

Author offers his insight on state of polarization

Much has been made in recent years of the great political divide in the U.S. and how that perceived polarization threatens the very existence of our democracy.

Political rancor, of course, is part of the fabric of any society, but the combustible nature of social media platforms combined with the incessant drumbeat of right-wing and left-leaning media outlets are stoking the flames of conflict, many analysts believe.

Controversy and negativity are two subjects that sell when it comes to attracting viewing and listening audiences, which, of course, is a sad commentary itself on where society is headed.

Like many others, I prefer to look at our current state of affairs in a different light. Generally speaking, whether we are “liberal” or “conservative” or somewhere in between, we are either optimistic or pessimistic about our nation. Pessimists all around are predicting civil war and the collapse of free society. Optimists are holding fast to truth, the rule of law, and the principles that made America a dream destination for immigrants over the past 250 years.

Last month, I had the pleasure of meeting Nathan Bomey, a national business reporter for Axios and the author of three books, including his most recent work, “Bridge Builders: Bringing People Together in a Polarized Age.”

“I started working on ‘Bridge Builders’ in late 2018 by going out and meeting people who aren’t accepting the status quo of toxic polarization,” said Bomey, a former business writer for USA Today.

“I walked away from the experience of my second book disillusioned about the future of democracy in this country,” Bomey admitted. “It was clear that there

was a need to work together for the good of the nation, and I was determined to be part of the solution in that regard.”

With that goal in mind, Bomey set out to build a case for writing a book offering a “positive path” for an otherwise bleak political situation.

“Before pitching the book idea to publishers, I knew that I had to do a lot of work up front to convince them that there were signs of hope amidst all the doom and gloom,” said Bomey, who is the son of a minister. “I wanted to avoid people in the public square and instead concentrate on those outside the spotlight or under the radar who were working hard to make a difference.”

He began his journey in Charlottesville, VA, the scene of the “Unite the Right” rally in 2017 that resulted in one death and more than 30 injuries when white supremacist groups clashed with counter-protesters.

“Charlottesville offered a perfect example of a seemingly progressive community racked by extremism and hate,” said Bomey, who initially ran into a general reluctance to be involved in the story he was trying to cover. “I began by cold-calling some ministers who pointed me to others instead.”

From the beginning, Bomey was intent on telling the story of “someone who was using social media to bring people together,” given how much the opposite occurs on those platforms.

Eventually, Bomey was led to those working with “The Everyday Projects,” a grassroots movement that “uses photography to challenge stereotypes that distort our understanding of the world,” according to its website. The group bills itself as a “global community of visual storytellers . . . all committed



to using imagery to combat harmful misperceptions and to rise above persistent inequality.”

For Bomey, the organization’s “shared sense of humanity” spurred his search for other like-minded groups and individuals that ultimately surfaced over a six-month period.

“We, as a dysfunctional family of a nation, will continue down a path toward a state of irreconcilable differences that threatens to hobble our democracy, our economy, and our personal well-being unless we fight back against the forces that perpetually seek to divide us,” said Bomey.

His belief aligns with our mission at the Primerus Foundation, which we hope will serve as a vehicle to promote honesty, integrity, and civility in government and society itself.

As Bomey has said, the fault line may be shifting in this country, where the ultimate battle may not be between left and right, but between optimists and pessimists. We, at Primerus, know where we will always stand.

Best regards,
Jack Buchanan, President