

Who We Are

A Message from Trump and Clinton
Supporters from Southwest Ohio



Better Angels

THIS REPORT COMES FROM **BETTER ANGELS**, a bipartisan network of scholars and leaders whose goals are to bring people together from across the divides to rethink currently polarized issues, show why reducing polarization is an important priority, and recommend public policy and institutional reforms that will permit progress and compromise to be substituted for impasse and frustration.

We are grateful to the Village Church in South Lebanon for their hospitality in allowing us to meet in the South Lebanon Community Center. We're grateful to Amber Lapp and Deb Rumelhart for their help with food service and other logistics. For editing and designing this report, we're grateful to Josephine Tramontano of Better Angels, and for help in evaluating the results of the "Broadway Gathering," we're grateful to Professor C. J. Peek of the University of Minnesota. Financial support from the journal *The American Interest* and from the Willard E. Smucker Foundation helped to make this gathering possible, and to these supporters of this initiative we are deeply grateful.

On the cover: Group photo of "The Broadway Gathering" taken by Sajah Woods.

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*Better Angels
420 Lexington Avenue, Rm. 1706
New York, NY 10170
Tel: (212) 246-3942
Fax: (212) 541-6665
Email: info@better-angels.org
Web: www.better-angels.org*

I just don't understand why anyone would vote for Clinton.

I just don't see how anyone could vote for Trump.

Lately it's been more a battle than co-existing.

I came to see if I can learn to talk to my cousin.

*Number one reason I'm here is because of how
divided we are.*

*It's hard to communicate when the conflict is between two ways of
living, capitalism and socialism.*

*My world has been turned upside-down. My pajamas are on back-
wards. Maybe this gathering will help me cope.*

Who We Are

A Message from Trump and Clinton Supporters from Southwest Ohio

Who We Are

WE ARE 21 residents of southwest Ohio, living in Warren and Hamilton counties. Ten of us supported Donald Trump for president and 11 of us supported Hillary Clinton.

Twelve of us are women and nine of us are men. One of us is a Muslim American. One of us is an African-American. One of us is a Latino American. Two of us are gay. The youngest among us is 18 years old and the oldest among us is old enough to be the 18-year-old's grandparent. Seven of us are graduates of four-year colleges. Our job titles include child care worker, factory worker, gunsmith, homemaker, political organizer, postal carrier, psychologist, school counselor, retired auto worker, steelworker, college student, retired R.N., and warehouse worker.

We are not a scientifically representative sample of our or any region of America, much less of the country as a whole. But we do feel that we are probably like many Americans in many communities today — very divided by politics and by the recent presidential election, and interested in talking to each other about those divisions.

The Broadway Gathering

We met for a total of 13 hours over the weekend of December 9-11, 2016, at the South Lebanon Community Center on Broadway Street.

The “Broadway Gathering” was organized by area resident David Lapp. The gathering was co-moderated by David Blankenhorn, the president of the New York City-based organization Better Angels (www.better-angels.org) and William J. Doherty, a professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota and founder of Citizen Therapists for Democracy.

What We Hoped To Do

We agreed upfront on three goals for the meeting:

- That we better understand the experiences, feelings, and beliefs of those who differ with us in today’s politically polarized environment;
- That we see if there are areas of commonality in addition to differences; and
- That we learn something that might be helpful to others in our community and in the nation.

Our Ground Rules

We agreed upfront on the following ground rules:

- We're here to understand others and to explain our views, not to convince anyone to change his or her mind.
- Let's focus on the present and future – what we believe our country needs – and not on the election campaign which is now in the past.
- Let's all speak only for ourselves and not try to speak for or represent any outside group.
- Otherwise, it's standard stuff we all know: taking turns, not interrupting others, listening to everyone and opening up space for quieter group members, being respectful (as in, no eye rolling or loud sighs when someone is speaking), etc. In other words, bringing our best selves to a difficult conversation.

Regarding enforcing the ground rules, the moderators asked: “Do the facilitators have permission gently to help people make course corrections when they inadvertently veer off one of these ground rules?” The participants agreed to give the moderators this authority.



Our Clashes

WHAT DO Clinton supporters think of Trump supporters? What do Trump supporters think of Clinton supporters? On Saturday morning we tried to answer these questions in an unusual way. Each “side” asked itself, “What are the most common stereotypes that our opponents believe about us?” And then: “Why are those stereotypes mistaken or exaggerated?”

What Trump Supporters Think Clinton Supporters Think of Them

The top four:

- *Racist*
- *Want to take away women’s rights*
- *Xenophobic*
- *Greedy*

And also:

- *Uneducated*
- *Ignorant*
- *Homophobic*
- *Sexist*
- *No compassion*
- *Warmongers*
- *Rich*

What Clinton Supporters Think Trump Supporters Think of Them

The top four:

- *Only care about certain groups*
- *Business killers*
- *Ready to give away the farm*
- *Baby killers*

And also:

- *Want people to get free stuff*
- *Willing to lie for political gain*
- *Unwilling to stand up to enemies*
- *Want open borders*
- *Unpatriotic*
- *Politically correct crybabies*
- *Don’t believe in the 2nd Amendment*

Comments from Clinton Supporters about the Top Four Stereotypes:

We care about everybody. But if I have two children, and one of them gets a fever, I do what's needed to get the one who needs help back to good health. We all do that together.

When we say "Black Lives Matter," it doesn't mean we only care about this group. It means "Hey, I'm having an issue here. Can you help me solve it?"

We do want to see the economy grow. We just feel that when something is over, like mining jobs in the coal country, we have to move on and explore new options.

When you're a minority in a different country, you feel weak and you just want to unite. You just want to be with people who understand you.

We aren't just for hand-outs, just free stuff for people. I was kicked out of my house because I was gay. I was diagnosed with HIV. I got Medicaid and housing assistance. My HIV medicine is \$3,000, and I can't afford that, and so Medicaid helps me to get it. I was on the streets, I was homeless. But now I'm paying for my own rent, my car, my food. I do believe drug testing should be implemented for public assistance programs.

You never see Democrats advising people to go out and get an abortion.

Pro-choice is what we are. We should be creating systems where abortion is a choice, but hopefully not something people have to resort to very often.

Create policies where abortion is available but rare — that's where we need to be going.

Do Trump supporters have information that I have, or that I've been open to? So I think my first need is to educate them. What they do with that is up to them.

Comments from Trump Supporters about the Top Four Stereotypes:

There used to be a lot of racism in this country, but we're getting better. Yes, there have been problems, but we're getting better.

We're not racists. We're tired of people having a chip on their shoulder.

There is equal opportunity. If you really want something in this country, you can do it. But you've got to get out and earn it.

I didn't get any special treatment. I had to pay for what I wanted. I didn't get any grants for school, because my parents were "middle class."

I was raised not poor, but my family didn't have a lot. I got married out of high school and when we started, we had nothing. We've worked hard. I don't mind people getting help from others, because we have received help from family members and we've received food stamps. So I'm not against help. Now if you are a drug abuser, that's something different.

I believe firmly in working for what you have. We want you to work for what you get, and not to be mooching.

We don't want to take away women's rights. We are concerned about poor sexual choices that a lot of women are making out of ignorance, and about 14-year-old boys having sex with girls. We want to be more proactive, so kids don't get into those bad situations in the first place. I don't think that abortion will ever be illegal.

America is a great melting pot. But some groups today are not assimilating. The melting pot really only works if you're willing to melt. If you just make your own communities, you become the other, and you're not included.

When they come here and then go back to their home country, I understand why they do, but it's not helping the nation.

Immigration used to work. We had a process. We were a family and we were a nation of laws.



Our Questions

AS ESTABLISHED by our ground rules and by the meeting design, much of our conversation consisted of asking questions of clarification. Below are some of those questions.

Questions from Clinton Supporters to Trump Supporters:

When was America great, and who was it great for?

How does diversity fit into making America great again?

Do Trump's bankruptcies bother you?

Are you for legal discrimination against gays, such as vendors refusing to serve gay weddings?

How did you handle the video of Trump saying what he does to women?

How can you tell when Trump means what he says?

What makes you think that people are looking for handouts?

Questions from Trump Supporters to Clinton Supporters:

How was Hillary going to unite the country?

Why did you think Hillary's emails weren't important?

Are you afraid that Trump will take away gay rights?

What are your fears about abolishing Obamacare?

Why should we help strangers?

How much should we accommodate to immigrants?

Why isn't America seeking energy independence, when we could do that on our own?

Our Findings

THE DISCUSSIONS of our differences were often tense, at times emotional. Some tears were shed. One participant said: “I’m frightened for my children.” Another said: “I’m just tired of politicians lying to people.” Another, as we were about to go home on Saturday, said: “Today was brutal.” One person said, “This was harder than I thought it would be,” to which another replied, “The stereotypes are still alive and well, and breaking them isn’t going to be easy.” There were also moments of laughter and personal connection.

Now, that guy, I like him.

Clinton supporter, referring to a Trump supporter who approached her after a session to clarify something he’d said that he believed had upset her.

We’re trying to get better at this.

Trump supporter, talking to a Clinton supporter after one of the sessions.

On Sunday, we looked for common ground, and with effort, we found some. We also identified several areas in which we simply cannot agree. By the time we adjourned, we had agreed on the basic wording of ten “findings” that all of us, Trump and Clinton supporters alike, believe in and can publicly endorse. Based on talking together and getting to know one another over the course of one weekend in December of 2016, here are our ten findings:

1. On the Value of Political Experience:

For now, the two sides agree to disagree on this issue. Clinton supporters tend to feel strongly that, other things being equal, having had prior political experience makes a candidate more attractive and more qualified to serve the public capably. Trump supporters tend to feel just as strongly that, in the context of U.S. politics in 2016, having had prior political experience does not make a candidate more attractive and, if anything, makes them less qualified to serve the public capably.

2. On Words:

The two sides largely disagree about the understanding and use of words, at least in the context of the 2016 election. Trump supporters tend to put more trust in a politician's overall approach, style, and ways of doing things than in that politician's capacity to speak with formal correctness and use words according to their literal meanings. In fact, Trump supporters tend to equate these qualities negatively with "being scripted" or "sounding like a politician." By contrast, Clinton supporters put trust in a politician's capacity to be well-spoken and to use words accurately and precisely. An example of this difference is candidate Trump's promise to "build a wall." Clinton supporters, who took the words literally, view the promise as either misguided, impossible to fulfill, or both. A number of Trump supporters, by contrast, who tended to take the words figuratively, view the promise as either a statement of overall policy direction, a piece of understandable and inspired hyperbole, or both. Same words – "build a wall" – but different meanings, based on different ways of understanding and interpreting the words.

3. On fear:

A number of Clinton supporters said that the elections results have made them fearful about the future – afraid for the welfare of the country and, in some cases, personally afraid of what might happen to them and to their friends and loved ones as a result of Trump's victory. Especially during our Friday and Saturday sessions, Trump supporters, while saying that they'd seen stories in the media of Clinton supporters saying that they are afraid, expressed surprise and incomprehension at the idea that the victory of one candidate over another would actually cause some Americans to feel fear. By the end of our meeting, however, a number of Trump supporters were saying that, while they continue to view fear of Trump as unwarranted, they now recognize that these expressions of fear are genuinely felt, not simply manufactured for political effect.

4. On minority groups:

We agree that no member of a minority group should ever be targeted or made to feel afraid, by the president of the U.S. or by anyone else. We insist upon an America in which everyone can thrive and reach their potential, regardless of color or background or religion. We also agree that the requirement of valuing everyone should not involve downplaying the rights and needs of anyone, and that too many politicians in both parties for too long have ignored the needs and concerns of everyday blue-collar and working-class Americans.

5. On treating everyone with equal respect:

We agree that all Americans should be treated with civility and equal respect by U.S. leaders and policy makers. We agree that, starting in the White House and in the Congress, and on both sides of the political aisle, we should do much less attacking, denigrating, and demonizing.

6. On political obstructionism:

We agree that valid, constructive proposals from President Trump should be supported by those who supported Clinton and that bad performance from President Trump should not be excused by those who voted for him.

7. On abortion:

While we disagree on whether and in what circumstances abortion should be legal, we can agree that abortion is not something to be preferred or desired, and therefore we agree on the importance of upstream policies to improve the life prospects of young women (and men), so that fewer of them will have to face the decision of whether to have an abortion.

8. On immigration and borders:

While we have diverse views on immigration policy, none of us favor open borders or unregulated immigration.

9. On helping those in need:

We have diverse and at times conflicting views on whether help for those in need should come more from government or more from the private sector, or, in the case of government, more from the federal government or from the states. Yet we agree that a good society is judged in large measure according to how it cares for its neediest members; we agree on the importance of a nationwide safety net, such that help for anyone in need is readily available; and we agree that, whenever possible, the best form of help is to help people help themselves, so that we offer not so much hand-outs as helping hands.

10. On character and the American Dream:

We acknowledge that some Americans of poor character become rich and famous, just as some of admirable character remain poor and forgotten. At the same time, all of us strongly affirm the principle that hard work, honesty, and decency are the essential foundations of the American Dream.



Who We Are

WHO ARE WE? We are 21 residents of southwest Ohio, living in Warren and Hamilton counties. Ten of us supported Donald Trump for president and 11 of us supported Hillary Clinton.

But we're also more than Ohioans. We're also Americans. And we are more than two groups who oppose each other politically. We're also citizens and neighbors with shared feelings and much in common with one another.

None of us, as a result of our conversations together, have changed our minds about which candidate for president was the better choice in the 2016 election. But we have changed our minds, at least a bit, about each other. We learned by talking to each other that we aren't as divided as we thought and that we aren't as incomprehensible to one another as we thought.

Here are some comments made in our closing session on Sunday:

My view was, apparently they don't love America because they are voting for this person. But I see now that they do love this country.

All of us looked over our fence, and saw that we're not as far from the other side as we thought.

We're closer to each other than we see in the media.

It was not an easy weekend, but it was worthwhile. This can work.

I came in here as a white from a white neighborhood, and I didn't really see the fear, but now I can see it a bit more.

Every single one of us wants the country to be a nice place to live.

We also changed our minds, at least a bit, about the necessity and the possibility of Americans with opposing political views learning to lecture each other a bit less and listen to each other a bit more.

Here are some other comments from Sunday:

I think we did a pretty good job of keeping the rhetoric on the back burner and keeping our ears open. The country can't come together unless we do this.

It's not us versus them. It can't be just that.

What we did in this meeting wasn't perfect, but it's a beginning.

It was relieving.

There needs to be a lot more of this. I would like to get involved – maybe go to other communities, and get this going.

Who are we? We are 21 Americans who believe that, together, we can achieve what our Constitution calls a more perfect Union.



Signatories

Linda Allen

Walter B. Baker

Leo Bonds

David Blankenship

Jill Bowman

Linda Burke

Fran Carpenter

Zachary J. Dick

N. J. Doherty

Maryann Harrison

David Lapp

Rebekah Lichte

David P. O'Brien

Mike Pogg

Patricia Spaeth

Patricia Spant

Roberto A. Vasquez

Sayil Ward

Participants

Jake Asher
Linda Allen
Whitney Baker
Leo Banks
Jill Bowman
Zacharey Bowman
Linda Burke
Fran Carpenter
Zachary Dick
Tristan Diegel
Noha Eyada
Maryan Harrison
Rebekah Leitner
Lance Nickol
David Osborne
Mimi Rogg
Patricia Spaeth
Willard Spicer
Patricia Smart
Roberto Vasquenz
Sajah Woods

Organizer:

David Lapp

Moderators:

David Blankenhorn
William Doherty

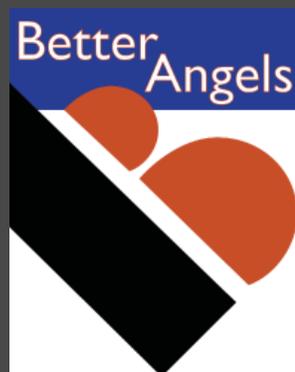
Why “Better Angels”?

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

— Abraham Lincoln, 1861

The idea of recognizing something that is shared with the other—even in moments of fierce conflict—is beautifully reflected in Abraham Lincoln’s use of the term “better angels” in his First Inaugural Address in 1861, on the eve of the Civil War. William Seward, who would serve as Secretary of State under Lincoln, had suggested that Lincoln close his speech by calling in hope upon the “the guardian angel of the nation.” Lincoln changed it to “the better angels of our nature.” In Seward’s version, what was needed would come from outside us. In Lincoln’s version, it would come from within us, something “better” in the “nature” of both Northerners and Southerners.

In America today we haven’t reached the point of violence and chaos—yet. But surely in our increasingly and dangerously fractured nation—liberals and conservatives detesting one another, the upscale minority increasingly isolated from the majority, and the ruled holding the rulers in growing contempt—we all need to be touched by something “better” within us and within the institutions that we build together.



420 Lexington Avenue
Room 1706
New York, NY 10170

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Fax: (212) 541-6665

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