discussing a "high-backed 'throne of power' from 19th century Zanzibar" that can be traced "to a unique time and place"…yet it "is not original in a broad historical sense."[74] He finds "certainties… scrambled" when "Makonde mask carvers from Mozambique and Tanzania…depict ancestral spirits and turbaned traders with equal skill and relish."[75] That awkwardness and the uncertainties give the show a "big picture inclusivity, with its contradictions and confusions."[76] The result of such inclusivity is a holistic focus or "hub" similar to 1) The intersegmental caring that brought together women and men in the #Me, Too Movement; 2) The "communities of descent" Olson finds identifies a mixture of heritage and choices in Hawaiian culture and also Hispanic culture; 3) The complexity of "merit" that colleges grapple with when considering their admissions practices; 4) The multiracial coalition of independent activists and grassroots groups working in Oakland, California; and 5) The poverty Rev. Barber sees that links underdogs and little guys across different racial, sexual, and generational segments in society.

Cotter rejects adopting "narrow, nationalistic thinking about identity" because it creates "basically a colonialist model…a 'them' as opposed to 'us.'"[77] We are perhaps overly familiar with this "us vs. them" colonialist model. But as with war, perhaps the real "enemy" of one group versus another might well be neither group "itself," but rather the categorizing, the stereotyping, labeling, or profiling that pits violence, hatred and/or other judgments among groups against each other rather than seeking some shared and some different goals among more complex and intersecting identities at various crossroads. This insight of the exhibit recalls what David Brooks finds when he, too, attempts to move away from distinguishing between political labels and real-time interactions with individuals: "When you actually meet people they defy categories….you try, when you can, to get to know their stories, or at least to realize that everybody is in a struggle you know nothing about."[78] Cotter acknowledges that this broader understanding leaves one with a sense of Swahili culture that "feels diffuse and unresolved." But that understanding "opens a view of the larger realities of history itself [that is] well worth having,"–one that exemplifies the title of his review of the art exhibit: "Broadening the view of identity, while also deepening our identities."[79] Acknowledging the complexity of individuals as cultural richness might help us recognize the way stereotypes and now profiling limit us by defining others through a single cultural lens that flattens out what is otherwise multi-dimensional. A single dimension, such as the color of one's skin or a speech pattern, is often more obvious and so feels more certain, but it is also just that—only one lens. It raises interesting questions, such as that asked of African art—"To whom does the past belong—imperialist conquerors or victims of heritages plundered?[80] Attempts to move away from the more easily stereotyped categories of race, gender, and ethnicity also might help stir society to refocus on Dr. King's vision regarding judging a person by their character. Martin Luther King Jr. felt we needed to nurture character in our young people, as well as model it for them and for each other.

As with affirmative action, it is more difficult to assess "merit" of character, but a multidimensional and holistic picture allows us to begin focusing on what it is we do with our common humanity and how particular individuals accomplish what is significant for themselves and for the societies in which they play roles. A good coach gets different players to focus on what they do with their talents but also to play for the good of a team rather than just remain in whatever categories they belong to and seeking the highest monetary reward for their individual skills. **When the news media caught up with Paul Salopek, who is walking around the world as a fellow with the *National Geographic*, they found that due to the pandemic, Salopek had to reroute his trip through southwest China: In Yunnan Province, "I had to adapt my route to move around parts of mostly rural China."[81]** The degree to which Salopek had to slow down attests to the diversity he encountered: "It really forces me to slow down my observations and to absorb the China that I'm seeing at a very slow, immersive, nuanced level. At the very beginning of my walk through the province of Yunnan, I was walking through more than 25 different minority communities that each had their own language. They had sometimes their own cosmologies. This project is about the micro level stories of the world."[82] The comparison here with diversity in American culture is significant. The above examples support identities being metaphoric: we are both different in our individual uniqueness and similar to each other, often in multiple and complex ways. When similarities are the singular focus, profiling results in discrimination, one category is pit against another, us vs. them, that see-saws back and forth depending on which of the categories holds power over the other. We neglect to read the richness in the ways individuals draw from their interactions with multiple cultural groups and consider only stereotypes. Stereotypes often draw from those with power over others in the same category. When differences are overemphasized, we fail to recognize the shared humanity with our species that allows us to act in solidarity with those whose differences may not be identical to our differences, but with whom we nevertheless empathize. Unaffiliated voters might recognize some elements of the extremes or fringes in both political parties that have moved center stage since technology has disrupted a social system based on majority rule. The complexity of each person is the site of unique choices made among multiple and intersecting differences.

This complex and holistic lens allows even for traditional values to converge and be integrated with multiracial and diverse coalitions in new and younger voices and/or across differences and new generations. Note, for example, the difference between power that swells into hubris, exempting itself from laws that were written to protect the freedom of all, and the power of someone like Colin Powell, a 4-star general, U.S. army, admired for numerous achievements and who treated people the way he expected them to treat him. He always had their backs and once said he liked to greet each person he came across in the morning because he saw them as equals: "I have more power, but that doesn't count; we're human beings." Despite the merit of his numerous achievements, Powell remained "most proud of his family" and found purpose in paying it forward: "to live for the next generation…"[83] Evgeny Afineevsky, director of the documentary "Francesco," depicts a similar message from Pope Francis who believes we are all children of God: "Stop putting labels on people…frames over the people. …The most important aspect is to be a good human being."[84] That is precisely what superstar Adele answered when Oprah Winfrey asked what the singer's dreams and expectations are for her son. Adele said she just wants Angelo "to be a good person."[85] Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi, Mandela, Bishop Tutu and other great leaders have similarly taught us to respect and acknowledge the dignity of others. In fact, many if not most religious doctrines do, yet humans remain at odds with each other and in need of an antidote to treat our fears and the spread of hatred when we de-humanize those with whom we disagree. As with war, the vaccine to counteract the virus of hatred is greater love—love that encompasses human identity beyond differences. There is evidence that this vaccine of greater love is plentiful. Healing begins with forgiveness. The example of the Amish community in Pennsylvania comes to mind because it was so unexpected. In 2006, five Amish children were shot dead before the shooter killed himself. Shocking many, the Amish community forgave the killer and showed concern for his widow and three children by going to greet them, then starting a fund for their care.[86] The deadliest attack on a Jewish community in the U.S. occurred on October 27, 2018, when an armed gunman killed eleven people and wounded six, including Holocaust survivors, from three congregations during Shabbat prayer services at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.[87] Later that same year, the FBI reported a 36% rise in antisemitism.[88] Five years later, a remembrance service was complicated by the ongoing Hamas-Israeli war, but included "several musical pieces on instruments from the 'Violins of Hope' project, which uses actual instruments that Jewish musicians had performed on during the Holocaust.[89] As demolition at the site began, Carole Zawatsky, head of the nonprofit project, commented: "It was sobering and a physical manifestation of healing."[90]

Plans to rebuild the Tree of Life Synagogue include a new design to "balance the light with the darkness." [91] More recently, 2020 marked five years since "family members of the victims stood in court and spoke counter-intuitive words of forgiveness to Dylann Roof," who confessed to murdering nine people and wounding three during a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina's Emanuel AME Church.[92] Todd Brady states, "Extending forgiveness does not erase the reality of past or current racism in America. It does not make things right…Christians do not forgive in order to make sense of the incomprehensible. Christians forgive because God commands it and Jesus modeled it…My forgiveness of others is to mirror God's forgiveness of me.[93] Responding to its first mass shooting since 1997, New Zealand showed a greater love. When a white power movement attacked two different mosques in Christ Church, New Zealand, killing 51 people, the nation's president and people immediately reconsidered its gun laws and resolved to spread love rather than hate.[94] Flint Township protest took place on May 30, 2020. Sheriff of Genesee County, said is the day "this office changed the way we do policing and George Floyd changed American policing because of what he sacrificed."[95] Floyd's family has set up a non-profit…turning grief into resources they hope will help others. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Greater Grace Temple pastor Charles H. Ellis III, and Detroit mayor Mike Duggan were among those who marched against police brutality on Thursday, June 4, 2020, in Detroit, Michigan. The leaders represented churches, temples and mosques from around the metro area.[96] We see love healing others in the quiet but everyday responses of the Red Cross to communities suffering from both weather disasters and our man-made ones. And in the work of the White Helmets, who for years have been doing similar work in Syria. We see love healing others in the young who set up thousands of Go Fund Me accounts for those who suffer deaths so that tragedy does not have to be grieved in isolation.

We see the hope for more of this love in the poetry of a young Black woman: "If we merge mercy with might/… then love becomes our legacy/and change our children's birthright./So let us leave behind a country/better than the one we were left with."[97] The power of greater love is a power music can also have. Rap artist Common calls to listeners to "choose love over hate" and asserts, "Life has no purpose without love, real love."[98] Eboo Patel, a Muslim Interfaith leader and founder of Interfaith Youth Core, uses the metaphor of a potluck dinner rather than a melting pot to discuss the change in identity politics in America: "A diverse democracy does not benefit from endless sameness, but upon the various gifts that its diverse people bring. If people don't contribute, the nation doesn't feast. The task of the leader is to inspire participation."[99] Most of us enjoy tasting foods from different cultures—appreciating international cuisine–so Patel's metaphor is ingenious in communicating the way we can all benefit from contributing to the nation's potlucks. When we share food, we also share a part of our cultures and traditions, but also feed our hunger and strengthen human need for community. Patel's thinking draws from both an appreciation of our differences and a common table among interfaith coalitions to bridge the political and racial divides in America.[100] Patel challenges young activists to go beyond engaging only in the "current campus crises around identity politics, cancel culture, and safe spaces versus free speech" and become leaders who build something better, such as Chef José Andrés *World Central Kitchen.101* US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy applauds these efforts to renew human bonds with each other by sharing meals with neighbors who might live alone or be going through difficult times. We can hope that the turmoil of the pandemic, hopefully subsiding as we near the close of 2023, increases determination for more fair-mindedness and productivity in the Congress. Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA) and Rep. Wm. Timmons (R-SC) have worked together on a House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress with broad, bipartisan support "Before the select committee disbanded at the end of the 117th Congress, it issued a report with more than 200 recommendations regarding outdated technology to cultural and logistical problems. Of those, 45 have been fully implemented, and 87 have been partially implemented." [102]

The Problem Solvers Caucus is a group of US House members equally divided between Democrats and Republicans, "with the Caucus' stated goal of fostering bipartisan cooperation on key policy issues." As of 2021, it is co-chaired by Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA).[103]The group believes—as do so many people today: "Only when we work together as Americans can we successfully break through the gridlock of today's politics."[104] We can look to these bipartisan thinkers to emerge as new leaders for difficult times, as their practical approaches to solving problems appeal to a wider audience of voters. Rather than locking individuals and groups into stereotypes or ideologies, we might redirect attention to character and the merit of our actions by analyzing how individuals in society use their power and share power with others. A comment from some travelers is a version of the adage don't judge a book by its cover: "I've realized the foolishness of judging people based on their license plates. We've been surprised to find welcoming people in central Texas and opinionated bigots on the Oregon coast. Perhaps we all need to get out of our silos to remember that hate can be found anywhere – and so can respect and love."[105]